



Kent Academic Repository

Hepburn, A. C (1968) *Liberal policies and nationalist policies in Ireland 1905-10*. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis, University of Kent.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/86223/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.86223>

This document version

UNSPECIFIED

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives)

Additional information

This thesis has been digitised by EThOS, the British Library digitisation service, for purposes of preservation and dissemination. It was uploaded to KAR on 09 February 2021 in order to hold its content and record within University of Kent systems. It is available Open Access using a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-commercial, No Derivatives (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>) licence so that the thesis and its author, can benefit from opportunities for increased readership and citation. This was done in line with University of Kent policies (<https://www.kent.ac.uk/is/strategy/docs/Kent%20Open%20Access%20policy.pdf>). If y...

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

LIBERAL POLICIES AND NATIONALIST POLITICS

IN IRELAND, 1905-10

by

A. C. HEPBURN

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the University
of Kent at Canterbury, August 1968.

I declare that this thesis is wholly my own work, and
embodies the results of research carried out under the
supervision of Professor F.S.L. Lyons between October
1965 and August 1968, during which time I was the holder
of a University of Kent at Canterbury Research Studentship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

I wish to express my thanks to the following for granting access to manuscript and other original material: Beaverbrook Library, London; Bodleian Library; British Museum; House of Lords Record Office; Liverpool University Library; National Library of Ireland; National Library of Scotland; Plunkett Foundation, London; Public Record Office, London; State Paper Office, Dublin Castle; Mr. Mark Bonham Carter; Viscount Harcourt.

I am grateful also to Professor Thomas Dillon of Donnybrook, and Mr. W.G. Fallon of Glasnevin, for their personal reminiscences of this period; to Mr. A. MacLochlainn of the National Library of Ireland; and to Mr. B. MacGiollaChoille of the State Paper Office, Dublin Castle.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Professor Lyons, for his advice and encouragement throughout, and for making available those aspects of his own research into the career of John Dillon which relate to this subject. I am grateful also to my wife and to my mother for their encouragement and assistance in the presentation of the material, and to Mrs. Christina Robinson, who typed the thesis.

A. C. Hepburn.

NOTES

The following abbreviations have been used in the footnotes:

B.M.	British Museum
C.B.	Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (this abbreviation has also been used from time to time in the text).
<u>D.C.</u>	<u>Daily Chronicle</u>
<u>D.N.</u>	<u>Daily News</u>
<u>F.J.</u>	<u>Freeman's Journal</u>
<u>Ir. Ind.</u>	<u>Irish Independent</u>
<u>I.W.I.</u>	<u>Irish Weekly Independent</u>
<u>M.G.</u>	<u>Manchester Guardian</u>
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland
N.L.S.	National Library of Scotland
P.R.O.	Public Record Office, London.
S'P.O.	State Paper Office, Dublin Castle
<u>W.F.J.</u>	<u>Weekly Freeman's Journal</u>
<u>W.G.</u>	<u>Westminster Gazette</u>

Terminology.

The term 'catholic' throughout refers to the roman catholic church. Likewise, 'liberal' refers always to the liberal party (or its supporters). The terms 'conservative', 'tory', and 'unionist' all refer to the unionist party (or its supporters). 'Nationalist' is used to describe the whole spectrum of Irish nationalist opinion, from home rulers to republicans. The expression 'the Irish leaders', unless otherwise stated, always means 'the leaders of the Irish parliamentary party'.

PREFACE.

The thesis begins with an examination of the attitudes to Irish home rule of those who directed the policy of the liberal party during the decade following the death of Mr Gladstone. By 1905 those who regarded home rule as a millstone had gained the tacit consent of the more devout adherents of Gladstonianism for a policy of temperization on the home rule issue. Even the Irish party leaders were prepared to acquiesce in the temporary shelving of home rule at this time, provided provocative public statements were avoided. They gave way, as did radical liberals, because after Gladstone's experience in 1893 it was clear that the house of lords would never allow a home rule bill to pass. The Irish leaders had just enough confidence in the long-term intentions of the liberal party to draw the teeth of the house of lords, and to follow up with a home rule bill, to enable them to support the majority of British liberal candidates in the 1906 general election. Although the United Irish League manifesto put the labour part in the forefront, this was entirely a matter of window-dressing.

But because it was not politic to make any explicit promise regarding home rule or even, as yet, to declare war on the house of lords, it was of especial importance for the Irish party at this time to win ameliorative measures in other fields. Pressure for these reforms was very much increased by the challenge of the Irish nationalist 'opposition' - the nascent sinn fein movement, and more especially the assortment of Munster labourers, Cork sectionalists and 'moderate nationalists' who followed William O'Brien. The Irish party and the O'Brienites competed for the prestige which would attach to those who 'won' labourers and evicted tenants bill. In fact these measures were in the main formulated within the Irish government, and were due to appear anyway. The town tenants bill, on the other hand, was an Irish party measure, and was in effect forced on the government by threats of violence.

Another factor which enabled the Irish party to give its support to liberalism in 1906 had been Campbell-Bannerman's promise of a measure which would be compatible with and lead up to home rule. This statement was in effect an endorsement of the policy known to be favoured by the under secretary for Ireland, Sir Antony MacDonnell. But it was not made because anyone in the liberal party thought MacDonnell's policy a good one per se, but because it offered the basis for a convenient form of words to satisfy both the liberal imperialists and the Irish party during the 1906 election. But for MacDonnell, devolution had become the most crucial reform of all - far better, for the present, than home rule, in that he expected it to free Ireland from the domination of uncompromising unionism and nationalism, from the thralldom of 'politics'. Thus, when the government and the Irish party sat down to translate C.B.'s form of words into a bill, grave differences emerged. MacDonnell had his scheme worked out, and was not co-operative when the government sought for a compromise which would make his Irish council bill acceptable to the Irish party. To a considerable extent the bill did not offer that increase in democratic control which was claimed for it, but on the contrary (it was alleged by nationalists) centralised many of the old Irish boards under the bureaucratic control of Dublin Castle. Redmond thus felt compelled to invite the national convention to reject the bill. Both he, in his desire to give nothing away to the O'Brienites, and the liberal cabinet, anxious not to raise the temperature in Ireland, had erred in doing nothing to prepare Irish public opinion for the bill. It was primarily an upsurge of hostile public opinion in Ireland which forced Redmond to call for the rejection of the bill. Many catholic clergy objected to the educational provisions, which embodied the principle of popular control, but there is no justification for the contemporary rumour that it was the priests who killed the bill.

Now that Campbell-Bannerman's compromise was exploded, life became more difficult for the Irish party, and for the cabinet, so far as Ireland was concerned. When it was decided (by Birrell) to override MacDonnell once more and conciliate Trinity College, a satisfactory university settlement was achieved, with the consent of the bulk of the unionist party. But although the National University became within a few years the seed-bed of revolutionary nationalism, its creation brought little immediate relief to the government or the Irish party. On the land, especially in the west, conditions had grown worse than they had been at any time since the 1880s. This trouble was primarily the result of the breakdown of the 1903 land act, which had been too sanguine in its financial arrangements and had raised land prices to such an extent that in the poorest parts of the west the act had scarcely worked at all. In addition, however, the agitation was the work of agrarian extremists within the Irish party. When the Dudley commission submitted a radical report, which was fashioned into a strong land bill, much of the steam was taken out of the agitation. The house of lords however, while maintaining that its main motive was to ensure that 'untenanted' land was given over to the relief of congestion and not given over by the Irish party to its agrarian storm-troopers, the landless men, drastically revised the land bill (the question of price was probably the main factor with most Irish landlords), and it was only the intervention of Lord Lansdowne and the unionist leadership which prevented the complete loss of the bill.

Lansdowne's motives were not altruistic but tactical. The tory party had decided that the lords should reject the government's 1909 budget, and did not wish to blur the issue by rejecting the land bill at the same time.

As another general election approached, the government once more needed the support of the Irish party, on general grounds, and especially in the struggle with the lords. But with the land bill safely passed it was less easy for the Irish party to ask their followers to join in a campaign against the lords on the budget, because a number of the budget taxes (especially the liquor duties) were extremely unpopular in Ireland, partly as a result of the exaggerations of the O'Brienites. The Irish party had been unable to give the budget any support during 1909. In this situation Asquith had little alternative but to give a home rule pledge, on the eve of the election.

When the parties returned to Westminster in 1910, the situation was radically changed. Redmond held the balance of power, and was able to conceal his inability to vote for the budget behind a concordat with the radical wing of the liberal party, by which they refused to pass the budget, on tactical grounds, until the government had extracted from the king a promise to swamp the house of lords by a vast creation of liberal peers. The liberal government were unable to retain the confidence of nationalists and radicals during the first three months of 1910, because of splits within the cabinet over whether the house of lords should be reconstituted or simply shorn of its powers. When the 'reformers' backed down it was at last possible for Asquith to throw off his chains (or at least some of them): he won back the support of the nationalists by a strong declaration in favour of abolition of the veto, and at the same time called their bluff by re-introducing his budget. Redmond and Dillon now felt safe enough to concur in this policy, but the death of the king intervened, bringing about a climate in which compromise talks between the government and the unionist party were able to take place. By June 1910 it was clear that the hold on the government which Redmond had exercised since January might prove a very brittle one.

CONTENTS

Volume I.

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, 1907-9. | 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.

- APPENDICES: 1. The Ancient Order of Hibernians.
2. The Imperial Home Rule Association.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

CHAPTER I. THE FORMATION OF THE LIBERAL GOVERNMENT

1. A policy defined

On 8 September 1893 the house of lords rejected the liberal party's second home rule bill by a majority of 419 to 41, and it was said that not a dog barked from John O'Groats to Land's End. Nineteen days later, in a speech at Edinburgh, Mr Gladstone declared that home rule would be put before the people again in the following session.¹ How this was avoided, and how the liberal party could still avoid it twelve years and three general elections later without either dividing itself or losing the support of the Irish party, is the subject of this chapter.

A recent article has shown that this 'withdrawal' from home rule was evolved during the period 1894 to 1905 as a matter of deliberate policy, and was not simply the result of the huge independent majority which the party gained at the 1906 election.² The first step had been the refusal of the cabinet to allow Gladstone to make an appeal to the country when the lords rejected the 1893 bill, a move presaged by Harcourt's insistence that Gladstone should ditch Parnell after the divorce. There still remained in the liberal party after the defection of the whigs

1. P.Magnus, Gladstone (London, 1954), p.414.

2. H.W. McCready, 'Home rule and the liberal party, 1899-1906', in Irish Historical Studies, vol.XIII no.52 (September 1963).

and Chamberlainites in 1886 a strong body of men whose attitude to home rule was akin to that of Sir William Harcourt, who 'suffered quite as much from the pangs of its birth as ever I can from the agony of its decease',¹ and it was these men, rather than the strict devotees of Gladstonian home rule, who were to determine the future Irish policy of the liberal party. But, ironically, it was Herbert Gladstone who, as chief whip, began in 1899 what Professor McCready calls the 'second liberal retreat' on home rule. His guiding idea was 'disengagement' from a policy which would certainly be blocked by the house of lords (and yet was unsatisfactory as a 'peers versus people' issue), and which was deflecting the liberals from the more important general questions of imperialism and social reform. There was substantial agreement about this among members of the ex-cabinet, and 'stand and wait' became the keynote of the party's Irish policy at the 1900 election.²

This consensus barely survived the election however. During the following months home rule became a main issue in the struggle between the imperialism of Rosebery's Liberal League and the more traditional Gladstonianism of the official leadership. Campbell-Bannerman in fact regarded opposition to home rule as the main

1. Sir W. Harcourt to L. Harcourt, 18 Dec. 1890. Quoted in A.G. Gardiner, The Life of Sir William Harcourt (London, 1923), ii.91.
2. It had the advantage of allowing a certain amount of latitude to individual candidates to speculate as to what they were standing and waiting for.

plank in Rosebery's policy, and he spoke out strongly in favour of its retention to the National Liberal Federation, at Leicester in February 1902.¹ One of the vice-presidents of the Liberal League, Asquith, quickly retorted that progress could be made on the Irish question 'only by methods which carry with them, step by step, the sanction and sympathy of British opinion'.² In this view, home rule might remain as a goal on the party's horizon but it should not again be brought out at the hustings or in the house of commons whilst there was any danger of a fresh debacle akin to those of 1886 and 1893. But Asquith soon elucidated his 'step by step' policy so that it appeared very different from Rosebery's 'clean slate', and his speech at St. Leonards in April 1902, as Professor McCready points out, marks the dim beginning of the rift which was finally to separate Asquith and Rosebery in the autumn of 1905.³

Liberals had done no more than agree to differ on home rule when it was pushed from the stage by the tariff reform controversy of 1903. The Gladstonians had not yet concurred in 'step by step', neither had it been made clear how that formula might be translated

-
1. C.B. at Leicester, 19 Feb.1902 (Cited by McCready, op.cit., p.332).
 2. Asquith: letter to E.Fife Lib.Assoc., 1 Mar.1902 (McCready, op.cit., p.333).
 3. Asquith at St.Leonards, 14 Mar.1902. At Chesterfield on 16 Dec. 1901, Rosebery had more or less repudiated home rule altogether (See McCready, op.cit., pp. 335-6).

into a practical policy. But in the autumn of 1904 a home rule liberal M.P., Thomas Lough, sent Campbell-Bannerman a detailed proposal for the creation of four provincial councils in Ireland to levy rates and take over the functions of many of the 'Castle boards'. A 'council of the four provinces' might be superimposed, with a view to expanding the scope of the scheme.¹ Campbell-Bannerman showed the scheme to Lord Spencer, who was critical of it (this seems to have been the general Gladstonian view), but who did display a general preparedness to accept a policy of gradualism on the question of Irish government.² About this time Herbert Gladstone suggested to Campbell-Bannerman that it would be useful to set up sub-committees to formulate policies on certain subjects, including Ireland, and though there is no evidence that this was done Lough's memorandum did serve as a basis of discussion amongst those to whom it was circulated.³ No more was heard of Lough's plan.⁴

-
1. 'Scheme for the creation of Irish provincial councils', a memo by T.Lough, n.d. (late 1904) (Campbell-Bannerman papers, B.M.Add.Ms. 41222, f.233)
 2. Spencer to Campbell-Bannerman, 7 Dec.1904 (Cited in McCready, op.cit., p.340)
 3. The number was not large, since Lough was anxious not to impair his 'reputation' as a Gladstonian home ruler, as he explained to C.B. in a covering note. He need not have troubled, for the nationalists regarded him as an enemy who would like to break up their party (Bryce to C.B., 15 Dec. 1905. C.B. Papers, B.M.Add. Ms. 41211, f.325)
 4. He is not treated with any great respect in correspondence between Liberal leaders, and even T.P.Gill, when advocating Lough as successor to Horace Plunkett at D.A.T.I. had to admit that he was 'pour rire' in the house of commons. T.P.Gill to A.Birrell, 20 Apr. 1907 (Gill Papers, National Library of Ireland, vols. 13478-13526).

But it foreshadowed the disclosure, early in 1905, that Sir Antony MacDonnell, the under-secretary for Ireland, had himself been working on a scheme of devolution, apparently with the connivance of his minister, George Wyndham. This scheme, dropped like a hot brick by the Tories as a result of pressure from the Ulstermen, offered itself, ironically, as the cement which the liberals needed to bind their various Irish viewpoints together.^{1.}

As early as January 1905 James Bryce, who had been a home ruler since 1886, could write to his friend Goldwin Smith that:

All persons who count are practically agreed on the presently important issues. As to home rule, no one thinks it possible to bring into the next parliament a bill like that of 1893. But probably there may be some further steps towards granting local powers and removing topics from the British parliament, while retaining its ultimate control.

2

It is evident that some sort of middle course was being worked out within the party, based on an acceptance that, for the time being at any rate, 'home rule or bust' was a suicidal policy. Even Morley, the most dogged adherent of Gladstonian orthodoxy, told Redmond in January 1905 that the liberals hoped to postpone for as long as possible the moment when the home rule issue would reappear and put a brake on their advance.³ More surprisingly, the Irish

-
1. For the devolution crisis see F.S.L. Lyons, 'The Irish unionist party and devolution, 1904-5', I.H.S. vol.VI no.21 (March 1948).
 2. J. Bryce to Goldwin Smith, 26 Jan. 1905 (Bryce papers, Bodleian Lib., vol. 17)
 3. Morley to Redmond, 26 Jan. 1905 (Redmond papers).

leader himself was sympathetic to this point of view. Redmond, Herbert Gladstone recorded, 'has to maintain home rule as a minimum.....but fully realises the difficulties of the liberal position. Thinks home rule will come by degrees, and not unreasonable.'¹

This was the situation when parliament rose in the summer of 1905. The tories longed to get off the very sharp hook of the tariff controversy by raising the old cry of 'the Union in danger', but they were given no opportunity. The liberals seemed to be agreed on a new Irish policy. But some, liberals and nationalists, feared that this agreement was secure only to the extent that the policy remained ill-defined. Campbell-Bannerman certainly felt that the less his policy was exposed to scrutiny the better it would be for him, and for his party at the election. As Bryce observed to him, 'these fellows [the tories] are utterly discredited, and don't even need a kick to tumble them into the ditch. Programmes² are not needed from us and (as you observe) may be embarrassing'. And so it is not surprising to find that C.B., always difficult to trace at the end of the summer, that year extended his sojourn at Vienna and Marienbad long into the autumn - with a very definite purpose apart from the restoration of his delicately balanced health.

1. H. Gladstone's diary, 13 Feb.1905 (McCready, op.cit., p.341)

2. Bryce to C.B., 2 Nov. 1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms. 41238 f.64)

He remained abroad for another month after T.R. Buchanan had advised him, on October 1, that 'you are right to stay away as long as you are well and the weather fine; for the Midianites will be about your path as soon as you get home'.¹ When he did return, CB told Herbert Gladstone, he would spend a few brief days holding discussions in London, and then retreat to his home in Stirlingshire until either Balfour resigned or parliament met. Furthermore, he did not think a meeting of the ex-cabinet was required, but preferred individual talks.² He evidently had more confidence in his own ability to reach agreement with his various colleagues privately than he did in their ability to agree with one another around a table - on the Irish issue at any rate.

As it was, his policy of silence came near to collapse in October, and his absence was therefore the more fortunate. Probably because they were among the most active of the party leaders, it was the Asquithians who re-opened the Irish question, by clarifying their own standpoints in public. Haldane, in a speech at Haddington on October 10 declared that although a Chamberlain in power might be able to force protection through the house of lords tomorrow, 'any measure even of a comparatively harmless description for extending self-government in Ireland' would meet with certain doom 'unless there had been for at least

1. T.R. Buchanan to C.B., 1 Oct.1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms. 41238 f.304)

2. C.B. to H.Gladstone, 20 Oct.1905 (H.Gladstone papers, B.M.Add.Ms. 45988 f.192)

six years previously the fullest discussion which showed the mind of the country in a way that inspired the house of lords with awe'. 'Administrative reforms' might be considered by a liberal government, for 'we have not done our duty by Ireland', but home rule was out of the question for the time being, and the British people might be sure that the liberals would go no further than the mandate put in their hands. ¹ The Freeman's Journal sourly commented that Haldane had carefully avoided asking for any mandate. ²

At Earlferry, Fife, on the following day, Asquith was more explicit. In answer to a question about the present possibilities of home rule legislation, he replied:

If by home rule is meant....the introduction of a bill for the establishment of a legislature in Dublin, as I have said before and will say again, I am of the opinion, speaking for myself, that it will not and cannot be any part of the policy of the next liberal government. But neither I nor any other leader of the liberal party, as I believe, has ever gone back, either in spirit or letter, on Mr Gladstone's policy. I am as profoundly convinced as I ever was that the present system of government in Ireland is irrational and unworkable.... because it fails entirely to associate the people of Ireland with the administration of their own affairs; and I am of opinion, as I have always been, that subject always to the control of the Imperial parliament, the gradual association of the Irish people with the management of their own affairs step by step should be the aim and ideal of liberal policy in regard to Ireland.
 An elector: Will you take office in a liberal government dependent upon the Irish party? ³
 Mr. Asquith: That is a question I will decline to answer.

-
1. Haldane at Haddington, 10 Oct.1905 (Times, 12 Oct.1905)
 2. Weekly Freeman's Journal, 14 Oct. 1905
 3. Asquith at Earlsferry, 11 Oct. 1905 (Times, 12 Oct.1905)

All this was too much for John Morley. In a speech to his constituents at Forfar on October 20 he pointed out that the whole liberal party had in the previous session voted for Redmond's home rule amendment, thereby agreeing that the present system of government in Ireland was in opposition to the will of the people, was extravagantly costly, was productive of universal unrest, and had proved itself incapable of promoting satisfactorily the intellectual and material progress of the people. No party which had supported so damning an indictment could avoid tackling the problem. He admitted that the maintenance of free trade would be the cornerstone of their election policy, but continued:

I defy the wit of man to give to Ireland, to Irishmen, any effective voice in the management of their own affairs whether in respect of saving money or anything else, unless there is an executive responsible to a body in which the elective element will have the deciding voice, whether that body sits on College Green or wherever it sits.

He concluded with a scarcely veiled jeer at Asquith's rather insolent claim, at Earlsferry, that step by step accorded with the 'spirit' and the 'letter' of Gladstone's policy.¹ What Morley had done, albeit rather mischievously, was to make plain that before the liberals' Irish policy was wrapped up in the blanket of 'administrative reform' it would have to be defined rather more closely: if by devolution the liberal party meant the transfer of

1. Morley at Forfar, 20 Oct. 1905 (Times, 21 Oct. 1905)

executive authority to a basically elective assembly, he would accept it; but if all that was intended by the Asquithians was some tinkering with the bureaucratic structure, then he would reject the whole compromise as humbug.

Morley's colleagues, however, were at that stage less concerned with defining a policy than with winning an election. His ire perhaps somewhat strengthened by the fact that he was staying with Rosebery at Dalmeny (the last time they met before Asquith took office), Asquith sent a very stern protest to the unfortunate Herbert Gladstone:

I am afraid that J.M.'s speech on home rule will be taken seriously and not (as in all probability it really was) a mere splenetic outburst directed at me. If it receives any countenance, open or ambiguous, from C.B. or any other person in a responsible position, no one knows better than you that it will do incalculable and perhaps fatal mischief. If we are to get a real majority in the next house of commons, it can only be by making it perfectly clear to the electorate that - as I said the other day - it will be no part of the policy of the liberal government to introduce a home rule bill in the next parliament.

Everybody knows (no-one better than J.M.) that this is the actual state of the case, and no one intends (least of all J.M.) to devote either the second or the third or any session to framing and carrying a bill which will be at once chucked out by the house of lords, and will wreck the fortunes of the party for another twenty years. I am sure that you agree with me about this, and I hope that C.B. does.¹ I should write in the same sense to him if I knew where he was.

1

1. Asquith to H. Gladstone, 22 Oct. 1905 (H.Gladstone papers, Add.Ms. 45994 f.116).

Gladstone, as chief whip, was concerned both to maintain unity among the leaders of the party, and to present their policy to the electorate in a palatable form. He forwarded Asquith's letter to C.B. on October 26, and endorsed its arguments:

I thought J.M.'s speech singularly ill-timed. Asquith said more in the direction of home rule than he had said for years, and then came the counter-blast. As you have written to Asquith he will probably write direct to you now that he has your address. He seemed more than satisfied with the line you took in your Irish speeches last session, and I suppose that a reference to them will quite satisfy him.

1

In fact Campbell-Bannerman had not yet got in touch with Asquith, and seemed in no hurry to do so, although he had already been aware for a week or more that Asquith was eager to contact him.² But he assured Gladstone that he would see Asquith before making any public utterance. The tone of C.B.'s reply was strongly assertive of the more radical standpoint on Ireland (perhaps he resented being asked to swallow the Asquithian policy at the direction of Herbert Gladstone, of all people) but in fact he made clear his acceptance of the step by step policy. As he told Sinclair on October 26, the same day on which he had replied to Gladstone:

I am not afraid of the Irish question, being honest about it. But of course if you move in the smartest circles.... you must make it clear that, though you retain your eccentric and unfortunate taste for pitch, you are not going to defile your hands with it.

3

-
1. H.Gladstone to C.B., 26 Oct. 1905 (C.B. Papers, Add.Ms. 41217 f.269)
 2. C.B. to H.Gladstone, 26 Oct. 1905 (C.B. papers Add.Ms.41217 f.271)
 3. C.B. to J. Sinclair, 26 Oct. 1905. Quoted in J.A.Spender, The Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (London, 1923,) II.180

His reply to Gladstone adhered strictly to this dictum:

If I were to be critical I think both he (Asquith) and J.M. have been a little too emphatic and peremptory. It was surely unnecessary (and may be inconvenient) to declare absolutely that nothing in the way of home rule shall be attempted in the whole course of the next parliament. That there would be time or opportunity for anything like a full-blown home rule bill is utterly unlikely, but we do not know how circumstances may change, and I doubt the wisdom of precluding any approach to it being made. It would not be very difficult to frame a formula (Spencer has always said we must do this) before the election, expressive of our attitude. There may be some insincere and even hostile feeling about home rule in some so-called liberal quarters where we may look for votes; and if such people are sensitive and suspicious we may lose their votes, but this would be a mere fleabite compared to the loss of belief in our sincerity on the part of the mass of real liberals.

1

This last statement was somewhat disingenuous, in that it was the floating voters and home rule doubtfuls, not the 'mass of real liberals', who would make the difference between a tory and a liberal victory. C.B.'s position was nonetheless clear - the search was for some form of words which all liberals could support yet which would not make it impossible for Redmond to co-operate with them during and after the election. C.B.'s letter to Gladstone reveals plainly enough that so far as practical policy on Ireland was concerned, little stood between him and Asquith.

1. C.B. to H.Gladstone, 26 Oct.1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms. 41217 f.271)

But a number of factors made it difficult to extend this accommodation to include his colleagues on the radical side of the party. Morley's disagreement with the Asquithians was complicated by a personal problem: he wanted to be chancellor of the exchequer.¹ To him the liberal imperialist group were junior both in terms of length of service and of assimilation of Gladstonian ideals. Hindsight shows his aspirations to have been vain (in both senses), but in 1905 he commanded a great reputation in the liberal party at large as the man who wore the mantle of Gladstone, whilst Asquith possessed, apart from his innate ability, only the mantle of Rosebery, a garment of more dubious value. Harcourt, at least, among the party leaders, thought Morley's claim a good one. After Rosebery's outburst at the end of November he wrote to Campbell-Bannerman:

The question is what are Asquith, Grey and Haldane going to say and do? I hope that you will, if necessary, go on without them: but I don't think you can go on without John Morley, and in order to secure him you may have to give him what he wants.

2

Thus Morley's ambition, and the more general feeling among some of the progressive liberals that what the liberal imperialist group offered in the way of ability did not match what they would cost the party in terms of traditional policies sacrificed, was ~~thus~~ one

1. Sir E.W. Hamilton's diary, 16 Dec. 1905 (B.M. Add. Ms, 48683);
2. L. Harcourt to C.B., 27 Nov. 1905 (C.B. papers, Add. Ms 41220 f. 189).

plank of the argument against a 'sell out' or compromise on home rule.

Sir Robert Reid, another leading liberal, who was much closer to Campbell-Bannerman personally than was Morley, expressed similar criticisms of the Asquithians' activities. He was a staunch advocate of federalism or 'home rule all round' and, perhaps partly for this reason, did not always have the full confidence of the Irish leaders, but in the autumn of 1905 he was in the forefront of the home rule debate. At Aberdeen on October 24 he declared defiantly that 'he agreed with Mr. Morley's attitude on home rule'.¹ He was, he told Campbell-Bannerman, 'very glad' that Morley had spoken out as he did. It was plain, he thought, that 'Rosebery and his friends' were hoping to get home rule 'in all its possible phases....absolutely excluded by a preliminary ban from the work of the next parliament. And I think it is equally evident that they are trying to get the liberal unionists to join hands with them on this footing'. He pointed out that one of Grey's recent meetings, in Manchester, had been chaired by Lord James of Hereford, a prominent unionist free trader.² This was the second aspect of radical apprehension about the intentions of the liberal imperialists - that they were anxious to put a brake on

1. Reid at Aberdeen, 24 Oct. 1905 (Times, 25 Oct.1905)

2. Reid to C.B., 29 Oct. 1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms. 41222 f.141).

the party's Irish policy in order to entice into the party free fooders and unionists, who would add to the strength and numbers of their own group, and perhaps even make possible the formation of a free trade administration under Rosebery's leadership.

Campbell-Bannerman was not unsympathetic to these fears. He told Sinclair on November 3 that 'Bob's [i.e.Reid's] blast met me in the teeth as I arrived. I agree with every word of it. I will see him in London. A tough job'.¹ To Lord Ripon, another old Gladstonian, he also complained that a lot of 'foolish things', 'unguarded pledges and sweeping approvals' had been made:

I presume with the object of sweeping the liberal unionists into our net, and showing how harmless we are. These things provoke angry criticism and retort just at the time when we ought to avoid irritating the temper or arousing the suspicions of our strong men in the country. It is these strong men and not the time servers who have put us on the vantage ground we occupy.

2

Ripon agreed with him that 'there is little or nothing to be got out of coquetting with the liberal unionists'.³ But in fact, so long as Campbell-Bannerman adhered to the middle of the road position he had taken up, there was little danger of Asquith and his friends pursuing new liaisons to a dangerous extent. Reid's fears were

1. C.B. to Sinclair, 3 Nov. 1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41230 f.85)

2. C.B. to Ripon, 7 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms. 41225 f.57)

3. Ripon to C.B., 9 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms. 41225 f.59).

somewhat alarmist, but his demands turned out to be fairly modest. Although his own preference was for the adoption of 'home rule all round' by the next liberal government, he urged C.B. only to keep his hands free 'to deal with Ireland and with devolution as you and your colleagues should think fit, with no padlock clamped on by means of previous declarations at Rosebery's instance'¹. This proved to be by no means an impossible demand.

It was, ironically, on the left wing of the party that the name of Rosebery still carried some weight - in that quarter he was still regarded as a threat. But Asquith and his friends had known since the autumn of 1903 that Rosebery was extremely unlikely to form another government, partly on the grounds of health, but more through disinclination and general lassitude.² Campbell-Bannerman was told this on 1 October 1905 (though he may have known earlier), and his position on the party was consequently strengthened.³ With their former champion out of the running, and Asquith not prepared to put himself forward for the premiership,

1. Reid to C.B., 29 Oct.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41222 f.141)
2. See Haldane to Asquith, 5 Oct.1903. Cited in Roy Jenkins, Asquith (London 1964) pp. 143-4. Also Rosebery's 'secret memorandum', printed in Marquess of Crewe, Life of Lord Rosebery (London,1931) ii. 585-7.
3. Buchanan to C.B., 1 Oct.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms. 41238 f.64).

the liberal imperialists had no reason to promote disruption
 on policy matters, so long as C.B. was cautious.¹ In fact, as
 it became evident that the liberals would be asked to assume
 office before a dissolution of parliament, C.B. was in a
 position to rather enjoy the predicament of those who had earlier²
 talked of not assuming office without an independent majority.

He told Gladstone on November 30 that:

Those who have proclaimed their resolve not to join any
 government without a majority over the Irish would be
 rather in a hole; but that is their affair. Why did
 they say anything so foolish?³

Reid and Morley were the only prominent liberals to take up
 a bold stand on home rule during these months. The great mass of
 the party seemed perfectly happy to permit Campbell-Bannerman to
 make the compromise that was necessary to secure the co-operation
 of Asquith and his friends. Many shared the views of one radical
 M.P. of very long standing who wrote to The Times:

I am a home ruler in the largest acceptance of that term,
 but I have always been conscious of the fact that Great
 Britain has been - even under the magnetic influence of
 Mr. Gladstone - on the whole apathetic and indifferent
 thereto..... The only reasonable course is that of
 compromise. It is clear that home rule on the organic
 lines of the first of second bills of Mr. Gladstone will
 meet with too pronounced and variable opposition to be
 attainable in the near future.

4

-
1. Their only demand was to be the rather lame one that C.B. should go to the Lords and leave the leadership in the commons to Asquith.
 2. On 11 Oct. 1901, Grey had informed Herbert Gladstone that such was the view of himself, Asquith, and Haldane (McCready, op.cit., p.325)
 3. C.B. to H. Gladstone, 30 Nov. 1905 (H. Gladstone papers, Add. Ms. 45988 f. 209).
 4. L.A. Atherley-Jones to the editor (Times, 30 Nov. 1905).

Dilke, another old radical, took a more personal viewpoint, harking back to the central board scheme which his then colleague, Chamberlain, had worked out with Parnell in 1885.¹

All over the country future liberal ministers who had been avowed home rulers made clear that the introduction of a Gladstonian measure was, at best, highly unlikely in the coming parliament.² Rufus Isaacs said that the future government's policy 'was very plainly marked out by developments during the past few years of the tory administration'.³ All the leading organs of the liberal press were agreed that full home rule was not a matter of practical politics, and most liberals would have approved of the sentiments, if not the bluntness, of the Daily Chronicle's declaration that 'Liberalism....[could]⁴....not reduce itself to permanent impotence for Ireland's sake'.

1. Dilke at Dunfermline, 7 Nov.1905 (Times, 8 Nov.1905)
2. See speeches by: Bryce at Newport I.O.W., 26 Oct.1905 (Times, 27 Oct.1905); Gladstone at Leeds, 7 Nov.1905 (Times, 8 Nov.1905); Tweedmouth at Fraserburgh, 28 Nov.1905, Buxton at Weymouth, 29 Nov. 1905, and Birrell at Birmingham, 29 Nov.1905 (all in Times, 30 Nov. 1905).
3. Isaacs at Reading, 27 Nov.1905 (Times, 28 Nov.1905).
4. Daily Chronicle, 27 Nov.1905. For a survey of the attitude of the liberal press to home rule at this time see A.K.Russell, 'The general election of 1906' (Oxford University D.Phil.thesis,1962) p.430 et.seq.

One of the last viewpoints to be laid before Campbell-Bannerman before he made his public declaration on the Irish issue was that of his colleague Lord Crewe, who had been Irish viceroy in the previous liberal administration. Crewe stood closer to the Asquithians than the Gladstonians on most matters but bearing this in mind, his letter merits fairly full consideration, being the most detailed analysis available to us of the issue at this stage.

Crewe assumed home rule to be the liberals' ultimate Irish policy, and that they were prepared to say so, but leaving this aside he saw three possibilities for the next parliament. They could promise not to introduce a home rule bill, or promise to grant home rule, or avoid any positive pronouncement at all. In favour of the first possibility Crewe saw strong arguments. Home rule was a constitutional question, which should be presented separately to the electorate, and should for the time being not be allowed to detract from the importance of the free trade issue, whilst a 'slower' policy would get the support of men like Lords Dudley and Dunraven, who might oppose the ultimate goal of a legislative body in Dublin. In addition there was the practical (and one feels, the strongest) argument against home rule:

The house of lords would certainly throw out any Bill which reached them, and if the tories won the next election they would be strengthened, as in 1895.....Probably there are fewer British home rulers than there were in 1886 and 1893.

Finally, and here Crewe may have seen further than his colleagues, 'the liberal party is on its trial as an engine for securing social reform'. Could they combat the challenge of the labour movement and grant home rule at the same time?

Against all this Crewe set the argument that it would be a breach of faith not to support the nationalists after they had supported the liberals in office from 1892 to 1895. Morley, at least, was known to feel bound by this. It would, furthermore, be somewhat peculiar and undesirable to pledge the party for a definite period against one of the main planks in its platform: if home rule was the policy of the liberal party towards Ireland, it might be better to say so. To avoid a statement altogether would satisfy nobody and resemble Balfour's standpoint on the fiscal question too closely for comfort. As to compromise proposals, Crewe felt that:

It is difficult, or impossible, to suggest half-way measures of any real value or effect, which would not initiate unionist prejudice almost as greatly as any home rule scheme; while the nationalists would not help to make them work.

On the other hand there was the possibility of proceeding with some lesser reforms for the time being, starting perhaps with some 'pretty large financial control'. O'Brien might support something like that, whilst Redmond could not oppose it. But Crewe did not think that line could be pursued very far: 'I have never myself seen that very much can be done about clearing out Dublin Castle.... which is a better machine than is often supposed, as I daresay you

will agree'.¹ Crewe's final verdict was in favour of saying frankly before the election that there was no possibility of an Irish legislature being established by the next parliament. This standpoint, he thought, would still permit a liberal government to vote for a home rule resolution, provided it did not call for action at once, without being expected to do anything about it in the immediate future.²

Crewe's letter put a very strong case for not attempting home rule in the next parliament, but the positive alternative offered, although little different in intention from Campbell-Bannerman's own view, was clumsy by comparison, and it is difficult to see how it could have satisfied the Irish. Crewe was presumably prepared to write off Irish electoral co-operation as unattainable in the absence of a liberal pledge on home rule, and hoped only to avoid a split in the liberal ranks on the issue by leaving the gate open for the party to support a home rule resolution in the future. But the very fact of a frank liberal declaration against home rule before the election would make it extremely difficult for Redmond and Dillon to deal with their critics, who were active both in Ireland, led by William O'Brien, and in the

-
1. Coming from a former Irish viceroy this remark is especially interesting, though it is in direct opposition to the view of Sir Antony MacDonnell.
 2. Crewe to C.B., 19 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41213 f.337).

British constituencies, under clerical influence. Indeed, though Crewe's analysis of the overall position was good, his letter suggests that he was not really au fait with the current situation. He was evidently unaware of the extent to which the Irish leaders were prepared to take Campbell-Bannerman on trust alone, and consequently he did not realise how very little the Asquithian wing of the liberal party would have to bend towards home rule in order to retain nationalist support.

Redmond in fact was eager for an opportunity to co-operate with the liberals. He had been satisfied by Campbell-Bannerman's moderate statement on home rule in the debate on C.Tuff's motion in the commons in April 1905, and privately admitted that he expected home rule to come by degrees.¹ But he could scarcely make such an admission in public, especially in view of the widening split between the party and the followers of William O'Brien. 'The worst symptom', observed Bryce to Herbert Gladstone, 'is the split among the Irish, which may make Redmond think he must play strong'.² When Rosebery spoke out at Stourbridge

-
1. H.Gladstone to Asquith, 26 Oct.1905 (Asquith papers, Bodleian Library, vol.10 f.159). On April 12,1905, C.Tuff, unionist M.P. for Rochester, had made 'a not very adroit attempt to exploit for unionist purposes the differences among the liberal leaders on the Irish question'. C.B. said that the question of Irish government would be approached on the 'elective principle.... involving popular control'. (Annual Register 1905, p.129).
 2. Bryce to H.Gladstone, 7 Nov.1905 (H.Gladstone papers, Add.Ms. 46019 f.100).

on October/²⁵ against legislative home rule but in favour of administrative reforms, the Freeman's Journal was totally unsympathetic:

Can he be so obtuse as to suppose that the Irish people or the Irish party will calmly tolerate such treason to principles and pledges that what they refused as a makeshift from the unionists they will accept as a policy from the liberals?

1

Redmond, in a speech at Glasgow a few days later, announced that he would 'regard the proposed indefinite hanging up of home rule as just as much of a repudiation as the more outspoken and shameless repudiation which we have heard from the lips of Lords Rosebery'.² The Freeman called for 'an explicit and authorised declaration' on home rule from the liberals, and warned that it was 'by no means a foregone conclusion that the Irish vote will be caste indiscriminately' for them.³

If Redmond did decide to 'play strong' then the delicate consensus among the liberal leaders on home rule might well evaporate: Campbell-Bannerman would either have to sacrifice his reputation as a friend of Irish nationalism or lose the chance of forming a strong liberal government representative of all shades of party opinion. T.P. O'Connor told Redmond on October 25 that

1. W.F.J., 4 Nov. 1905. For Rosebery at Stourbridge, 25 Oct. 1905, see Times, 26 Oct. 1905.
2. Redmond at Glasgow, 10 Nov. 1905 (W.F.J., 18 Nov. 1905).
3. W.F.J., 4 Nov. 1905.

although the English catholic priests would oppose the liberals everywhere, regardless of home rule prospects, the situation was being very much aggravated by the activities of William O'Brien on the one hand, and Asquith on the other.¹ The public clash between Asquith and Morley indeed made the Irish leaders extremely nervous, and anxious for a re-assurance from Campbell-Bannerman: 'if he were to make a really hard speech', thought Dillon, 'the situation would become very bad indeed'.²

But although the Irish leaders would not publicly accept a compromise, they were more conciliatory in private. As one back-bench radical observed, it was 'scarcely to be expected that the initiative in effecting any compromise will be taken by Mr Redmond, and if a concordat is to be arrived at it must be at the initiative of the liberal leaders, representing a united party'.³ Indeed it had already been privately agreed by the Irish leaders that Redmond in his coming speeches would not press the liberal leaders for specific declarations on home rule, but would 'content himself with stating the attitude of the Irish party, their resolve to push on by every means in their power - now, at the general election and after the general election, the cause of self-government for Ireland'.⁴

-
1. T.P.O'Connor to Redmond, 25 Oct.1905 (Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 26 Oct.1905 (Redmond papers).
 3. Atherley-Jones to the editor (Times, 30 Nov.1905).
 4. Dillon to Redmond, 26 Oct.1905 (Redmond papers).

Redmond and Dillon had thus decided not to 'play it strong', partly out of confidence in Campbell-Bannerman, but perhaps mainly because they realised that firm demands from them would arouse a hostile response from the liberal imperialists which would give more help both to Rosebery and to William O'Brien than did the existing, slightly equivocal, situation. Dillon explained his views more fully to Redmond on November 2, in what was, for him, an unusually optimistic letter:

Morley's point is the true one - if the liberals quarrel with us after the election, we shall have it in our power to make their position an impossible one. And unless absolutely driven to it by the conduct of Asquith and Rosebery I do not think we should do or say anything calculated to make a sweeping defeat of the unionist party and the formation of a strong liberal government impossible.

I am strongly in favour of your seeing C.B., if possible before he speaks. And the line I suggest to you to urge upon him is this - That he should like Morley dwell on the terms of your amendment - point out that the party who voted for that amendment will after the election be the government and the majority of the house of commons - that no system of Irish government condemned in such terms by the majority of the house of commons can decently discharge the functions of government. That therefore the duty lies plainly with the liberal party at the earliest possible moment to apply a remedy - that in his opinion no remedy will be found fully effective except an elective legislative body and executive responsible to it. But that having laid down these principles he must declare that all questions of priority of any measures of reform, of time, opportunity and possibility are questions for after the election and that he absolutely declined to give any pledges whatever on these matters.

If C.B. follows this line and sticks to it - all will go well. But you ought to draw his attention to the language in his speech on Tuff's resolution - in which he said that 'home rule was not now before the country' and warn him of the enormous mischief done by such language. And the very great difficulty it caused us.

1

1. Dillon to Redmond, 2 Nov.1905 (Redmond papers).

The time had plainly come to bring the policy of silence to an end, at least so far as Ireland was concerned. Campbell-Bannerman descended on London from Paris early in November, saw all the leading liberals who were available within the space of a few days, and then retired to Stirlingshire, where he could be subjected to no further inquisition. On November 13 he saw Asquith, and made it plain that he intended to retain both the leadership of the party and his position in the house of commons. 'A few days after' this he saw Asquith and Grey together, and the party's Irish policy was fully talked out.¹ He later told J.A.Spender that "those fellows" had been very amicable and reasonable about Ireland and that there was no difference worth thinking of between him and them'.² The date of this meeting is not clear, but when Redmond and T.P. O'Connor had breakfast with C.B. on November 14 they found him both frank and confident of his ability to maintain a public standpoint acceptable to Irish opinion.³

Redmond recorded:

His own [C.B.'s] impression was that it would not be possible to pass full home rule [in the next parliament] but he hoped to be able to pass some serious measure which would be consistent with and lead up to the other. He would say nothing, however, to withdraw the larger measure from the electors.

4

-
1. Jenkins, Asquith, p.149 mentions that such a meeting took place, but gives no source.
 2. 'Memo on the formation of the 1905 government.' by J.A.Spender (Spender papers, B.M.Add.Ms.46388 f.62).
 3. T.P.O'Connor later revealed that this meeting had taken place. See his short memoir, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (London, 1908) p.72.
 4. Memo in Redmond's hand, 14 Nov.1905 (Redmond papers).

Redmond's memorandum gives no indication of his reaction to what Campbell-Bannerman had told him, but its tone does not suggest that Redmond was surprised or dissatisfied with what he heard. Indeed C.B. himself seems to have been the one who was surprised. He told Gladstone:

I had most satisfactory interviews last week with everyone I could lay hands on at the time. These included, as you will be surprised to hear after what we both concurred in last week, T.P. and J.R.! They breakfasted with me: and I feel sure no harm will come of it.

1

A few days later, at Stirling on November 23, Campbell-Bannerman made the promised Irish declaration, the result of his talks with Redmond and O'Connor and with his Gladstonian and liberal imperialist colleagues. His desire, he declared, was 'to see the effective management of Irish affairs in the hands of a representative Irish parliament', but he urged nationalists to take it in any way they could get it: 'if an instalment of representative control was offered to you, I would advise you to accept it, provided it was consistent with and led up to the larger policy'.² The Freeman immediately declared support for him.³ C.B. had succeeded in gaining the support of the nationalists for a policy which was in essence the same as that of Asquith. Yet Asquith could not have secured this

-
1. C.B. to H.Gladstone, 20 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41217 f.276).
 2. C.B. at Stirling, 23 Nov.1905 (Times, 24 Nov.1905).
 3. Though at first it mistook his speech for a full home rule declaration. Freeman's Journal, 24 Nov.1905, et.seq.

agreement. We may say that C.B. used the capital of goodwill he had been investing in the Irish party since 1886 to buy him out of trouble in 1905. He could not offer home rule - had he thrown such a challenge at the feet of the Liberal Leaguers he would have split the party. What he did do however was to save Redmond's face, by making clear that devolution was not an alternative to home rule but a first step towards it. Even more important for the time being, he avoided pledging the party against introducing home rule in the next parliament.

But the Stirling speech was not quite the last word on the Irish issue that it was intended to be. John Morley welcomed it 'with the utmost satisfaction' as making things 'easier for sensible Irishmen',¹ but the Freeman's Journal at first chose to interpret it as a declaration for home rule.² It was able to climb down from this position without too much embarrassment, but Lord Rosebery had chosen to make a similar misinterpretation, the results of which were considerably more far-reaching. The lord 'Barnbogle', as

1. Morley to C.B., 24 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41223 f.162). Lewis Harcourt would have been surprised by Morley's letter. As always during times of crisis, Harcourt^o was prodigious in his communications with the party leader. He asked C.B. on November 27: 'Have you heard anything of J.M. lately. I wonder what he is thinking and doing. Loading a gun for your head?' (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41220 f.189).
2. F.J., 24 Nov.1905.

Campbell-Bannerman usually called him, had not been in touch with his old associates for some time,¹ and for some days prior to the Stirling speech had been down in the west country on what was, for him, an unusually strenuous speaking tour. Two days after Stirling, at Bodmin on November 25, he adopted what was intended to be a decisive position on Ireland and the Liberal leadership, but which instead turned out to be a decisive blunder. Campbell-Bannerman, he said, had 'hoisted once more, in its most pronounced form, the flag of Irish home rule..... I cannot serve under that banner'.²

Those beyond the innermost circle of Liberal affairs were for the moment filled with alarm, thinking that the great man's action presaged similar action from Asquith and his friends. Their fears might have been removed had they noticed that on the same evening, in Cheshire, Haldane, whilst firmly putting legislative home rule outside the purview of the coming parliament, had declared that 'there was no greater delusion than that of thinking that the Irish problem could be left out of sight'.³ But would the bold intransigence of the Liberal League leader draw his errant vice-presidents back to his side, regardless of their previous compact with Campbell-Bannerman?

1. He had not seen Asquith since late October.
2. Rosebery at Bodmin, 25 Nov.1905 (Times, 27 Nov.1905).
3. Haldane at Frodsham, Cheshire, 25 Nov.1905 (Times 27 Nov.1905).

The answer was to be a firm 'no'. Haldane told a relieved Spender on November 27:

I had interpreted C.B.'s speech just as you have done and just as the 'Freeman's Journal', on second thoughts, has done. Rosebery's speech is really mischievous. I had myself spoken in the other sense on Saturday night, but unfortunately The Times has not reported that part. Grey, who was staying with me on Saturday, meant to speak tonight in the same sense, and doubtless will - we talked it over fully - You may rely on our making every effort to prevent a disaster.

1

That night, at Newcastle-under-Lyme, Grey stated frankly that he did not agree with the interpretation Rosebery had placed on Campbell-Bannerman's speech, that he knew more of both their views than either did of the other, and that in fact 'there was no substantial difference between them' with regard to Irish policy for the next parliament.

'Until Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman declared that he disagreed with Lord Rosebery, they might assume that the whole business was the result of a misunderstanding'. Ironically, when Grey went on to define his own views on Irish policy, he did so by quoting verbatim from Rosebery's Stourbridge speech of October 1905. For once Herbert Gladstone was not worried by the turn events had taken.

He did not think Asquith could find fault with the Stirling statement,³

-
1. Haldane to Spender, 27 Nov.1905 (Spender papers, Add.Ms.46390 f.160).
 2. Grey at Newcastle-under-Lyme, 27 Nov.1905 (Times, 28 Nov.1905).
 3. One Liberal M.P. met Asquith a day or two after the Bodmin speech, and found him 'very angry with Rosebery and some of his satellites'. J.W.Williams to Ripon, 27 Nov.1905 (Ripon Papers, B.M.Add.Ms.43639 f.88).

and he commented to C.B. : 'Your Irish utterance seems to have thoroughly satisfied the Freeman's Journal. Not so our noble friend! But that does not matter'.¹

Rosebery said he would withdraw his refusal to serve if Campbell-Bannerman would 'explain' his Stirling statement more fully, but C.B. refused to be drawn.² After all, it was not Rosebery he wanted in his cabinet. As Mr.Jenkins has observed, Rosebery's outburst succeeded less in marking his final separation from Campbell-Bannerman than his final separation from his former lieutenants, Asquith, Grey and Haldane.³ But the part played by divergence of policies on the separation of Rosebery and the Asquithians should not be overestimated. Lewis Harcourt thought it 'very dishonest of Rosebery to have raised this bone of contention merely to give himself an excuse for refusing to join - which he never meant to do'.⁴ It seems likely that at this stage Rosebery thought of returning to office only if summoned to play the role of 'national' leader. His Irish views did not differ very much from the pragmatic outlook of Asquith. At Stourbridge, on 25 October 1905, he had denounced home rule, but endorsed a progressive policy for Ireland of 'large administrative reforms and the development of

1. H.Gladstone to C.B. 24 and 25 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers,Add.Ms.41217 f.f.277, 279).

2. Times, 12 Dec.1905.

3. Jenkins, Asquith, p.150.

4. L.Harcourt to C.B., 27 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41220 f.189).

local institutions'¹. It was a cautious utterance, but it contained nothing which would have precluded him from taking office under Campbell-Bannerman, nor did it conflict with the views of his liberal imperialist associates.²

Unlike the basic conflict in the party between liberal imperialists and Gladstonians, which was basically a policy struggle between moderate imperialism and 'continuity' of foreign policy on the one side, and 'little Englandism' on the other, the later split between Rosebery and the Asquithians was much more a question of personalities and aspirations. Asquith was at this time without a rival in his own political generation: correct and rather traditional in style, sometimes called 'the last of the Romans' or 'the greatest parliamentarian', his method would not be to upset the party system in a dramatic bid for power, but to preserve a powerful liberal party and keep the path clear for his 'assured succession'. Rosebery's position, although he was only five years older, was somewhat different. He had reached the summit of political power as a comparatively young man, and from the point of view both of natural pride and unnatural temperament regarded himself as a rival rather than as a successor to Campbell-Bannerman, Morley,

-
1. Rosebery at Stourbridge, 25 Oct.1905 (Times, 26 Oct.1905).
 2. Haldane indeed wrote to congratulate him on this speech, singling out the Irish passage for special praise. Haldane to Rosebery, 26 Oct.1905 (Haldane papers, National Library of Scotland, vol.5906 f.230).

or Spencer. These men were Asquith's political parents, but Rosebery's political brothers. He was C.B.'s 'big salmon.... always lurking under his stone',¹ fearing the effects of high office on his health, but hoping always that the blunders of others would stimulate a national demand for his return. Rosebery, then, needed a showdown if he was to become leader, but Asquith needed little more than the process of time, combined with certain safeguards for what he considered to be vital policies.

2. A government formed

Meanwhile, as the liberals struggled to hold their ranks together, the unionists had been fighting a much more forlorn battle. The governments of Salisbury and Balfour had been in office for ten years. They had seen the country successfully through the Boer war, and done much to revise the social-political structure of the Irish countryside with their local government act (1898) and their land act (1903). But the efforts of George Wyndham and Sir Antony MacDonnell to carry their reforming spirit into the sphere of Irish central government had caused dissension amongst the extreme unionists in the party; the governments' education act of 1902 had aroused considerable opposition amongst non-Anglicans; and the issuing of permits for the use of indentured Chinese labour in the South African mines had exposed the government to fierce moral criticism from the liberal and labour

1. C.B. to Asquith, 20 Dec.1898 (Cited in J.A.Spender and C.Asquith, Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith (London,1932), i.124).

parties. More damaging than any of these factors had been Joseph Chamberlain's declaration for tariff reform in 1903, which badly split the party, despite Balfour's attempts to walk the tightrope. The majority of unionists supported Chamberlain, and by 1905 the liberals were playing on the 'dear bread' scare for all they were worth. The Daily News in its columns constantly referred to the unionist party as 'the foodtaxers'. It was widely expected that the Unionist government would not again venture to face parliament, and when in November 1905 the National Union of Conservative Associations, against Balfour's advice, passed a 'whole hog'¹ resolution on tariff reform, the end was known to be near. And so, when Rosebery made his unfortunate pronouncement at Bodmin, Balfour and his crumbling government clutched at the passing straw, in the hope that the great unionist party and anglican church might be saved in the nick of time by a fresh rendering asunder of the liberal party on the Irish rack. On December 4, 1905 Balfour tendered his government's resignation.

The liberals thus had to turn from the business of policy discussion to the more urgent, and indeed controversial task of forming a government. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had been leader of the liberal party in the house of commons since the resignation of Sir

1. Jenkins, Asquith, p.150. See also A.M.Gollin, Balfour's burden (London,1965) for a full account of the tariff controversy within the unionist party.

William Harcourt in 1898. He had not previously been outstanding in the liberal hierarchy, and no-one at the time seemed to have thought they had necessarily made him head of the next liberal government which, they guessed correctly, was a long way off. Lord Rosebery, should he feel so inclined, or failing him Lord Spencer, were both men of more experience and more standing in the party. Asquith had a number of supporters for the leadership, and he himself seemed to give it serious consideration for a time, but he was a man without family fortune behind him, had just entered into a (second) marriage with Margot Tennant, a woman of wealthy background and expensive tastes, and was dependent on his work as a barrister in order to maintain his new position in society. He could not afford to devote his time to the leadership of a party which was expected to sustain a clear-cut electoral defeat and remain in opposition for a possible seven years. C.B. on the other hand was a wealthy man who had shown no sign of inordinate ambition (he had at one time been eager to become Speaker) nor of extremist views (he was a Gladstonian who was associated neither with the Rosebery faction nor with the radicals),

1. Jenkins, Asquith, p.105.

2. P.Stansky, Ambitions and Strategies (Oxford,1964) p.156. This is the most recent and dispassionate account of the struggle for 'power' within the liberal party between 1892 and 1899.

whilst his easygoing temperament would be a welcome change from the petulant activities and inactivities of Rosebery and the elder Harcourt, and for that same reason a welcome alternative to John Morley. Furthermore he would be well into his sixties before there was much chance of the liberal party being asked to produce a prime minister, and his health was known to be not strong. His appointment was a stop-gap until the storm which had begun with Gladstone's withdrawal from political waters died down. But C.B. became more tenacious as the years went by, and had won much prestige on the left of the party by his stand against the liberal imperialists during the Boer war. By 1905 Rosebery's image as the Man of Destiny in the liberal party was somewhat tarnished, whilst few people now felt that Lord Spencer would do the party justice in the highest office.¹

In this situation Asquith met together with his closest associates, Haldane and Grey, at Grey's fishing cottage at Relugas in N.E. Scotland, in September 1905. They agreed that none of them would serve under Campbell-Bannerman as prime minister unless he took a peerage and left the leadership in the commons to Asquith.² C.B. meanwhile was relaxing in Vienna, where he was kept in touch with

-
1. In October 1905 a serious illness removed Spencer from consideration altogether.
 2. Jenkins, Asquith, p.145.

developments by his younger followers, notably John Sinclair, and T.R. Buchanan, who wrote of Asquith and Haldane on October 1 :

They both recognise and said so in so many words that you must be P.M. They would like to shove you in the lords, but that I told them would be fatal to your position and influence. They both think Rosebery must and will stand out, and will give trouble in the Lords and country. They accept Lloyd George, are not sure of Winston Churchill (Mrs Asquith dissenting, she believes in him) will shelve Fowler in the lords.....They think (like you) that John Morley wants to be Chanc. of the Exch. but doubt his administrative power. So far as I can judge they won't, either of them, be divisive elements in a government after it is formed, but they may try to get it filled with men of their own sort and the uncommitted liberal.....

1

This information did not cause C.B. to make any change in his plans, and he remained in Vienna (where Asquith, much to his annoyance, was unaware of his address) for another month. He returned to London early in November, however, and on the 13th had an interview with Asquith at which he offered him the exchequer in the next government, but made it clear that he did not intend to pension himself off in the house of lords, an idea which he tactfully attributed to 'that ingenious person Richard Burdon Haldane'.

2

An additional problem for the liberal leadership was the tactical question of what attitude ought to be adopted if Balfour resigned instead of dissolving parliament. As Lord Ripon succinctly

1. Buchanan to C.B., 1 Oct.1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41238 f.64).
2. Margot Asquith recounts this episode in her Autobiography (Penguin edition, London, 1936), ii.55-7.

put it to C.B.: 'that the present government should dissolve would I suppose be the best thing for us; but for that very reason I should have thought that it was just the thing they would not do'.¹ C.B. was firmly in favour of taking office if asked, and this policy accorded well with the requirements of his personal position; once the liberal party was returned with a clear majority at a general election it would be much easier for the Asquith group to oppose him, and probably defeat him, with a clear conscience; but if the party took office with an election still ahead of them, it would be difficult to refuse to play the game as dictated by C.B. To stand out for their own views on appointments and refuse to serve would result in the formation of what Asquith called 'a weak government, all of one colour',² whilst a battle with the Gladstonians for control of the government would be even more calculated to revive flagging tory spirits.

But Campbell-Bannerman was also able to put forward arguments of a less personal nature in favour of accepting office at once. He told Ripon on November 25:

Most of our people seem to be impressed with the disadvantage of accepting office after a resignation. Anyone can see that as a mere move in the party game it would be clever to refuse. But it seems to me that the inconveniences would be outweighed by the damping effect on our fighting

-
1. Ripon to C.B., 25 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers,Add.Ms.41225 f.62).
 2. Asquith to Haldane, 7 Dec.1905 (Cited in Jenkins, Asquith, p.152).

men in the country, when after all our clamour we invited the government to remain in office. They know nothing of tricks and pedantries and judge by the facts.

1

In fact, the debate between the liberal leaders over the dissolution/resignation question in no way reflected the division between the Gladstonian-Radical group and the Asquith-Rosebery group. Rosebery and Morley, a very diverse pair, and certainly poles apart on the leadership question, were reported by Herbert Gladstone, perhaps with a certain amount of exaggeration, as the only liberal leaders in favour of accepting office prior to a dissolution.² Ripon thought that Campbell-Bannerman would be justified in refusing (on the grounds that Belfour had no justification, such as a parliamentary defeat, for resigning instead of dissolving), but he did not favour that course from the point of view of tactics.³ Lewis Harcourt on the other hand, a man even more closely committed to the anti-imperialist wing of the party than Ripon, was urging C.B. that he was under no obligation to accept office before a dissolution.⁴ Asquith and his associates were all against acceptance, as was Spender's Westminster Gazette - the 'Roseberyite organ' as the

-
1. C.B. to Ripon, 25 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41225 f.64).
 2. H.Gladstone to C.B.,24 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41217 f.277).
 3. Ripon to C.B., 28 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41225 f.65).
 4. L.Harcourt to C.B.,24 Nov.1905. Though Harcourt did change his mind 'on information received', at the last minute. See Harcourt to C.B. (telegram), 30 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41220 ff.183 & 193).

nationalists always called it.¹ But then so were Bryce and Herbert Gladstone, both of whom were by background linked far more closely with the other wing of the party.²

Campbell-Bannerman, however, remained determined to accept office immediately if Balfour resigned, and (after a consultation with his wife, and in defiance of his doctor) equally determined to ^{be} both prime minister and a member of the house of commons.³

When it became clear that Rosebery's outburst at Bodmin was likely to precipitate the crisis, C.B. was quick to bend this new development to his own advantage. He wrote to Asquith on December 1:

The Bodmin bombshell has upset the public equilibrium and as usual the press, not purely of malice, but as a mere matter of paper-selling, has fanned the flames and set it ablaze.

My only complaint against our friend is his saying that I 'raised a banner'. It was he who stirred the waters at Stourbridge by challenging us either to put away home rule altogether or make it our foremost object. I am

1. See Morley to C.B. 25 Nov.1905 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms.41223 f.164). Grey had privately told Herbert Gladstone as early as 1901 that he, Haldane, and Asquith would not accept office in a government which was dependent for its majority upon the Irish party. (McCready, op.cit., p.325).
2. Bryce wrote to C.B. on Nov.25, with an obtuseness which may have been deliberate: 'Your view, was, I think, that we should refuse to take office at this moment but insist on dissolving. Am I right in that view? It is, I think, the general view among our people'. (C.B. papers, Add.Ms. 41211 f.310). Also H.Gladstone to C.B., 24 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers, Add Ms.41217 f.277).
3. J.A.Spender, Sir H.Campbell-Bannerman, ii.199. Apart from domestic encouragement, C.B. had the left of the party fully behind him. L.Harcourt told Sinclair on Dec.7: 'The radicals are in open revolt.....it would be absolutely fatal for C.B. to go to the house of lords now; it would be regarded as the triumph of the Rosebery section...for God's sake stop this before it is too late' (C.B.papers Add.Mss.41220, f.194).

bound to say that it was nothing but mischief. I showed my estimate of it by saying nothing at Portsmouth, and at Stirling I purposely avoided a controversial mode of handling it, and answered him by inference merely. However I do not think any harm has come of the whole episode. In effect it seems to me to clinch the argument, which (already appeared to me to be strong, in favour of a bold course and acceptance of responsibility if it is offered us. Any shirking or reluctance would read as inability through disunion, and would greatly damp and discourage our people. Both Grey and you have done great service in your treatment of the thunderbolt, and the whole party is under obligation.

2

Asquith had no time to offer any reply to this letter, for by then it was known that Balfour was to resign office on the following Monday, December 4. C.B. arrived from Scotland early on the morning of the great day itself, and soon saw Asquith and Grey, when policies, mainly with regard to Ireland, were discussed, and there was general agreement.¹ In fact for Asquith the battle was virtually over. C.B. had made good use of events to outmanoeuvre him, and he determined to give in with good grace and push things no further. This was the gist of the letter he wrote to Haldane on December 7. He explained that the election was still ahead of them, and a free trade majority must be assured, and also a majority independent of the Irish (It would be ironic indeed if they held out against C.B. on, amongst other things Irish home rule, only to find

1. . . . Jenkins, Asquith, p.151. He gives no source.

2. C.B. to Asquith, 1 Dec. 1905 (Asquith papers, Ms.10 f.172).

that the result in seats lost put power at Westminster in the hands of Redmond). Furthermore, if he did not go in, a weak government, all of the 'advanced' persuasion, would take office, and Rosebery would be able to gloat over the havoc he had created. C.B. had made good offers to Grey and Haldane and so the group could not claim to have been flouted. 'If the election were over and free trade secure, different considerations would arise'¹.

This was enough for Haldane - he was eager for political office, and could hardly condemn from the outside a government in which his closest associate was to be second minister. Grey on the other hand did not share the keen ambition of the other two - rather the opposite, in fact - and was more inclined to stick to what he thought was a principle. There is a strong petulant note in his letters to Asquith at this time. On December 4 he complained:

C.B. gave me the impression he was quite prepared to form a government without any of us; he never once suggested that my abstaining would make the formation of a government difficult, though I had suggested it might raise difficulties in regard to yourself.

2

During the night Grey found that a number of more general points 'rankled', and passed them on to Asquith the next day, presumably hoping that they would rankle with him as well. He objected first of

1. Asquith to Haldane, 7 Dec. 1905 (Cited in Spender and Asquith, Life of Asquith, pp.174-5).
2. Grey to Asquith, 4 Dec. 1905 (Asquith papers, Bodleian Library, Ms. 10 f.180).

all to: 'The discourtesy of forming a government without giving Rosebery the chance even of expressing regret that he can't join it'. In view of the Bodmin onslaught, a less partisan onlooker might have considered that Rosebery had shut himself off from consideration. A further 'rankle' was "the slighting of R.B.H.". Grey felt that it was a "strong thing" for C.B. to have promised the woolsack elsewhere, after Asquith's letter to C.B. of November 25, in which Haldane's legal talents had been vigorously stressed. Here again Grey overstated his case - Haldane may have set his heart on the woolsack, but the offer of a choice of two secretaryships of state to a man who had not previously held high political office, was hardly a slight. Finally came the problem of the Irish declaration (Grey now seemed to regard this issue as open again), but this, he thought, could be left until the many people concerned were able to discuss it - Morley for instance should be there to discuss it, Grey thought.¹

This last was surely a mischievous proposal: the basis of C.B.'s settlement of the Irish policy had been to preserve a vague formula, which all might loosely agree to, but which might well crumble if any attempt was made to clarify it in the presence of men of such diverse standpoints as Grey and Morley.

1. Grey to Asquith, 5 Dec.1905 (Asquith papers, Ms.10if.186).

C.B.'s position was thus a difficult one: Grey's view as expressed to Gladstone on December 5 was basically that C.B. must go to the lords, leaving Asquith in charge of the party in the commons. The Irish matter was 'subordinate', and should be 'settled in enclave, but C.B. ought to say that while refusing to exclude home rule, he would not attempt to pass a big bill without further reference to the country'. The questions of the woolsack for Haldane and an offer of cabinet office to Rosebery were secondary to these issues. Gladstone's conclusion after this interview was that: 'There are strong reasons why C.B. should start in the commons, but they do not outweigh the effects of Grey's abstention'¹. These 'effects' Gladstone saw, reasonably enough, as the destruction of party solidarity at both parliamentary and grass roots levels, as well as the loss of Grey himself; but he rather surprisingly concluded that 'the government at best is rather drab coloured, and E.G. is one of the men who give it distinction'.

As it turned out, Gladstone need not have worried. Haldane, eager not to be left^{out}/even if he had been denied the first object of his ambition, was extremely anxious to persuade Grey to join, both to save his own conscience in going back on the Relugas agreement and to strengthen the power of the Asquith group within the cabinet, as well

1. H.Gladstone's 'Memo. on interview with E.Grey', 5 Dec.1905 (H.Gladstone papers, Add.Ms.45992 f.122).

as out of a genuine belief that Grey's presence at the foreign office was vitally necessary to the new government. With the assistance of his old friend Acland, he finally persuaded Grey to come in, and so Campbell-Bannerman was able to present his completed cabinet list to the king on December 8.¹

From the Irish point of view the cabinet was a very mixed body, though it was clearly a very distinguished one, and not at all 'rather drab coloured'. Campbell-Bannerman himself was, as in 1886, a clear-cut home ruler, restrained only by the pressures of practical politics and the veto of the house of lords. Morley (secretary of state for India) was, if anything, closer in outlook to the nationalists themselves (though they had only a limited respect for his ability) and felt himself, as a previous home rule chief secretary, to be committed to steady advocacy of home rule. Reid (now ennobled as lord chancellor Loreburn), Ripon (lord privy seal), Tweedmouth (first lord of the admiralty,) Birrell (president of the board of education), Sincclair (secretary for Scotland), and Buxton (postmaster-general) were also home rulers, tempered only by their belief in what was possible and compatible with the maintenance of the liberal government in office. As leaders of the labour and radical sections respectively, Burns (president of the local government board)

1. R.B.Haldane, Autobiography, pp.173-82.

and Lloyd George (president of the board of trade) were committed in principle to the home rule cause, though they were not to be notably determined champions of it during the 1906 parliament. Herbert Gladstone was also a home ruler of long standing, but had of late become very circumspect in his approach to the subject, partly on account of his personal closeness to Asquith (he was one of the very few people who wrote to him as 'My dear Henry'), partly on account of the pressure for 'disengagement' imposed on him during his long stint as chief whip.

But the liberal cabinet also represented the other side of the home rule coin; those who were too closely associated with classic liberal policies like free trade, social reform, and non-sectarian (i.e. nonconformist) education ever to dally seriously with the liberal unionists, but who nonetheless regarded the home rule commitment as a millstone from which the liberal party would be well-advised to divorce itself - whether they had, like old Sir William Harcourt, always regarded home rule as a mistaken policy and accepted it only in so far as they preferred Mr Gladstone to Chamberlain and Hartington; or whether they had come to oppose it on grounds of expediency only, as being impossible to enact in the foreseeable future and therefore likely to wreck the party again. This was the view of Asquith (chancellor of the exchequer), and of Haldane (secretary for war) and of Grey (foreign secretary). It was pragmatic rather than ideological. Sir Charles Dilke, at least, thought that 'Grey is quite

as ready for home rule as is C.B., but he is less willing to admit it'.⁴ Fowler (chancellor of the duchy), another vice-president of the Liberal League, shared the standpoint of his old colleagues, as did the new colonial secretary, Lord Elgin, who, in a letter to C.B. on December 9 accepted office specifically on condition that no home rule bill was to be brought in and no alliance made with the Irish party. Having made this stipulation Elgin did not wait for an answer, but hastily accepted office, on the basis that 'others more deeply concerned than I' were satisfied on the point.¹ The views of Lord Crewe (lord president of the council) have already been discussed at some length.² Carrington (president of the board of agriculture) does not seem to have felt impelled to express any opinion on home rule during these months, but his close friendship with Edward VII and the court circle suggests that his views were likely to be moderate.

Outside the cabinet, the radical and labour groups might be expected to support a home rule policy, though even Dilke at this time was advocating no more than 'a central board scheme all round',³ and nothing which could conceivably be called a home rule pressure group existed outside the Irish party itself. On the outer ring of

1. Elgin to C.B., 9 Dec.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41214 f.13).

2. See supra pp.19-21.

3. Dilke at Dunfermline, 7 Nov.1905 (Times, 8 Nov.1905).

4. Dilke to Labouchere, 6 Jan.1906 (Dilke Papers, B.M.Add.Ms.43892 f.242)

the liberal hierarchy, Runciman and Emmott were not regarded sympathetically by the Irish leaders,¹ and although Harcourt, McKenna and Buchanan all inclined towards the Gladstonian wing of the party, for none of them was home rule a prominent plank in their radicalism. Two other rising hopes of Liberalism, Winston Churchill and Herbert Samuel, made no bones about disclaiming home rule in their election addresses.²

The attitude of Bryce (chief secretary for Ireland) was also very much tempered by circumstances, and in view of his special responsibility for the problem, merits closer attention. He had been a home ruler in Gladstone's day, but early in 1905 had told his old friend Goldwin Smith that 'no one thinks it possible to bring into the next parliament a bill like that of 1893'.³ Writing to the unionist lawyer A.V. Dicey around the same time he had confessed his opinion:

That home rule will come in our time seems unlikely. But under our democratic government a resolute section is pretty sure to get sooner or later whatever does not conflict with the direct interests or passions of the English masses. So I expect it to come, if the Irish go on pressing for it as they have done since O'Connell.

1. See *infra* p. 50.
2. For Churchill's, see R.S. Churchill, Winston Spencer Churchill: the young statesman, 1901-14 (London 1967) pp. 442-3. A copy of Samuel's is amongst his papers (Samuel papers, house of lords record office, A/27 f.2.).
3. Bryce to Goldwin Smith, 26 Jan. 1905 (Bryce papers, Bodleian Ms. 19 f. 189).

But he added a rider that the maintenance of this pressure was in his opinion not so certain - 'when they have got the land much of the steam will have gone out of the boiler'¹. Thus Bryce, the great constitutionalist of the liberal government, was disastrously wrong in his predictions for the future development of the Irish question: he saw Irish nationalism as an engine relying almost completely on agrarian unrest, and he failed to predict (a curious omission for a Belfast man) that the Ulster 'card' would more than make up for any relaxation of pro-union vigour on the part of the English masses. These views, adding up as they do to a strong advocacy of the 'wait-and-see' policy, are important when attempting to reconcile Bryce the home ruler of 1893 with Bryce the chief secretary of 1906.

His appointment was not popular with the nationalists. His recent speeches, notably the one at Aberdeen on November 30 in which he had interpreted the Stirling declaration to be against home rule, had made it rather too clear that he was no longer the straightforward follower of Mr Gladstone he had once been.² But the nationalists' candidate for the post, Thomas Shaw, declined (as he was again to do in December 1906, when Bryce resigned) in favour of the less

1. Bryce to A.V.Dicey, 3 Feb.1905 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11011).

2. Bryce at Aberdeen, 30 Nov.1905 (Times, 1 Dec.1905).

controversial and more financially promising post of lord advocate for Scotland. The nationalists made no mention of Morley.

Perhaps they already knew that he, like Shaw, was not attracted to the Irish 'back-kitchen', or perhaps they feared his

administrative touch at Dublin Castle as much as did E.W.Hamilton

at the treasury.¹ But such was the weakness of the nationalist position in 1905 that their demands could only be negative ones.

At least Bryce would be 'less objectionable than Emmott or Runciman',

Dillon observed to Redmond on December 9.² And again Dillon wrote,

from London, on December 12:

Bryce's appointment after his late speech is very bad. But really, if Shaw refused, it is not easy to name anyone who would be any better than Bryce. But his appointment, together with old Walker's [Sir Samuel Walker had been appointed lord chancellor for Ireland in the new government] shows that we shall have to take a very stiff attitude with these gentlemen.

Yet despite this gloomy note, Dillon could continue in the same letter:

There can be no doubt that the general impression here [London] is that we have come out on top - and so long as C.B. does not go back on the Stirling speech that will remain the impression, but I do not feel at all comfortable as to what might have passed between C.B. and Grey.

3

1. 'Morley tried to make himself disagreeable by putting forward a claim to the exchequer....We have got Asquith, I am glad to say'. E.W.Hamilton's diary, 16 Dec.1905 (Add.Ms.48683).

2. Dillon to Redmond, 9 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

3. Dillon to Redmond, 12 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

The prime concern of the nationalists at this time was, realistically enough, to prevent the liberal leaders from saying anything to firmly preclude home rule from consideration in the next parliament. This would have given a new lever to the O'Brienite attacks on the party, prevented them from pursuing their intended policy of liberal alliance, and presented them with the problem of finding another policy: 'independent opposition' was a find-sounding slogan, but had never (except for a few short months in 1885) existed as a genuine alternative. But so long as the Stirling front was maintained, their election policy at least was not in jeopardy.

Home rulers, or at least those who had little or no doubt that home rule with a dependent legislature in Dublin was in principle the best way of solving the Irish difficulty, were in a clear majority in Campbell-Bannerman's cabinet. Twelve of its members can be fairly confidently placed in this category, whilst those who may be said to have regretted that Mr. Gladstone had ever linked his party with the cause of home rule numbered only six, or seven if Carrington be included. Thus Dillon was able to report the general impression that 'we have come out on top'. But party policies (and sometimes party leaders) are decided on by other means than the taking of majority votes, and whatever claims Redmond and Dillon might feel entitled to make to their electors, C.B.'s government did not in fact take office unfettered against home rule: it was understood, not only by Asquith and his associates, but by C.B.

and by men like Ripon, Birrell, Bryce and even Morley, that home rule would not be made an issue, and that the vagueness in the Stirling declaration was there principally for the benefit of the Irish party, to help them with their own difficulties. In fact the Irish crisis of the autumn of 1905 had proved to be a storm in a teacup, and Morley's one man revolt at Forfar in October brought no supporters to his standard, except the lukewarm encouragement of Reid.

1

But it should not be assumed that the Stirling statement and the rejection of Rosebery marked a final and complete consensus amongst liberals for the duration of the election. That the general situation with regard to Ireland should still be fairly well concealed in the mists appealed to many sections of the political world at this time, especially Campbell-Bannerman and Redmond, but the Asquithians, while appreciating the value of the mist, wanted to be quite certain that they knew what it concealed. Grey, Morley reported, did not disapprove of what C.B. had said about Ireland at Stirling, 'only rather wished that this particular passage had not been so long and prominent'.² Grey explained his doubts more fully to Gladstone in a letter from York, on November 29, where he was 'taking

1. As it perhaps is by Mr Jenkins (Asquith) and Professor McCready ('Home Rule and the liberal party, 1899-1906').

2. Morley to C.B., 27 Nov. 1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41223 f.164).

refuge from the Irish gale of the past few days':

If C.B. would occasionally cross a 't' or dot an 'i' it would be better. I had been told what line he intended to take at Stirling, and so could decipher the message. But when the next liberal government announces in parliament that it is not going, in the next parliament, to propose a home rule bill of the scope of '93 or '86, the head of it ought not to be open to reproach from Redmond that he got votes at the election on the assumption that he would go the whole hog on home rule.

1

Gladstone passed this information on to Campbell-Bannerman in a letter of his own, sent on the following day:

G. and A. are both now on the right side, and it is of course of enormous importance to keep them there. The advanced home rulers and radicals are of course all right and entirely with you, whatever turn you give to your home rule utterances either to or from it. But the vote which will make or mar your majority is composed of Un.free traders and educationists, and anti- or weak home rule liberals. Your Stirling speech was accepted by all till R's monstrous outbreak. Since then letters have been coming to me from quite good men in different parts of the country reporting disturbed minds. What the best of them say is that the party is open to suspicion because you won't say in terms that a big home rule scheme will not or cannot be brought forward in the next parliament. Of course I don't know what passed between you and Redmond [my underlining] but is it certain (let us say) when you declare in the next parliament, or by bringing in a limited bill make it clear, that you are not going to propose to constitute a legislative body, that Redmond will not be able to say that he and his friends were misled into giving us the Irish vote in Great Britain?

1. Grey to H.Gladstone, 29 Nov.1905 (H.Gladstone papers Add.Ms.45992 f.120).

If on the other hand, as I believe, he does understand the position, is it worthwhile for the sake of easing Redmond's position, to endanger and very likely to lose 30 or 40 of our seats by not saying in so many words what most of us know to be the real situation.

1

This passage, especially the sentence underlined, indicates the nature of the problem that remained. The Asquithians and moderates, and even Herbert Gladstone, whose line of action throughout this episode would certainly have failed to meet with the approval of his father, were suspicious of the calm which E.B.'s return to England had brought to the Irish issue - a calm which Rosebery had been unable to break. A fear was beginning to emerge that the wonderful consensus was based on duplicity somewhere along the line. The Asquithians were fairly confident that C.B. had not hoodwinked them - confident enough at any rate to ditch Rosebery - and therefore suspected that he had hoodwinked Redmond in a shortsighted attempt to maintain his position. Those who were not blessed with the confidence of the Irish Party were beginning to be incredulous of the distance C.B. was managing to travel on his past record as a home ruler.

Even if Campbell-Bannerman was playing straight (which of course he was), his silence in the face of Rosebery's blast was causing some public concern, and from the Asquithian point of view

1. H.Gladstone to C.B., 30 Nov.1905 (H.Gladstone papers, Add.Ms.45988 f.204).

there was nothing to be lost by pressing him for some firmer disavowal. But C.B. knew how delicately balanced his position was. Dillon wrote anxiously to Redmond from Dublin on November 27:

The situation created by Rosebery's speech is exceedingly serious. Most satisfactory from our point of view if Bannerman stands on his speech and says nothing more on the subject - but you know Bannerman's fatal habit of being drawn. And I feel strongly that any reply by him to Rosebery's challenge would be most injurious - no matter what position he took up....I wish very much you could communicate with him through some channell...urging him to say nothing more on the Irish question on this side of the election - except of course in his election address.

1

Whether or not Campbell-Bannerman ever received such a communication is not known, but his reply to Gladstone's letter of November 30 shows that the liberal leader was aware of the dangers - the Stirling speech whatever Rosebery thought, offered the nationalists at best an unwanted substitute for home rule, and at worst a mirage to gain for the liberals a seven-year moratorium. To make this any clearer would not help Redmond at all, and both he and C.B. knew it.

Nonetheless, the post-Stirling correspondence of both C.B. and Herbert Gladstone does show that a number of liberals were still concerned lest the party be wrecked again on home rule, and ultimately

1. Dillon to Redmond, 27 Nov.1905 (Redmond papers).

a very veiled concession to this view was made. George Newnes, founder of the Westminster Gazette, wrote as one who had voted for both home rule bills, to urge C.B. to publicly disavow the idea for the duration of the next parliament.¹ Sir Francis Mowatt, former permanent head of the treasury, and now chief liberal backroom adviser on finance, wrote in the same vein. He showed some appreciation of the delicacy of the situation, but considered that it would be possible for C.B. to state 'definitely' enough for anxious liberals, yet 'casually' enough to avoid embarrassing nationalists, that he was not asking the country for a home rule mandate.²

Herbert Gladstone was also asked to put views of this nature before Campbell-Bannerman. In reply to St.Loe Strachey, a unionist free trader and editor of the Spectator, who asked for a public assurance that the Stirling policy did not mean home rule, Gladstone

1. G.Newnes to C.B., 30 Nov. 1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41238 f.89).
2. Sir F. Mowatt to C.B., 1 Dec.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41238 f.120). In contrast to these letters came one from J.Lawson walton, just after the 'regrettable Bodmin speech', in which the writer, 'a loyal supporter of yours, who is also a member of the Liberal League...' sought to make clear to C.B. that he fully accepted the Stirling policy on Ireland. He felt that these views were shared by a large number of Liberal League members. But perhaps his letter should be taken less as an indication of a significant swing in party feeling than as a hint from Walton that he did not intend his past association with Rosebery to stand between him and political office. Walton became attorney-general in the new government. J.L.Walton to C.B., 29 Nov.1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41238 f.108).

wrote on December 6 that the government were 'unable to whittle away
¹
 now'. But Strachey persisted and asked for confidential authority
 from Gladstone to publish an explanatory gloss in his editorial.

His first draft was rejected by Gladstone as too direct and personal -
 it referred obliquely but obviously to the Stirling speech, and
 mentioned C.B. by name twice. But by December 8 Strachey knew
 that his second draft was acceptable. 'Emboldened by your
 encouragement', he told Gladstone, 'I am giving great prominence
 to my statement, and the public must make what they like out of it'.
 His revised draft ran as follows:

We have the best possible reasons for believing the
 statement which we made in our issue of last Saturday
 as to the attitude of the new administration in regard
 to the establishment of a separate parliament in Ireland
 were well-founded. The new cabinet do not intend, if
 they command a majority in the next parliament, to
 introduce a home rule bill, nor will they appeal to the
 country for a mandate to endow Ireland with a separate
 legislature. The essential issue placed before the
 electorate will be the maintenance of free trade, and
 the opposition will be given no excuse for evading that
 issue or pretending that the issue of home rule has taken
 its place.

2

Gladstone and Campbell-Bannerman (for he was presumably consulted
 about this authorisation) thus did in some measure give way to the
 pressure put on them by the moderates - but very indirectly. Only

-
1. St. Loe Strachey to H.Gladstone, 6 Dec.1905, with a note of
 Gladstone's reply added (H.Gladstone papers, Add.Ms.46063 f.165).
 2. Strachey to H.Gladstone, 8 Dec.1905, and printed draft enclosed
 (H.Gladstone papers, Add.Ms.46063 f.178).

those capable of reading between the lines, and this excluded the bulk of the nationalist electorate, would interpret the true significance of the declaration.

There is little doubt that most of this pressure was put upon Campbell-Bannerman as a result of the Bodmin attack, rather than a direct response to what he himself had said at Stirling. But from other points of view Rosebery's speech proved quite advantageous to C.B. It caused Balfour to send in a snap resignation, which suited C.B.'s personal strategy in his struggle with the Asquithians, whilst it forced the latter group, through the medium of a speech by Grey, to declare in effect for C.B. and against Rosebery. Furthermore, it in fact eased things for the nationalists - 'Rosebery is doing all he can for us', wrote Dillon - and from then¹ on their only pressure on C.B. was for him to say no more.

Nonetheless, the Stirling policy in practice was to work out as a victory for Asquith's, rather than C.B.'s, outlook. Home rule was not specifically disavowed by the prime minister before the election, but throughout the next parliament he and his party acted as if it had been

1. Dillon to Redmond, 12 Dec. 1905 (Redmond papers). The nationalist press found the problem a little more perplexing. On Dec. 2 the 'Crisp Comment' column of the W.F.J. declared that 'If Sir Edward Grey and Lord Rosebery differ as to what Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman means, it is obvious that there must be some ambiguity in his utterance which must be removed'. But the 'Leading Topics' column of the same edition judged that 'Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman has no explanation or invitation to offer to the deserter [i.e. Rosebery]'. So we may hope that incident is closed'.

But the situation might well have been different had Redmond come back holding anything approaching the balance. Then the advanced wing of the liberal party would have been in a far stronger position on the Irish issue, and Campbell-Bannerman would have been able to use the vagueness of his formula to draw away from Asquith's standpoint and nearer to that of the Irish themselves - probably not as far as full home rule, but certainly to the extent of offering a more acceptable scheme of devolution than MacDonnell's ill-fated council scheme of 1907. How this would have affected the development of the lords crisis is another matter.

But this did not happen, and perhaps one should be wary of the danger of overestimating the amount of liberal concern over the Irish issue at this time - the main concern of virtually everyone in the party was that it should not be permitted to split and ruin them once more. Despite the great spectrum of views on how the problem should be solved, it should be noted that ~~no-one~~ (except Rosebery) made the Stirling declaration an excuse not to join the government, and no-one made Irish policy a reason for resigning from the government between 1906 and 1910.¹

This then was the state of opinion on Irish policy as the liberal government was formed. After this the question entered on

1. Although Bryce certainly regarded his translation from Dublin Castle to Washington at the end of 1906 as an escape, his feeling was much more one of exasperation with highly complex situation than of disagreement with his colleagues about policy.

a second (and secondary) stage, from the formation of the government to the end of the election. The broad lines of policy had emerged, and what was now left was a number of technical questions - for the Irish, how to direct their votes in Great Britain, and for the liberals, how to transfer the policy arrived at into everyday administration and into legislation, without opening up a breach once more.

3. An election won

The Irish vote in Great Britain was an extremely important commodity. Herbert Gladstone estimated before the election that it would be the decisive factor in 97 seats lost by the liberals in 1886¹ or 1892, and might help them capture 23 others. It was controlled by the United Irish League of Great Britain, a mass organisation which, like the parent body in Ireland, had branches in all districts where Irish nationalists resided in any numbers. Its affairs were directed by a national executive under ^{the} presidency of T.P. O'Connor, and although the majority of this body were delegates from the regions, policy was very much in the hands of Redmond, Dillon, O'Connor, and F.L.Crilly (national secretary). Other members were simply 'consulted' as to conditions in their localities. As an organisation the U.I.L.G.B.

1. 'Liberal seats dominated by the Irish vote', a typed list in H.Gladstone's papers (Add.Ms.46107 ff.28-35).

always looked more impressive on paper than it did on the ground. Even in the Irish ghettos of Lancashire branch membership numbers were not high: the 'Davitt' branch at Bury had 150 members in 1909, for instance, and the Preston branch only 90 in 1906. Only at election times did their propaganda reach noticeable proportions, and even then it was limited to the issuing of a manifesto and a few posters aimed specifically at the Irish community. There is little indication that the organisation did anything to disseminate arguments for home rule amongst British voters. What it did do, with great thoroughness and efficiency, was to undertake the canvassing and registration of the Irish community, which was in many areas a highly mobile one. An analysis of Lancashire politics at this time has concluded that 'the influence of the Irish movement.....was out of all proportion to its membership figures, and to the volume of its election propaganda'¹. It is difficult to assess how much notice Irishmen really took of the advice they were given, but Herbert Gladstone's notes are sufficient testimony to the political value of the U.I.L.G.B. Probably the organisation was partly spontaneous, and partly kept alive² by the promptings of the Irish party. Certainly it provided a route

-
1. G.A.Jones, 'National and local issues in politics: a study of East Sussex and the Lancashire spinning towns, 1906-10' (Sussex University Ph.D. thesis, 1965) pp.151-2.
 2. E.P.M. Wollaston, 'The Irish National Movement in Great Britain, 1886-1908 (London University M.A.thesis, 1958) p.234.

to a safe Irish seat in the house of commons for a number of Irish professional men domiciled in England and Scotland.¹ A study of the Irish movement in Great Britain concludes that 'on both sides there was continued faith that the organisation was politically worthwhile. It was certainly not effective to the degree of their more sweeping claims. In many constituencies, however, the Irish were extremely active: a smaller number they might claim to control'.²

The Irish vote was thus a useful bargaining counter in Redmond's hands. But his freedom to wield it was strictly limited, notwithstanding his grip on the executive. Except in 1885 the Irish party had never been able to stand uncommitted between the two parties, and Redmond's choice, in 1906 as in other years, was between finding a justification to give the vote to the liberals and, alternatively, not giving positive instructions at all. It is doubtful whether the organisation could have survived an attempt to persuade its members to vote for the unionists. Yet to issue no instructions, or to issue instructions for

-
1. The following sat at one time or another during the 1906-9 parliament: W.McKillop and Dr C.O'Neill (both S.Armagh); P.J.O'Hare (N.Monaghan); M.Keating (S.Kilkenny); T.Scanlon (N.Sligo). F.L.Crilly (Gen.sec.), J.Valentine (West of England delegate on the U.I.L. executive), and O.Kiernan (paid organiser for Yorkshire), were others whose names appeared at Irish constituency conventions.
 2. Wollaston, op.cit., p.236.

Irishmen to abstain, might have an equally serious outcome. The attempt of the catholic church to secure Irish votes for the conservative party would be facilitated and the result would probably be the irretrievable fragmentation of the Irish vote into liberal, labour, and catholic-tory sections. It was therefore essential for Redmond to extract at least a glimmer of hope from Campbell-Bannerman - for if he was to direct the Irish vote at all, he had to direct it for the liberal party. As he said at Manchester after the election, there was 'no half-way house'. 'I have never yet met any man of sense or experience who believed that it was possible for us to maintain political organisation in this country and to make that organisation a power on abstention in elections'¹.

Yet Redmond had known for some time that there was no chance of the liberals embracing home rule in such a way that he could declare openly for an alliance with them. Herbert Gladstone told Campbell-Bannerman in May 1905 that Redmond 'recognizes that we cannot take up a position on the Irish question which would enable him to say to Irish voters in England, this justifies and calls for your support to liberal candidates.'² While Walter Long was at Dublin Castle and the liberals were in opposition, it was possible for the Irish party to co-operate with them on the basis of hostility to a coercionist regime.

1. Redmond at Manchester, 18 Mar.1906 (W.F.J., 24 Mar.1906).

2. H.Gladstone to C.B., 26 May 1905 (Cited in Wollaston, op.cit., p.107).

Even then, when that policy led to a liberal who was frankly opposed to home rule being given the Irish vote, at Barkston Ash in October 1905,¹ many nationalist eyebrows were raised. Redmond felt it necessary to explain that:

It was the settled policy of the Irish party at this moment to do everything they could do to discredit and weaken and defeat the present government and to hasten the date of a general election; but those who imagined that meant either at the general election or in the next parliament they would tolerate the betrayal of Ireland by the liberal party would meet with a rude awakening.

2

A few days later he met together with his colleagues to shape this fine-sounding warning into a practical course of action.³ The declaration was made at Glasgow, on November 10:

...as I see things now, I cannot conceive a state of circumstances arising in which we would ask the Irish electors to give their votes in favour of a liberal who had openly, defiantly and insultingly repudiated his pledges to Ireland. Bear in mind, I am not speaking of a by-election.....wherever it is possible, I think the Irish electors ought to give preference to the labour candidate. There is of course, this obvious limitation. No-one, I suppose, would expect us to fight in favour of a labour candidate where there is a certainty that by so doing we would secure, not his election, but the election of the anti-home ruler.

4

-
1. Annual Register, 1905, p.220.
 2. Redmond at Loughrea, 21 Oct.1905 (Times, 23 Oct.1905).
 3. Dillon to Blake, 15 Nov.1905 (Blake papers, N.L.I., micro., p.4683 f.575).
 4. Redmond at Glasgow, 10 Nov.1905 (W.F.J., 18 Nov.1905).

The Glasgow correspondent of the Freeman was soon able to report in Scotland a determination 'to oust the Roseberyite candidate in every constituency in which Irishmen reside'¹.

But this fine-sounding declaration was not a very far-reaching one. In the majority of constituencies there would be no labour candidate at all, and most of those who were standing would, in England at any rate, go unopposed by the liberals, in accordance with the MacDonald-Gladstone pact of 1903.² Only eighteen labour men were in fact opposed by liberals,³ and most of these cases were to come within Redmond's proviso about not voting labour if it might let the tory in. Dillon's letter to Redmond of 8 December 1905 reveals the private thoughts of the Irish leadership on the electoral situation.

My views are quite well known to T.P. and to you. I am in favour of selecting five or six prominent Roseberyites and doing our best to defeat them - I am very doubtful whether it would be wise to make any attack on Haldane or Asquith - especially if they take office under Bannerman. But of course either or both may say or do something before the election which would change my view in this regard. With these few exceptions I am in favour of throwing the whole Irish vote for the liberals - unless Bannerman explains away or goes back on his Stirling speech.

4

-
1. W.F.J., 2 Dec.1905.
 2. See H.Pelling, A short history of the Labour party (London,1951) p.13
 3. Ibid., p.15.
 4. Dillon to Redmond, 8 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

For a time there was considerable anxiety on the part of the nationalists lest C.B. should retract his declaration, stemming not from any want of confidence in the liberal leader's sincerity but rather from fear that pressures within his party might force him to recant. Rosebery's Bodmin speech first threatened to throw the matter back into the melting pot, and although it soon became clear that the great man was not going to carry the party with him, suspicious minds began to wonder why not. Worries lest secret disavowals of home rule had been made by Campbell-Bannerman to the liberal imperialist group were further enhanced when, after considerable heart-searchings, Grey was persuaded to join the government. But the fear was not so much that the liberals would attempt to evade the Irish government question in the next parliament (the lords would after all block the passage of any acceptable bill) as that with an eye on the uncommitted voter they would force C.B. to say something which would put the nationalists in an impossible position so far as the Irish vote was concerned. Dillon told Bryce that the Irish leaders were 'content' with the Stirling statement, though it was 'a ¹ most moderate statement'. Redmond's feeling was similar, Labouchere told C.B.: 'He says he is not very hopeful, but that if you will

1. Extract of a letter from Dillon forwarded in Bryce to C.B., 19 Dec. 1905 (C.B. papers, Add. Ms. 41211 f. 333).

maintain your present attitude on home rule, the election will be
got over satisfactorily¹'.

Lord Rosebery, in a speech which marked his final disassociation from the liberal government (by making clear that he did not intend to let his Bodmin outburst be written off as a momentary aberration) did his best to prevent this. He told a meeting of the Liberal League Council in London on December 11 that:

....a general election is the wine-press which squeezes out the pure spirit of candour from the drained-out grape-skins of ambiguity; and it will be impossible for any members of the government to get through this general election without telling us in clear and unambiguous terms what is the Irish policy of the new government....

2

It was perhaps with this in mind that Haldane mentioned casually to Rosebery in a letter on December 19 that 'I do not think much will be heard of home rule, except from the other side (i.e. the unionists)³'. Indeed, despite Rosebery, the apparent dichotomy in the government's Irish policy was allowed to continue through the election. Both Grey and Fowler denied strongly that a majority obtained for free trade would be used by the government to introduce a home rule bill. Tweedmouth and Crewe declared that the government would continue in the footsteps of Wyndham and MacDonnell.⁴ The Freeman riposted that

-
1. H.Labouchere to C.B., 28 Dec.1905 (C.B.papers Add.Ms.41222 f.123).
 2. Rosebery to Liberal League Council, London, 11 Dec.1905 (Times, 12 Dec.1905).
 3. Haldane to Rosebery, 19 Dec.1905 (Haldane papers,N.L.S. Ms.5906 f.282).
 4. Grey at Alnwick, 4 Jan.1906; Fowler at Wolverhampton,12 Jan.1906; Tweedmouth at Huntingdon, 5 Jan.1906 (all cited in Annual Register, 1906, p.4). Crewe at Crewe, 2 Jan.1906 (W.F.J., 6 Jan.1906).

Ireland expected a liberal government 'to dress itself in some other garments than are found in the second-hand shops of toryism', but advocated no change of Irish party policy.¹ For Campbell-Bannerman stuck very closely to the letter of Dillon's wishes: he said virtually nothing about the Irish question during his entire campaign. At the Albert Hall on December 21 he said that the domestic affairs of the Irish people should be placed in their hands 'as and when opportunity offers', but at Inverkeithing on January 12, in answer to a question about legislative home rule, he said that he 'did not think that in the immediate future there....[was]... any chance of such an opportunity occurring'.² Apart from this he made no reference to the issue at all, even in his election address, which, said the Irish Times was 'impudent in its silence on the issue which he himself has raised'.³ Davitt, who was of course eager for any opportunity to direct Irish votes away from the liberals into the L.R.C. camp, regarded this omission as an 'evasion' of home rule, but his colleagues, who had less of an interest in internal British politics, were happy enough with a policy of silence.⁴

1. W.F.J., 6 Jan.1906

2. C.B. at the Albert Hall, 21 Dec.1905 (W.F.J., 30 Dec.1905).
C.B. at Inverkeithing, 12 Jan.1906. (Times, 13 Jan.1906).

3. Irish Times, 8 Jan.1906

4. He wired to Redmond on 8 Jan.1906: 'Private. If you, Dillon, think think necessary modify policy manifesto view Cannerman's evasion home rule, let me know. Davitt' (Redmond papers).

The manifesto of the U.I.L.G.B. executive was drafted by Redmond, Dillon, and O'Connor,¹ and issued on 30 December 1905. Its preamble dwelt on the 'great injuries' done to Ireland by the Tories, and placed the destruction of their predominance as the first duty of Irish voters. The best guarantee for the catholic schools lay not in the party of anglican ascendancy, but in the maintenance of the authority and prestige of the Irish party. The manifesto continued:

We recommend our people in all cases where a Labour candidate, who is sound on the question of home rule, is in the field, to give their votes to that candidate, except in cases where he is standing against an old tried friend of the Irish cause, or where the support of the labour candidate would cause the return of the unionist candidate. In all other cases, with the exception stated below, we urgently appeal to all Irish nationalists to vote for the liberal candidate, and by doing so aid the defeat of the party whose reason for existence was to deny Ireland all the rights of free men.....In the case of constituencies where the choice is between a unionist and a so-called liberal who declares himself against self-government for Ireland, or who had proved by his actions that he is a follower of Lord Rosebery on the Irish question, special advice will be given to Irish voters.

2

-
1. See T.P.O'Connor to Redmond, 29 Dec.1905, and Dillon to Redmond, 29 Dec.1905 (both in Redmond papers). The full membership of the U.I.L.G.B. executive at this time was O'Connor, Redmond, W.O'Malley, and W.Abraham, M.P.s. Delegates: F.J.Greeves, F.J.Farley, E.Jordan, (Lancs); J.McCabe (Scotland); J.Valentine (west of England); D.Tuckey, M.Walsh (London); J.Kelly (Northumberland); W.Sullivan, J.Cain (Yorkshire). Organisers: F.L.Crilly (Gen.Sec.); O.Kiernan (Yorks); J.Brady (London); J.O'Donnell Derrick (Scotland); J.F.McGairy (Midlands and Wales). Shortly after the election W.J.Loughrey (Lancs) was added (W.F.J., 6 Jan.1906).
 2. W.F.J., 6 Jan.1906

This declaration was good publicity for labour - it boosted the prestige of a movement fighting its first ever general election as an organised party. As Redmond wrote to Keir Hardie, 'we have put the labour men in the forefront'¹. Sympathy between Irish nationalists and the new Labour Representation Committee was considerable: of the L.R.C.'s fifty-odd candidates, seven were Irish catholics;² Michael Davitt probably hastened his death by the efforts he put into the election on behalf of labour candidates;³ a debate at the Glasgow Home Government branch, the most powerful U.I.L. branch in Britain, revealed a general feeling that 'the best way the Irish vote could be a factor for good would be to go with the side of labour - in nearly every case'⁴. Keir Hardie saw immense long-term possibilities in a labour-nationalist alliance. He wrote to Redmond

-
1. Redmond to Keir Hardie, 1 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. J.R.Clynes (N.E.Manchester); J.Conley (Kirkdale); P.Curran (Jarrow); G.D.Kelley (S.W.Manchester); J.O'Grady (E.Leeds); J.Sullivan (N.W.Lanarks); S.Walsh (Ince). Estimates vary as to the exact number of candidates run by the L.R.C. in this election, because of cross-membership of the various labour groups - L.R.C., I.L.P., S.D.F., Miners', Scottish Workers' Rep.committee, Lib-Labs, etc.
 3. See Davitt to Redmond, 26 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers) for details of Davitt's speaking tour.
 4. W.F.J., 30 Dec.1905.

on December 26:

.....I am very anxious that the Irish and labour parties should get to know each other better by working harmoniously together in as many constituencies as possible. A combination of these forces would, at the election following this coming one, dominate the political situation in the industrial centres.The liberal party is a decaying quantity. The Haldanes, Perks, Asquiths and Roseberys are the dominant^t faction in influence and money, if not in numbers, and I anticipate that in the near future these in combination with the conservatives will form a centre party to put a check upon democratic progress. Then with the radicals, the labour, and the Irish parties forming a fighting opposition, the wheels would begin to go round.

1

But in practice the amount of co-operation between Irish and labour was extremely limited in 1906. Even Hardie's grand vision of an alliance of the democratic forces boiled down only to a request that in cases where liberal and labour candidates were opposed, the U.I.L
²
 G.B. executive should leave the decision to the local Irishmen. The proviso in the Irish manifesto, that labour should not be supported where to do so might let the tory in, in practice covered most of the constituencies where liberal and labour were opposed. Further, labour men stood against liberals in constituencies where the labour vote was thought to be high, or where the local labour organisations felt inclined to run a candidate, and not particularly where the liberal was known to be unacceptable to Irish nationalists. The views of the

1. Hardie to Redmond, 26 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

2. Ibid.

Diamond press, strongly nationalist but very wary of socialism, circulated widely amongst the Irish population of Scotland and industrial England: 'Where a labour candidate is standing against a liberal home ruler, the Irish vote will go to the latter. There is too much reason to believe that many of these so-called labour candidates are merely tory candidates in disguise'.¹

In almost all cases the benefit of any doubt in the manifesto went to the liberal and against the labour man. Two prominent liberals with a Liberal League background, Runciman at Dewsbury and Lawson Walton at South Leeds, were supported by the U.I.L. against official labour candidates, although it must have been clear that the unionist could not win under any circumstances.² Had Robertson, the miners' candidate in N.E.Lanarkshire, received the thousand-odd Irish votes which were given, and presumably went, in the main, to the liberal,

1. Liverpool Catholic Herald, 5 Jan.1906

2. Ibid., 12 Jan.1906. Except where otherwise stated, the information in this chapter about U.I.L. instructions to constituencies is taken from the Liverpool and Dundee Catholic Heralds, 12 Jan.1906, for English and Scottish seats, respectively.

<u>Dewsbury</u>		<u>South Leeds</u>	
W.Runciman (Lib.)	6764	J.L.Walton (Lib.)	6200
W.Boyd-Carpenter (U.)	2954	A.Fox (Lab.)	4030
B.Turner (Lab.)	2629	H.Lucy (U.)	2126

All the election results in this chapter are taken from The Times, Jan.1906, unless otherwise stated.

Findlay, he would have come first in the poll instead of third.¹ At Wakefield the vote went to the liberal, Snape, even though the labour man was clearly the first-string alternative to the unionist.² At Jarrow, the liberal got the Irish vote in a straight fight with the labour man.³ In two places, Burnley and Middlesbrough, the U.I.L. supported 'lib-labs' with no clear party allegiances (though their expenses were in both cases paid by the liberals)⁴ in preference to the socialist candidates who had the blessing of the L.R.C.⁵ At Burnley, Davitt campaigned for the socialist, Hyndman, and after a row with T.P.O'Connor and Crilly, appealed to Redmond to keep the U.I.L. neutral.

-
- | | | | |
|--|---------------------|------|----------------------------|
| 1. Lanarkshire North-East: | A.Findlay (Lib.) | 6436 | |
| | Hislip Eliot (U.) | 4836 | |
| | J.Robertson (Lab.) | 4658 | |
| 2. Wakefield: | E.A.Brotherton (U.) | 2285 | |
| | S.Coit (Lab.) | 2068 | |
| | T.Snape (Lib.) | 1247 | |
| 3. <u>Liverpool Catholic Herald</u> , 5 Jan.1906 | | | <u>Jarrow</u> |
| | | | Sir C.M.Palmer (Lib.) 8047 |
| | | | P.Curran (Lab.) 5093 |
- In this one case (Jarrow), local conditions determined the decision. "Pete" Curran was an Irishman who had apparently altered his name from "Pat", and was regarded as a renegade and viewed with general distaste by the local Irish community, or at least by their leaders. When the popular old liberal M.P. died in 1907, the local U.I.L. ran a nationalist candidate, in the hope of preventing Curran's accession. Instead, their action seems to have penalised the liberal carpet-bagger, and eased Curran's path to Westminster. See a speech on this affair by Redmond, at Wexford, 21 Oct. 1907 (*Times*, 22 Oct. 1907) + his a...
 By Redmond at Wexford, 21 Oct. 1907 (*Times*, 22 Oct. 1907)
- | | | | |
|---|----------------------|------|-----------------------|
| 4. H.Gladstone's notebook of 1906 election expenses (H.Gladstone papers, Add.Ms.46019). | | | |
| 5. | <u>Burnley</u> | | <u>Middlesbrough</u> |
| | F.Maddison (Lib-Lab) | 5288 | J.H.Wilson (Lib-Lab) |
| | G.Arbutnot (U.) | 4964 | A.Sadler (U.) |
| | H.M.Hyndman (S.D.F.) | 4932 | G.Lansbury (Ind.Soc.) |
| | | | 9251 |
| | | | 6870 |
| | | | 1380 |

He thought he had won, but the local press shows without doubt that the U.I.L. branches in fact opposed Hyndman fiercely.¹ In the case of Middlesbrough, the 'lib-lab' was not really a liberal at all, but a sitting labour M.P., Havelock Wilson, who was being opposed by the local trades unionists because he had refused to join the newly established L.R.C. Keir Hardie, who admitted that it might be difficult for Redmond to take sides in many places, thought that 'in the case of Middlesbrough it should not be'.² However, John Burns wrote in support of Wilson, Lloyd George spoke on his behalf, and (in consequence, one suspects), the U.I.L. did likewise.³ In fact the U.I.L. worked against the socialist or L.R.C. candidate in favour of the liberal in at least seventeen constituencies where the Irish vote was important: Bradford East, Burnley, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Jarrow, S.E.Lancs., S.Leeds, Middlesbrough, MonmouthBurghs, Rochdale, Wakefield, N.Aberdeen, Dundee, Falkirk, Govan, N.E.Lanarks, and Paisley.⁴ As the Labour Leader commented, the U.I.L. manifesto was 'in the main a case of "thank you for nothing" when we get down to details'.⁵

-
1. See Davitt to Redmond, 26 & 28 Dec.1905 and 7 Jan.1906; T.P.O'Connor to Redmond, 4 Jan.1906 (all in the Redmond papers). Also Wollaston, 'The Irish Nationalist Movement in Great Britain', p.192.
 2. Hardie to Redmond, 26 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).
 3. Times, 6 Jan.1906
 4. I have not included in this survey those three-cornered contests, such as Gravesend, Northampton, and Southampton, where the Irish vote was not a significant factor.
 5. Labour Leader, 5 Jan.1906

Thus, beneath the window-dressing, the policy adopted by nationalists was that outlined by Dillon to Redmond in his letter of December 8: The Irish vote was thrown fully behind the liberals, with the exception of a small number of 'prominent Roseberyites'¹. But if this eschewing of Roseberyism was to be kept to the scale of a gesture, and not be permitted to seriously alter the balance of nationalist policy, liberal candidates would have to be afforded a high degree of tolerance in the matter of their Irish declarations. For not even the most pronounced Roseberyite would be obliging enough to declare unambiguously against all reform of Irish government, whilst those liberal candidates whose home rule pledges could at best be described as luke-warm probably numbered almost half the party. This extract from the semi-official Dundee Catholic Herald illustrates the extent to which the directors of nationalist policy were prepared to bend to maintain their electoral position:

From most of the liberal candidates pledges on the home rule question, more or less satisfactory, have been received. Until C.B.'s Stirling speech came, a great many liberals were disposed to hold back to quirk and quibble on home rule; but since that speech most of these gentry have adopted a convenient, but sufficient formula, and are 'with Campbell-Bannerman on the Irish question'. That is enough'.²

Only in seven cases was the Irish vote given to labour in three-cornered fights.³ But the significance even of this figure is

1. See supra, p.65.

2. Dundee Catholic Herald, 12 Jan.1906

3. Those labour candidates who were not opposed by liberals received the Irish vote more or less as a matter of course.

reduced by an examination of local circumstances. Only two of these cases were ones of clear-cut opposition to Roseberyites: In N.W. Lanarkshire Sullivan (miners' candidate) received the Irish vote and let in the unionist, thus achieving the U.I.L. object of ousting Dr Douglas, a Liberal Leaguer who, in the last parliament, had broken his earlier home rule pledge;¹ and in Stockton-on-Tees the vote went 'unanimously' in favour of Rose (L.R.C.)² against the liberal, Mendl, who was 'rather shy' on the home rule issue.³ But in the other five cases, different factors operated. In Croydon, the U.I.L. followed the advice of the local Irishmen, and gave the vote to labour, in opposition to Somers Somerset, a home rule liberal who came far closer to winning.⁴ In the remaining four cases - West Bradford, Deptford, and the Blackfriars and Camlachie divisions of Glasgow - the liberal opposition was initiated at local level, and was more or less factious,

1. W.F.J., 27 Jan. 1906.

<u>N.W. Lanarkshire</u>	
W. Mitchell-Thomson (U.)	5588
C. McK. Douglas (Lib.)	4913
J. Sullivan (Lab.)	3291

2. W.F.J., 13 Jan. 1906.

3. Yorkshire Post, 5 Jan. 1906.

<u>Stockton</u>	
R. Ropner (U.)	5330
S. F. Mendl (Lib.)	3675
F. H. Rose (Lab.)	2710

4. Russell, 'The general election of 1906', op.cit., p.405.

<u>Croydon</u>	
H. O. Arnold-Foster (U.)	8248
S. Somerset (Lib.)	7241
S. S. Stranks (Lab.)	4112

the labour man in each case having been far longer in the field. In the two Glasgow divisions the liberals were late entrants whose candidature had been prompted against the advice of the central organisation by the Rosebery-Harmsworth organ in the city, the Glasgow Record.¹ At West Bradford, the L.R.C. man, Jowett, had in 1900 been acknowledged by the local liberals as the alternative to unionism in the division, since when a revolution within the local liberal party had led to them sponsoring their own candidate.² In Deptford the local liberals had carried out a similar manoeuvre, but at a very late stage, after Bowerman (L.R.C.) had secured the support of all the free churches, and their candidate received endorsement from the new liberal chief whip, Whiteley, only in the most grudging terms. In this case it is clear from the poll where most of the 'liberal' votes went, and for Irish votes to have gone along with them did not constitute a serious break with the liberal party.³

-
1. Hardie to Redmond, 26 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

<u>Blackfriars</u>		<u>Camlachie</u>	
G.H.Barnes (Lab.)	3284	A.Cross (U.)	3119
A.Bonar Law (U.)	2974	W.Pringle (Lib.)	2871
A.D.Provand (Lib.)	2058	J.Burgess (Lab.)	2568

2. Yorkshire Post, 5 Jan.1906.

<u>West Bradford</u>	
F.W.Jowett (Lab.)	4957
Sir E.Flower (U.)	4147
W.Claridge (Lib.)	3580

3. Times, 2 and 10 Jan.1906.

<u>Deptford</u>	
W.Bowerman (Lab.)	6236
A.H.Morton (U.)	4977
H. Vivian (Lib.)	726

Thus only in Stockton, N.W.Lanarkshire and Croydon was a labour man preferred by the U.I.L. to a fully-endorsed liberal candidate. But in three other cases also, an official liberal was denied Irish support. In Ayrshire North, after much delay, it was decided to issue 'no instructions', since the liberal was unsatisfactory on home rule and it was felt that 'it would have taken one of the greatest stretches of discipline to get the nationalist electors to support him'. In this case advice was not given in favour of the labour candidate.¹ But the most ostentatious opposition to Roseberyite liberalism was made in two constituencies in the east of Scotland. In Leith Burghs, R.Munro Ferguson, long-established in the public eye as Rosebery's closest satellite in parliament, was the liberal candidate. At first Cunningham Graham was expected to oppose him for the L.R.C., and when he refused Davitt wrote urging Ramsey MacDonald to put up another man against Ferguson.² This was not done however, although a member of the Midlothian liberal executive later told Redmond that Ferguson was so unpopular before the election that he could have been beaten by a lib-lab, or even by the L.R.C. man Smillie,

1. W.F.J., 3 Feb.1906

North Ayrshire

T.Cochrane (U.)	5603
A.M.Anderson (Lib.)	4587
J.Brown (Lab.)	2684

2. Davitt to Redmond, 28 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

who had instead stood vainly against a home rule liberal at Paisley.¹
 Thus the Irish leaders found themselves in the position of having to
 support a straightforward unionist, who was nonetheless well beaten.²
 But the gesture had been made, though doubts were later raised as to
 whether the machinery of Irish opposition to Ferguson had in fact been
 fully activated by the local Irish leaders,³

In neighbouring Midlothian, the Irish voter was left in no
 doubt as to his duty. The liberal candidate was Lord Dalmeny, son
 and heir of Rosebery himself. Like Munro Ferguson, Dalmeny made
 promises about the reform of Irish government which were somewhat vague,
 but no more so than those of many other candidates.⁴ But, even more
 than Ferguson, he had to be included in Dillon's category of 'prominent
 Roseberyites'. As in Leith, he too was to have been opposed by a
 labour candidate (Alderman West of Battersea) who withdrew at a late stage.⁵

1. J.A.Paterson to Redmond, 31 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).
2. Leith Burghs
 R.Munro Ferguson (Lib.) 7677
 F.T.Cooper (U.) 4865
3. W.F.J., 27 Jan.1906. But this was after the election. It was
 tempting for the nationalist press to try to explain away Ferguson's
 sweeping victory by claiming that he had (by accident) received the
 Irish vote after all.
4. Dalmeny's election address stated 'I believe the present cabinet will do
 their utmost for the welfare of Ireland, and I will loyally support
 their policy'. See J.A.Paterson to Redmond, 4 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).
5. Davitt at Battersea, 2 Dec.1905 (W.F.J., 9 Dec.1905)

On other matters, especially those of interest to the local miners, Dalmeny was sufficiently radical, and in view of this, and the fact that ^{he} was certain to win, T.P.O'Connor was anxious to persuade Redmond and Dillon to rescind their opposition. ¹ But so far as Irish opinion generally was concerned, Dalmeny's name was itself sufficient objection to him. O'Connor received the following wire in reply to his request: 'We are both strongly of the opinion that Irish voters should be told to vote against Dalmeny whatever his chances of success may be. Redmond. Dillon'. ² Thus once again the Irish leaders had to give their support to a unionist who was well-beaten. ³

Of the thirty cases originally estimated by the Freeman to be ⁴ 'doubtful', the decision had only gone against the liberal in nine (plus the abstention in N.Ayrshire). Such was the weight of Redmond's claim to Hardie that 'we have put the labour men in the forefront'. The opposition to liberals had been a gesture only, and the devious wording of the manifesto an attempt to avoid the appearance of giving unqualified support to a government not pledged to home rule.

-
1. T.P.O'Connor to Redmond, 18 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Copy of a telegram sent by Redmond and Dillon to O'Connor, 19 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. Midlothian: Lord Dalmeny (Lib.) 8348
 F.J.Usher (U.) 5131
 4. W.F.J., 6 Jan.1906.

Anomalies abounded everywhere. Ferguson and Dalmeny were opposed, whilst the far more senior Liberal Leaguer, Haldane, was supported in nearby Haddington. Sullivan, miners' candidate in N.W.Lanarkshire (and, embarrassingly, an Irish catholic) received Irish support, while his colleague in N.E.Lanarkshire was opposed. Liberal Leaguers Pringle and Provand were opposed in Glasgow, yet Watt, in the College division, described by the Freeman as 'next door to a unionist',¹ was supported, as was Sir Thomas Glencoats, who employed Pringle as his political secretary,² in West Renfrew.

In these circumstances it is a considerable tribute to the directors of the U.I.L.G.B. that the election was got over without serious dislocation of the nationalist ranks. Their lines of communication with the men of local influence, and the co-operation they received from these men, seems to have been first-class. The day-to-day campaign was directed by T.P.O'Connor and F.L.Crilly from Liverpool, assisted by John O'Connor M.P. and W.Abraham M.P. in London.³ The scrutiny with which they investigated the thirty-odd reserved cases was minute, and we may be sure that not all their attention was on the statements of the liberal candidate, but that they kept a sharp eye also

1. W.F.J., 13 Jan.1906.

2. W.F.J., 6 Jan.1906.

3. Ibid.

on the state of local Irish feeling and the turns it might be taking. If Irish discipline was good, it was at least to some extent the result of asking voters to vote in a way which they favoured anyway. We have seen that in Croydon and Ayrshire North, at least, the importance of local opinion was publicly admitted, whilst in the case of Midlothian, Redmond seems to have consulted the leading Edinburgh nationalist before¹ he and Dillon denied O'Connor's request.

There is no indication that in the country generally Irishmen failed in large numbers to act on the advice of their leaders. But in a handful of places there was some slight hint of revolt. The worst instance was in Glasgow-Blackfriars where the aptly-named 'William O'Brien' branch of the U.I.L. refused to support the labour man, and instead issued green circulars, not for the Roseberite, but for² the tory, Bonar Law, a most 'unlikely friend of Irish nationalism. Various reasons were adduced for this revolt. The branch itself said that to vote for Barnes (L.R.C.) would in fact result in the re-election³ of Provand, the 'renegade home ruler'; one member of the branch declared⁴ in a fiery speech that he 'refused to surrender to the labour Irishmen'; the Freeman thought the branch's action a retaliation against the failure

-
1. Donworth to Redmond (telegram), 19 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers): 'Dalmeny not at all acceptable, Advise Usher'.
 2. W.F.J., 20 Jan.1906.
 3. W.F.J., 14 Apr.1906.
 4. Ibid.

of the labour party to support the candidature of the Irish nationalist
 in the last municipal elections;¹ whilst a more recent commentator has
 pointed to a considerable amount of hostility in the O'Brien branch
 to the powerful Home Government Branch, whose hegemony in Glasgow
 Irish politics they attributed to 'the leaders of the publican ring'.²
 Evidently the motivation of the branch was a mixture of personal/local
 rivalries on the one hand and a certain amount of opposition to the
 labour movement on the other. At all events it was almost a unique case.

But smaller defections did occur in a number of other
 constituencies. In Deptford one U.I.L. branch protested against
 what they regarded as an attempt by Davitt to railroad them into the
 labour camp, and declared their intention to 'strenuously' support the
 liberal.³ But when Bowerman, the labour candidate, complained,
 T.P.O'Connor intervened on his behalf, and judging from the low liberal
 poll (726) his pleading was successful.⁴ In the two-member
 constituency of Preston, Macpherson (L.R.C.) was teamed with Harold
 Cox, who stood as an official liberal, but who might have been better

1. W.F.J., 13 Jan.1906.

2. J.E.Handley, The Irish in modern Scotland (Cork, 1947), p.290.

3. Times, 13 Jan.1906.

4. E.P.M.Wollaston, 'The Irish Nationalist movement in Great Britain'.
 (London University, M.A.thesis, 1958) p.193.

described, in view of his speeches and the past record of some of his principal supporters, as a unionist free trader.¹ Cox nonetheless received U.I.L. approval and, he told Bryce, he found the Irish voters 'most reasonable'.² But Cox's poll, 1600 lower than Macpherson's, suggests that a number of 'progressive' supporters, probably mainly Irish, did not use their second vote. Other constituencies in which defections were suspected were Cockermouth, where some Irish support for the unionist was reported,³ presumably on the schools question; Burnley, where a high socialist poll suggests that some Irishmen listened to Davitt rather than to Redmond; Dundee, where the position was similar;⁴ and Midlothian, where Balmeny's majority suggests that T.P.O'Connor was correct in his estimation that the Irish miners would vote liberal regardless.⁵

1. Liverpool Catholic Herald, 12 Jan.1906.

2. Cox to Bryce, 23 Jan.1906 (Cited in Russell, 'The general election of 1906'. p.404).

Preston (2 members elected)

J.T.Macpherson (Lab).	10181
H.Cox (Lib)	8538
J.Kerr (U.)	7303
Sir W.Tomlinson (U.)	6856

3. T.McCartan to Redmond, 23 Jan.1906, telegram (Redmond papers).

4. Russell, op.cit., p.405.

5. T.P.O'Connor to Redmond, 18 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).

Apart from the influence of personal and local rivalries at Glasgow-Blackfriars, all these little revolts boil down to one main factor - a conflict between the interests of Irish nationalism on the one hand and the general interests of Irish voters as residents in Great Britain on the other. Thus the dissidents in Deptford and in Midlothian were liberals before they were nationalists; in Blackfriars and in Cokermonth some of them were Tories; in the other cases they were, as perhaps was Michael Davitt, essentially labour men. Keir Hardie thought that some of Redmond's decisions, especially in the west of Scotland, would cause 'great discontent' in league branches.

Where the trade unionists are paying for labour representation and where the labour candidate is a good, sound home ruler and a general supporter of the claims of Ireland, Irish trade unionists will hesitate a good deal before they vote against a candidate whom they themselves have selected and for whom they are paying.

1

This discontent certainly did not manifest itself (in public at any rate) to anything like the extent to which Hardie had warned, but, in the long-term, the conflict between trade unionist and nationalist interests was a threatening one for the Irish leadership, and provided a strong reason why the Irish party could not risk facing another general election with their relationship to the liberal party so imprecisely defined.

1. Hardie to Redmond, 4 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).

Another cause of insecurity in the Irish party ranks during the pre-election period was the activity of William O'Brien. He had broken with the party at the end of 1903 as a result of the strongly critical attitude towards the new land act which it had adopted at the instigation of Dillon and the Freeman's Journal, and by 1905 was attacking his old colleagues most bitterly in the columns of his own newspaper, the Irish People. In this policy he had the steady backing of three Cork M.P.s, E.Crean, J.Gilhooly, and D.D.Sheehan, and of John O'Donnell, M.P. for South Mayo, as well as a certain amount of more sporadic sympathy from T.C.Harrington (Dublin Harbour), T.O'Donnell (West Kerry), C.O'Kelly (North Mayo), and A.Roche (Cork City). The majority of nationalist M.P.s opposed O'Brien more or less consistently, and he was at no stage able to command real grass-roots support outside county Cork. But he was a wily and sometimes energetic campaigner, and an engaging orator, who had the power to make himself a dire embarrassment to the party in Ireland, in Britain, and, not least, in the U.S.A. Dillon told his colleague Edward Blake that although O'Brien had 'utterly failed to get any response to his appeal for faction outside of Cork', there were three serious elements in his attack:

- I. That he has a very considerable following in Cork city and county - who stick to him in the teeth of reason, in the well-known old factionist style.
- II. That his success and his revolt acted as a centre and rallying point for all the cranks, soreheads, and discontented men in all parts of the country.
- III. That if he has sufficient sticking power to maintain the fight till after the election he will give a vast deal of trouble, and embarrass the situation very seriously.

1

1. Dillon to Blake, 15 Nov. (Blake papers, N.L.I., micro.p.4683 f.575).

In the autumn of 1905 O'Brien began suddenly to call stridently on the Irish party to summon a conference of all elements in Irish politics apart from the official unionists. Apart from the nationalists he mentioned the moderate landlords of Lord Dunraven's Irish Reform Association, the Belfast democrats who made up T.H.Sloan's Independent Orange Order, and the protestant farmers who supported T.W.Russell's agrarian radicalism.¹ Dillon privately expressed to Redmond his desire to see O'Brien back within the party, but felt that nothing would be achieved in that direction until O'Brien had been 'made to realise that the people are against his present course'.² Until O'Brien was 'broken' Dillon felt that a conference would be useless:

.....if a conference were to take place now there is very considerable danger that O'Brien would, on its breaking up without agreement - as it inevitably would - start a controversy as to what actually took place at the conference. What you said, what he said, what I said, etc., who was to blame....and hopelessly confuse the situation. At the moment the situation is excellentCork people are already realising the absurdity of O'Brien's position, and when the proper time arrives I think we ought to do everything in our power to open a door of escape for them.

3

-
1. Times, 5 Oct.1905.
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 3 Oct.1905 (Redmond papers).
 3. Dillon to Redmond, 15 Oct.1905 (Redmond papers).

whether at Dillon's instance or not, Redmond was soon equally hostile to the conference proposal, and expressed himself 'astonished' that anyone could think he favoured it.¹ O'Brien nonetheless claimed that the Irish leader in fact supported his idea, and Dillon pressed Redmond to speak out against O'Brien more strongly than he had been doing in his public speeches.² Even his old colleague T.P.O'Connor did not satisfy Dillon in his platform appearances at this time.

Dillon told Blake:

T.P. made a very great blunder in his Glasgow eulogy of O'Brien. His notion was that by laying it on thick he could mollify O'Brien. No notion could be more mistaken. It was like dosing a patient with champagne and brandy who needed ice baths - the disease being egotism, grown beyond all bounds. The growth of which you and I have sorrowfully watched during the last five years. Such flattery as T.P. poured out on him in his Glasgow oration.....served to exacerbate the disorder.

3

But Dillon's 'iron man' approach overlooked the more humdrum problems of those Cork M.P.s who were loyal to the party. One of these, Cap. A.Donelan, was under strong pressure from the O'Brienites who led the U.I.L. in his constituency of East Cork to extract peace feelers from Redmond.⁴ Having failed to achieve anything in regard to the

-
1. Redmond to Donelan, 17 Oct.1905 (Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 2 Nov.1905 (Redmond papers).
 3. Dillon to Blake, 15 Nov.1905 (Blake papers, N.L.I micro.p.4683 f.575).
 4. Donelan to Redmond, 13 Oct.1905 (Redmond papers).

conference proposal, he reported at the end of November that George Crosbie, owner of the Cork Examiner, the leading Munster paper, and a former supporter of O'Brien, was calling for reunion. Donelan urged Redmond to hold out the olive branch to O'Brien by inviting him to attend the coming national convention of the U.I.L. (even though, as author of the U.I.L. rules, O'Brien must have known that he was entitled to attend)¹. This Redmond refused to do, but he was hopeful of a settlement nonetheless - provided that the hands of the party were strengthened meanwhile by a vote of confidence from the national convention.²

Accordingly, after the convention had met and expressed the desired confidence (no significant body of dissidents attended), Redmond and Dillon had interviews with George Crosbie.³ Redmond told Crosbie that he would not countenance re-union on the basis of revising the party constitution or modifying the pledge,⁴ but that he would be prepared to meet O'Brien if necessary, and that he would be happy to

-
1. Donelan to Redmond, 28 Nov.1905 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond to Donelan, 29 Nov.1905 (Redmond papers).
 3. For an account of the national convention see W.F.J., 9 Dec.1905.
 4. All 'official' U.I.L. parliamentary candidates had to sign a pledge to 'sit, act, and vote' with the party at Westminster and on the public platform. O'Brien had been maintaining that, since Dillon's denunciation of the land act (at Swinford, in 1903), to apply the pledge outside Westminster was a sham.

1

declare a truce in the Cork constituencies. Electoral contests, which had been the most immediate concern, were thereby avoided, but hopes of a more far-reaching reunion were for the time being dashed and Dillon for one plainly thought more in terms of victory than of reunion:

I do not think his Crosbie's mission will have much result - beyond promoting a truce for the election. But it is plain from his coming to town and from his conversation that O'Brien's friends in Cork are sick of the situation and are desperately eager to extricate themselves. And of course we ought to do everything consistent with the safety of the party and the movement to open a way out for them.....I read last week's Irish People - and I am sorry to say it is, if possible, more scurrilous and outrageous than ever.

2

Nonetheless, for the duration of the election at least Dillon maintained a public attitude of tolerance: O'Brien was no longer castigated, but gently criticised as 'misguided' in some aspects of his thinking; the point about Sloan and Dunraven was no longer that they were 'black-blooded Cromwellians' but that they represented no significant body of opinion, and were therefore of very minor importance.

3

-
1. 'Interview with G.Crosbie, 16 Dec. 1905 ', a note by Redmond (Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 18 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).
 3. Dillon at Swinford, 9 Jan.1906 (W.F.J. ,13 Jan.1906).

In Cork the soft pedal had been applied - both by the leading combatants and by the local men. In North Louth, however, the touch of the party leadership was considerably less sure. The sitting member, T.M.Healy, was distinguished on both sides of the Irish sea as an orator, an intriguer, and a wit. But ever since his opposition to Parnell in the Galway election of 1886 his mischievous tongue and lack of party loyalty had led him down an increasingly solitary path. He had been expelled from the party by a national convention in 1900, but still held his seat in Louth, for as Blake observed, 'he who fights Healy must have his force ready for the field'¹. Dillon, however, attached considerable importance to ousting Healy in 1906. He told Redmond on 8 December 1905:

I consider it of vital importance to fight Healy and put him out at all costs. Our difficulties in dealing with the liberals will, I think, be immeasurably increased if we are to have Healy and O'Brien on each flank. Without Healy, O'Brien will not count for anything in the house of commons. But a combination between them would be extremely formidable.

2

For some weeks after this it seemed likely that the Irish party would force a fight, though Healy (very much the first in the field) maintained that this course of action had been forced on Redmond by Dillon and Devlin. The chairman of the Irish party, Healy claimed, was 'as much a free agent as a man heavily weighted with Guinness who was being led to the bridewell

1. Blake to Eliz.Dillon, 22 Jan.1906 (Blake papers, N.L.I micro.p.4683 f.582).

2. Dillon to Redmond, 8 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

by two policemen'.¹ But during the second week of January both Cardinal Logue and the archbishop of Dublin sent open letters to Healy deploring any nationalist opposition to him, as a result of which Redmond announced that there would be no contest.² Sir Antony MacDonnell observed to Bryce:

Redmond made a horrible blunder over the Louth election. He ought not to have opposed Healy. Or having begun opposition he ought to have fought to a finish. It would have been better not to have opposed. Now he is regarded, with more apparent than substantial truth, as having come to heel at the crack of the bishops' whip.

3

4

Dillon, it was rumoured, tried to hold out for a fight, and after the election urged Redmond to put before the party a resolution re-affirming Healy's exclusion.⁵

Elsewhere there was little excitement in the nationalist-held seats, where private votes at the constituency conventions usually satisfied the normal competitive instinct. In this way the party were rid of Jasper Tully, the 'factionist' who had previously held South Leitrim, but in two other seats conventions operated to their detriment:

1. Healy at Dundalk, 1 Jan.1906 (W.F.J., 6 Jan.1906).
2. W.F.J., 13 Jan.1906.
3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Jan.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms.11012).
4. Ibid.
5. Dillon to Redmond, 6 Feb.1906 (Redmond papers).

in West Clare (where the sitting member, Major Jameson, had joined the unionists and was standing for Chatham) an up-and-coming hope of the national movement, Stephen Gwynn, lost the nomination to a local councillor; and in North Donegal the sitting M.P., John Muldoon (who features frequently in Redmond's papers as a legal-political adviser) was voted out by the local party in favour of a local man.¹ In all, only seven nationalist-held seats were contested.² Three of these involved nationalists only: in East Kerry there was purely personal rivalry between E.O'Sullivan and J.Murphy; in Newry the sitting member, P.G.H.Carvill, had refused either to perform his parliamentary obligations or to vacate his seat, and had to be put out; and in North Gálway the old Parnellite M.P., Col.Nolan, was overthrown on account of his conservatism on the land question.³ Only in this last instance was there the slightest hint of policy disagreement. Nowhere was there any organised opposition to the Irish party, once the tunc with the O'Brienites had been sealed. The sinn fein movement had only formed itself into a cohesive force at a convention in November 1905, and had resolved not to contest the election: partly because it lacked the funds to do so, partly because Griffith's policy of passive resistance was

1. W.F.J., 13 Jan.1906.

2. The election in Ireland is discussed in more detail in F.S.L.Lyons, 'Irish parliamentary representation' (Dublin Univ.Ph.D.thesis,1947), esp.pp.29-34.

3. Ibid.

one which needed rational agreement, not internecine conflict.¹
The Times' rumour that F.O'Phelan would contest Kilkenny city for sinn
 fein was not substantiated,² whilst the invasion of the West Waterford
 convention by a gang of Dungarvan 'working men and shop-boys' who
 elected T.F.O'Higgins (a local Gaelic Leaguer) to the nomination was
 simply ignored by the Irish party: Redmond wrote authorising the ex-M.P.
 O'Shee, to stand as U.I.L. candidate, and O'Higgins' candidature melted
 away.³

The other four nationalist M.P.s who had to defend their
 seats were opposed by unionists. In the Harbour and St.Stephen's Green
 divisions of Dublin they were successful by large majorities, and in
 South Down the margin was comfortable. But the ever-shrinking majority
 in East Tyrone was cut down to 31, and at a by-election six months later
 it dropped to 19. In fact, although it has been claimed that the 1906
 election marked a temporary halt in the polarisation of Irish politics
 along extreme unionist-nationalist lines (and especially a set-back
 for orthodox unionism),⁴ evidence also exists for the converse view.

-
1. R.P.Davis, 'The rise of Sinn Fein, 1891-1910' (Dublin Univ.B.Litt. thesis, 1958) pp.103-113.
 2. Times, 8 Jan.1906.
 3. F.J., 13 Jan.1906.
 4. notably by Dr E.Larkin in James Larkin (London,1965) p.310.

Much was made by nationalists of the long-awaited recapture of West Belfast by Devlin, who claimed that 'many honest protestants' had supported his stand 'for labour, for democracy, for reform, for liberty'.¹ The result was a credit to nationalist canvassers and registration committees, but the tiny majority of sixteen would not have been won had it not been for the intervention of a liberal unionist, A.M. Carlisle, most of whose 153 votes must have been taken from the unionist.² It was rumoured that Carlisle had been put up, with this end in view, by supporters of T.H. Sloan, the independent Orangeman, as a reprisal against the unionists' decision to oppose him in South Belfast.³

Sloan was able to retain South Belfast (though he felt it necessary to renounce the conciliationist 'Magheramorne Manifesto' to do so), and this victory, along with Devlin's and those of the liberal home ruler W.H. Dodd in North Tyrone and the liberal unionist R. Glendinning in North Antrim, both against Ulster unionist opponents, and the good showing of the L.R.C. candidate in North Belfast, is put forward as evidence of a conservative-unionist recession in 1906. But elsewhere

1. Devlin in Belfast, 19 Jan. 1906 (W.F.J., 27 Jan. 1906).

2. West Belfast:

J. Devlin (Nat.)	4138
Capt. J.R. Smiley (U.)	4122
A.M. Carlisle (Lib. Ind.)	153

3. W.F.J., 13 Jan. 1906.

unionism may be said to have advanced in 1906. Despite nationalist boasts they they could win South Dublin, Hazelton was unable to come even within a thousand of Walter Long, the carpet-bagger from Wiltshire. In North Armagh the independent orangeman failed to secure a substantial number of unionist votes from Col.Saundershn, leader of the Ulster unionists. The biggest challenge to unionism in Ulster, that of T.W.Russell's Farmers' and Labourers' Union, was very much a damp squib, only Russell himself retaining his seat (at South Tyrone). Despite Russell's firm disavowal of home rule before the election, on behalf of all his followers, all seven of them were defeated.¹ Only in South Derry and North Fermanagh did they come even within five hundred of victory. Two of these defeats must be counted as unionist gains, for Wood and Mitchell had sat in the previous parliament.² The debacle of the Russellites, a party of small farmers appealing to small farmers with no nationalist intrusions to blur the issue, a party expressing deep sympathy with the social programme of the liberal party³ in an election which turned out to be a liberal landslide, must be counted

1. T.W.Russell in Belfast, 18 Dec.1905 (W.F.J., 23 Dec.1905).

2. <u>East Down:</u>	(by-election, Feb.1902)	(General election,1906)
	J.Jood (Russellite) 3576	J.Craig (U.) 4011
	Col.Wallace (U.) 3429	J.Wood (Russellite) 3341
<u>N.Fermanagh:</u>	(by-election, March 1903)	(general election 1906)
	E.Mitchell (Russellite) 2407	G.Fetherstonhaugh (U.) 2419
	J.Craig (U.) 2255	E.Mitchell (Russellite)2331

3. Russell's speech in Belfast, op.cit.

a substantial blow to the opponents of conservatism in Ulster.

The traditional balance of Irish politics was not upset in 1906: only four 'moderates' were elected to stand between the 82 nationalists and 17 unionists.¹ But in Great Britain a radical change had taken place. The previously dominant unionist party was returned as little more than a rump: 157 against the 513-strong coalition which the liberals might expect to command on most issues. As a bargaining-counter with the government, the votes of the nationalist members were now worthless. But although a liberal victory had been universally predicted, observers had been less sure that it would be independent of the Irish. Joseph Chamberlain had been prepared to bet Asquith (admittedly only to the extent of sixpence) that this independence would not be won,² and Haldane had earlier confessed to Rosebery his worry that 'a narrow majority would be a great curse'.³ The London correspondent of the Freeman expressed 'bewilderment' at the results of the first day of polling, and even then calculated that the unionists would hold 200 seats.⁴ For the nationalists the extent

-
1. The moderates were Dodd (Lib.), Russell (joined Libs after the election), Glendinning (Lib.and unionist), Sloan (Ind.unionist).
 2. J.Chamberlain to Margot Asquith, 23 Jan.1906 (cited in M.Asquith, Autobiography (Penguin edition, London,1936),ii.65-66).
 3. Haldane to Rosebery, 19 Dec. 1905 (Haldane papers,N.L.S.Ms.5906 f.282).
 4. W.F.J., 20 Jan.1906.

of the victory was something of a shock, especially when they thought of it as a nonconformist victory, and for some weeks their leaders were subjected to heavy criticism, especially from the Irish hierarchy and a portion of the Irish community in Britain, for making a material contribution to its size. This they could meet only with the valid, but uninspiring, argument that 'any attempt to minimise the result would merely have been a futile provocation to a victorious army. The results at Leith and Midlothian were but typical of what would have occurred all over the country'¹.

In addition, the claim was made that the rank-and-file of the Liberal party itself was now more favourable to home rule: 'The Roseberyites have been completely routed', exulted the Freeman's² Scottish correspondent, and the veteran radical Labouchere expressed to Dilke his own feeling that grass-roots liberals were not now 'against some sort of self-government in Ireland, with representation'³. But Herbert Gladstone, for once in his life the architect of victory, had analysed the results more methodically, and reported to C.B. of a great preponderance of 'centre liberals': 'there is no sign of any violent

1. W.F.J., 17 Feb.1906. Similar arguments were put forward by Redmond, at Manchester on 18 Mar.1906 (W.F.J., 24 Mar.1906), and by Davitt, in a letter in the Freeman's Journal, 22 Jan.1906.
2. W.F.J., 3 Feb.1906.
3. Labouchere to Dilke, 11 Jan. [1906] (Dilke papers, B.M.Add.Ms.43892 f.245).

forward movement of opinion'.¹ A struggle between imperialist and radical elements had been going on within the liberal party since 1886, and had been very much intensified by the Boer war, and observers on the left, both nationalists and labour men, expected this struggle to be carried to a conclusion.² But parties in power have a far greater incentive to avoid disruption, and a major characteristic of the liberal government of 1906-10 was the way in which these old disputes were driven firmly underground. The unspoken agreement between liberals to impose a moratorium on Irish home rule was one aspect of this solidarity. But if the predictions of the Freeman as to the government's immediate future were wishful thinking only, its longer-term prognostications were nothing short of portentous:

If the liberal party is at the climax of its power, it is also at the crisis of its existence. It is face to face with the situation which the liberal parties all over Europe failed to deal with, and accordingly failed for ever. The rise of the independent labour party is a portent; and it depends wholly on the use that the present liberal government makes of its power, whether the new forces are to array themselves in permanent opposition to liberalism....or whether the alliance cemented in many constituencies at the recent election is to endure. What is true of the British labour party is true of the Irish National party. In no domain of the government are the inducements so strong towards a

-
1. H. Gladstone to C.B., 21 Jan.1906 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41217 f.294).
 2. Hardie to Redmond, 26 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers); also see W.F.J., 3rd Feb.1906.

policy of make-believe and marking-time.....But for these very reasons boldness and courage are essential in the Irish administration that seeks the conciliation of the Irish people. And failure will hardly be less disastrous to liberalism than failure to respond to the hopes of the British democrat.

1

1. W.F.J., 3 Feb.1906.

CHAPTER II. SOME PROBLEMS OF CONCILIATION, 1906.

1. Government 'according to Irish ideas'.

The new government's most immediate reason for adopting a conciliatory attitude towards the Irish party at the end of 1905 was its desire to secure the Irish vote at the general election. But there was also another, less ephemeral, reason. The liberals needed peace in Ireland in order to proceed unhampered with their programme of social reform in Britain, and during the years of unionist government they had made very plain their opposition to the use of coercion.¹ Yet they knew from experience that if they were to govern Ireland under the ordinary law, they required the co-operation of the Irish party. Furthermore, Dillon told Bryce, if the country was governed 'according to Irish ideas' it would be possible for the Irish party 'to give the government time to mature their proposals for reforming the system of Irish government and to approach the consideration of those proposals in a friendly and tolerant spirit'.²

-
1. Arthur Balfour's criminal law and prosecution act of 1887 (the 'crimes act') was still on the statute book, and might be applied instantly in any Irish county proclaimed by the executive government. Ten counties, in the south and west, were under proclamation at the time of the unionist government's resignation in 1905.
 2. Dillon to Bryce, 19 Dec. 1905, forwarded by Bryce to the prime minister (Campbell-Bannerman papers, B.M.Add.Ms.41211 f.333).

This meant in practice that the Irish leaders wanted the sympathetic ear of the chief secretary on questions of appointments and administration. Before he had even appointed his cabinet the new prime minister was informed by Redmond that some of the names mentioned in the press in connection with the legal posts in the Irish government 'would undoubtedly give the impression that the old system was to be continued under the new government and that no change in the spirit of administration could be looked for'.¹ Bryce himself had embraced the 'gradualist' standpoint on home rule rather too eagerly to make his choice a popular one in Irish circles, but his background at least was impeccably Gladstonian. The appointment of Sir Samuel Walker as lord chancellor was even less acceptable. His was one of the names Redmond had warned Campbell-Bannerman against, and Dillon regarded him as a 'whig'.² The law officers, R.R.Cherry and Redmond Barry, both Irishmen, were regarded as 'a great improvement on the previous appointments of the government'.³ The attorney-general, Cherry, especially, was a convinced home ruler who would in fact have been pleased to enter parliament as a nationalist in 1904 had this been compatible with his legal ambitions.⁴ His fervour would in no way be reduced by his absolute dependence on the Irish vote for the retention of his marginal seat at Liverpool Exchange.

1. Redmond to Campbell-Bannerman, 5 Dec.1905 (C.B.papers,Add.Ms.41238 f.12).

2. Dillon to Bryce, 19 Dec.1905, op.cit.

3. Dillon to Redmond, 21 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).

4. Cherry to Redmond, various letters between June and August 1904
(Redmond papers).

The most delicate appointment of all was that of Sir Horace Plunkett at the department of agriculture and technical instruction (D.A.T.I.). He had been largely instrumental in the creation of that department, had been appointed its first vice-president, with a seat in parliament, in 1899, and had been retained in office by the unionist government after he had lost that seat. In 1904 he had published a highly controversial book, in which he had suggested that the honest endeavours of people like himself to improve the condition of Ireland were largely impeded by the catholic church and the pernicious influence of 'politics'.¹ This did not endear him to nationalist Ireland, but in some quarters hostility to him was already deeply ingrained. John Dillon especially was keen to see his departure from public life, and had regarded his 'unpolitical' pose as humbug ever since Plunkett had become a unionist M.P., in the 1890s.

When the unionist government resigned in December 1905 Plunkett immediately made preparations for departure, even to the extent² of making private arrangements with T.W.Russell for the succession.

-
1. H.Plunkett, Ireland in the new century (London 1904). A reply to Plunkett was made by Rev M.O'Riordan, Catholicity and progress in Ireland (London, 1905).
 2. Plunkett to MacDonnell, 15 Dec.1905, forwarded by MacDonnell to Bryce (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11011).

But Bryce and Lord Aberdeen, the new viceroy, were persuaded by MacDonnell 'that there was nobody else in Ireland fit to take up the work', and so Plunkett was persuaded to stay on until such time as ¹ the government had formulated their wider reforms of Irish government. The matter was not so easily settled however. The Freeman's Journal ² quickly denounced the retention in office of a unionist. This attitude was attributed by the assistant under secretary, Sir James Dougherty, to machinations on the part of an embittered Russell, but MacDonnell told Bryce that nationalist opposition to Plunkett was very deep-rooted: they objected on principle to the retention of a unionist in a political office in Ireland; they objected to Plunkett especially, on account of the way the department had been administered; they wished to see Russell in the post, 'as he has helped to fight their battles'; and they felt that Bryce would need a colleague in the commons to meet attacks from the Ulster unionists - 'you would, they think, have in Russell an assistant who would pay back Carson, Campbell, Saunderson, and co. in their own coin'. The nationalists in fact saw no reason why Russell could not be appointed on a temporary basis. ³ But as it

-
1. Bryce to Campbell-Bannerman, 15 Dec.1905 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41211 f.322)
 2. N.F.J., 16 Dec.1905.
 3. MacDonnell to Bryce, n.d. but must be on or about 17 Dec.1905 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11011).

turned out, their protest was not carried to a conclusion. The government's promise that Plunkett would only be retained pending reorganisation seemed to hint that they meant business in the matter of governmental reform, whilst the general election and the challenge of O'Brien and Healy, left the nationalists with little time to devote to a matter which only made plain their lack of influence in the councils of the liberal party. Dillon thought that the Irish party should be reasonable, and insist only on the removal of Plunkett 'at an early date'¹.

The complete motive for the retention of Plunkett is not clear. Certainly there is some truth in the obvious point: that Plunkett to a great extent was the department of agriculture, that in the contemplation of any changes his advice would be invaluable, and that some sort of revision or rationalisation of D.A.T.I. would have to be made, with or without a complete scheme of governmental reform. But more devious bureaucratic factors were also involved. The nationalist bishop of Ross observed to T.P.Gill that although he could see objections to Plunkett's retention, he would resist strenuously any attempt by the government to go back on the D.A.T.I. act and put the department in the same position as the other Irish boards, 'bossed by the Irish government'².

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 29 Dec.1905 (Redmond papers).
 2. Bishop Kelly of Ross to T.P.Gill, 17 Dec.1905 (Gill papers, N.L.I.). Gill was secretary, i.e. permanent head, of the D.A.T.I.

MacDonnell on the other hand was telling Bryce at the same time that there was much dissatisfaction with the administration of the department and that in the past he had arranged with Wyndham for all D.A.T.I. correspondence to be forwarded to the Castle, so that he (MacDonnell) might open it and 'have an opportunity of noting my views without coming into prominence'¹. MacDonnell's request, at this time, that Gill be required to comply with this arrangement, does not fully bear out his contention that the procedure was already well-established. It is certainly true that although he had no great admiration for Plunkett, MacDonnell was strongly opposed to T.W.Russell.² His suggestion to Bryce that Plunkett be retained may have been in part motivated by a desire to exclude Russell. Furthermore, by keeping the post out of the hands of an M.P., MacDonnell as the chief secretary's representative, would himself be able to keep a firm grip on D.A.T.I. affairs.³

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 23 Dec.1905 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11011).
 2. Dillon wrote to his wife on 3 May 1907: 'Just as we had finished our interview with Birrell the door opened and in walked A.McD. I am sure he is staying here [in London] partly to knife Russell'. (Dillon papers. I am grateful to Professor F.S.L.Lyons for showing me this letter).
 3. Plunkett remained in office until the commission of enquiry into the affairs of the D.A.T.I. submitted its report. Then, in April 1907, the nationalists mounted a new campaign for his removal, and were this time successful. By this time Augustine Birrell had become chief secretary. Plunkett thought that the Irish party had 'put a gun at Birrell's head and told him my removal was a sine qua non of further Irish support for the government'(Plunkett to Bryce, 20 Apr.1907, Bryce papers,N.L.I.Ms. 11015).

In other matters connected with the administration, the government were not anxious to press forward too rapidly. John O'Donnell M.P., who had been imprisoned under the crimes act, was released before the election,¹ but less auspicious personages were left to complete their sentences, or detained until after the election.² MacDonnell urged Redmond not to press the government too hard, and told Bryce:

These things would not gain us a single vote in Ireland, while they might lose us many in England. They will all be dealt with before parliament meets, but better not raise them before the elections are over. Redmond agrees.

3

But immediately after the election the Irish leaders began to press for a repeal of the crimes act altogether. Withdrawal of the proclamations, and intimations that the act would not be used by the liberals, were not enough for them. If they were to get no amending land bill, they had to extract some other gesture from the government for Irish consumption. After an early meeting with Bryce Redmond was hopeful,⁴ but the chief secretary's attitude then seemed to undergo a change.

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 8 Jan.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012)
 2. D.Gwynn, Life of John Redmond (London,1932), p.122.
 3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 2 Jan.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).
 4. Gwynn, Life of Redmond, p.121.

T.P.O'Connor thought that cabinet timidity was at the root of the problem: he lobbied six ministers, and reported to Bryce that 'if you renew the struggle today, you may succeed'¹. Redmond even gave a broad hint that the repeal bill need not be carried through, it being of 'enormous importance' simply that an announcement of intention be made by the government, and perhaps a second reading carried.²

Bryce meanwhile was receiving very different advice from his chief adviser, MacDonnell. On February 2 the under secretary sent him a long statement of the case against repealing the act for the time being. It would, MacDonnell thought, 'disgust' many 'well-meaning unionists' who were otherwise well-disposed towards the new regime. The nationalists would not thank Bryce for passing repeal through the commons if it was to fail in the lords (here, as we have just seen, MacDonnell was wildly misinformed) whilst it was far from being the best ground to choose for a struggle with the lords over Ireland. Furthermore, MacDonnell made plain his conviction that negotiation with the Irish leaders should be conducted on the basis of the strict bargain and the quid pro quo rather than on the basis (which Birrell was later to establish) of mutual confidence and co-operation against the 'carrion crows' of Ulster.

1. T.P.O'Connor to Bryce 16 Feb.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012). The six ministers were Campbell-Bannerman, Morley, Lloyd George, Birrell, Burns, and Ripon.

2. Redmond to Bryce, 15 Feb.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).

MacDonnell wrote, February 2:

You may well say we could never use the act. Perhaps: but the existence of the act on the statute book without a doubt has a sedative effect. We may indeed hope that when your Irish proposals are matured you may dispense with such an act; but till then I would not entirely disarm. The nationalist party instead of disarming are strengthening their leagues everywhere. The proposed mention of your intentions and hopes in the king's speech will have more effect in Ireland than the repeal of the coercion act. No doubt Redmond would like to be in a position to say 'see what we have got before we have even taken our seats in the new parliament; this is only an example of what is to come'. In my humble opinion prudence and policy suggest that all should not be given away at the start.

1

Finally, on February 15, Bryce told Redmond that it had not been possible to include a promise to repeal the crimes act in the address, though some concession was made to nationalist feeling by a declaration that the government of the country would be carried on 'in reliance on the
²
 ordinary law'.

Over the wording of the speech also, MacDonnell's advice was in opposition to the wishes of the Irish leaders. At the end of January Redmond had asked for a statement to the effect that, pending reform, government would be carried out 'in accordance with Irish ideas', and this form of words was included by Bryce in an early draft.³ But

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 2 Feb.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).
 2. Bryce to Redmond, 15 Feb.1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. Draft paragraph for the king's speech, in Bryce's hand, n.d. (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

MacDonnell telegraphed Bryce on February 10 to the effect that Lord Dudley, the unionist ex-vice-roy, alleged author of the phrase, had indeed used it in 1903, but the occasion had been a private one, and not an official utterance. MacDonnell thought that 'your employment of this or similar phrase will lead [to] bitter criticism and embarrass [the] government'. He preferred a more guarded assurance: that the Irish administration would be 'animated by a sympathetic and conciliatory spirit'. He 'did not believe for a moment' that the exclusion of the 'dangerous words' would cause the Irish party to raise a hostile debate on the address, but if Bryce adhered to the other wording he would have given an effective pledge to the nationalists where none had previously existed, as well as exposed himself to an awkward line of questioning from the Ulstermen.¹ Once again an effective compromise was struck, retaining the idea behind the phrase, but qualifying it more carefully. Irish government was to be carried on 'so far as existing circumstances permit, in a spirit regardful of the wishes and sentiments of the Irish people'.²

Ultimately the Irish leaders did not propose any amendment to the address, and both Redmond and Dillon spoke on a note of cautious

1. MacDonnell to Bryce (telegram), 10 Feb.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms.11012).

2. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series vol.152, cols.2-3.

optimism.¹ Nonetheless, MacDonnell erred in telling Bryce that 'if we could get a peep into the inner councils of the [Irish] party - we should find it in great jubilation': Dillon, especially, was annoyed by the government's attitude at the beginning of session, and within a few weeks was telling Redmond that they were 'very weak and squeezable'.² Before the year was out Redmond was writing to Edward Blake that 'the Irish administration of Mr Bryce is lamentable in the extreme'.³

But for the time being questions of public order, at any rate seemed unlikely to cause the liberal government much trouble. Their past record meant that they possessed a considerable residue of goodwill which not even the stilted nature of their declarations on the subject of home rule had reduced very much. They offered hope, and on that basis the Irish leaders were able to give them co-operation. There was admittedly considerable dissatisfaction in Connaught at the non-working of the land act, but the agitation against the graziers was being conducted with 'commendable restraint'.⁴ The government were

-
1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series vol. 152, cols. 180-193, 433-439.
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 14 Feb. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms. 11012); Dillon to Redmond, 31 Mar. 1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. Redmond to Edward Blake, 13 Nov. 1906 (Redmond papers).
 4. Monthly R.I.C. reports (769/S), report of the inspector-general, April 1906 (Dublin, S.P.O.).

being given a chance. Sir Neville Chamberlain, inspector-general of the R.I.C., reported that 'for the present it would appear that the more moderate nationalists who support the parliamentary party do not wish to embarrass the government by resistance to the administration of the law'¹. But Chamberlain was sceptical about this lull, and saw two forces which might exercise powerful influences in another direction: in agrarian matters he feared that central control would not be very effectual, for 'in certain localities the general policy is unable to restrain those who are locally in power, and who do not wish for peace'²; whilst at the central level he thought that sinn fein, though unlikely to take over the national movement, might influence U.I.L. policy, for 'the more moderate leaders in Ireland have never hitherto been able to with impunity to ignore the opinions of extreme men'. Against this last observation MacDonnell commented tartly that 'the reason is that repression and prosecutions have changed movements of essential unimportance, if left alone, into martyrs' causes'³.

Chamberlain, of course, may have felt it necessary to be more alarmist than the situation merited, now that a liberal government was in power. Unionist-style administration, with a more clear-cut

1. Ibid., Feb.1906 (655/S).

2. Ibid., Mar.1906 (713/S).

3. Ibid., Feb.1906 (655/S).

emphasis on the maintenance of order and the defence of property, was always simpler for the police to execute. Thus there tended to be a slight slant in Chamberlain's reports, but one which MacDonnell and Dougherty were not slow to detect. MacDonnell wrote to Bryce on 23 December 1905:

I am sending you the police report for last month. It shows the country to be in a perfectly quiet condition.....The police are in the habit of designating as 'outrages' offences of a comparatively trivial kind, and thus prejudicing their case. The question of nomenclature will be looked into.

1

One result of this policy had been the 'monstrous' abandonment by Walter Long's administration of Wyndham's promise to effect reductions in the R.I.C., which MacDonnell now hoped it would be possible to
2
implement.

But the radical intentions of the new government, and the harmonious relationship it hoped thereby to create with the nationalists, rapidly dwindled away so far as day to day administration was concerned. One reason was MacDonnell's anxiety lest fears be aroused among conservative elements in Irish society which might prejudice the chances

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 23 Dec.1905 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11011).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 27 Dec.1905 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11011).

of his devolution scheme. At the time of the Belfast police enquiry in May 1906 he told Bryce 'there is danger at present in disturbing the police more than is absolutely needed. We ought not to "take on" any avoidable difficulty till the big scheme is brought to port'¹. This attitude, which manifested itself also in an attempt to appoint 'moderate' or uncommitted men to posts on the land commission and places on the commission of enquiry into Trinity College, instead of meeting the requests of the Irish leaders,² was soon reflected by Bryce in his parliamentary relationship with the nationalists. As Redmond and Dillon found their advice repeatedly rejected, they came to look on Bryce as being 'entirely under the domination of our friend Sir Antony [MacDonnell]',³ whom they regarded with some justification as being an enemy of their party. Their confidence in Bryce was rapidly sapped, and they felt obliged to put pressure on him more often than they might otherwise have considered necessary.

An incident in connection with a proposed meeting of the U.I.L. at Thomastown, Kilkenny at Easter 1906, demonstrates the lack of co-operation and trust, as well as the awkward position of an administration

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 20 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
 2. See infra, chapters 4 and 5.
 3. Redmond to Blake, 13 Nov.1906 (Redmond papers).

which attempted to steer an independent line in Ireland. At the end of March a placard appeared in Thomastown calling a meeting to protest against a 'grabber' - its tone was openly intimidatory, and the meeting was to be held in the vicinity of the man's farm.¹

MacDonnell thought the placard 'an open challenge to the government' and asked Bryce to prohibit the meeting, though Cherry thought the meeting should be allowed to proceed - an opinion which 'amazed' the under secretary.² Bryce was prepared to accept MacDonnell's recommendation, until Redmond appealed to the prime minister, who advised Bryce to seek some sort of compromise, especially in view of the co-operation the government were expecting from the Irish over the forthcoming education bill.³ This wish was communicated to MacDonnell, who concurred, but arranged to pack 100 extra police into Thomastown, with orders to prevent trouble and keep the demonstration away from the evicted farm.

The meeting took place on April 8 amidst some disorder, and the county inspector issued a strong warning that the meeting should be kept on general lines and no attempt made to direct attention towards the local 'grabber'. P. Meagher and J.O'Mara M.P.s spoke, severely criticising

-
1. 'Grabber' was U.I.L. parlance for a tenant who took over an evicted farm. The nearest modern equivalent would be a blackleg. See Ch.4, section 2.
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 31 Mar. and 3 Apr.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
 3. Campbell-Bannerman to Bryce, 7 Apr.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms 11012).

Bryce's administration of the country. Dillon, who was in Dublin, became extremely alarmed about the way the affair had been handled by the government, seeing in it a 'recurrence of the old policy of 1890' when a similar warning notice had been served on him by a policeman at Swinford.¹ He thought Redmond ought to make some protest about it in London. Redmond's reply throws much light on the whole episode, and reveals that it was all the result of misunderstanding rooted in mistrust. That this should have happened so soon after the liberals took office was symptomatic of the failure of Bryce to win the confidence of the Irish leaders. Redmond wrote:

The meeting was first called by a placard of a most reprehensible and idiotic character, and I got O'Mara and Meagher to stop the meeting, not only on account of the placard but because Bryce informed them that he was getting the land commission to send down a man specially to enquire into the case of the evicted tenant. Subsequently the placard was repudiated by the parish priest and others, and the meeting was called for last Sunday. Bryce meantime informed O'Mara that after enquiry he found he could do nothing in the matter of the evicted tenant for the present. Under these circumstances I advised O'Mara and Meagher to attend the meeting and I very seriously warned Bryce of what the consequences would be if he suppressed the meeting. This he apparently was quite determined to do, and no doubt would have done it were it not that the facts came to the knowledge of Bannerman. What he did do was of course exceedingly stupid, but I feel that if we raise the question in debate, we will be answered by the original placard, which was of an entirely indefensible character.

2

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 9 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond to Dillon, 10 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).

As we have seen, Bryce's part in this episode was in fact negligible, being very much that of a shuttlecock between the prime minister, MacDonnell, and the Irish leaders. But Redmond's letter illustrates the lack of confidence in him, as compared with C.B., as well as the failure of the police on the spot to strike the note which the executive government required of them.

This inability of the political government to control the bureaucratic machine is illustrated in other incidents also. In May 1906 a man was fined in Dublin for not having his name correctly displayed on his cart: it was written in Gaelic. MacDonnell had to explain to Bryce that this had been allowed to happen because the orders issued to the R.I.C. requiring reference to the chief secretary's office before a prosecution could be instituted had not been issued to the D.M.P. at the same time.¹ About the same time, an incident in Belfast necessitated an enquiry into the police force there. The incident was a minor one, but MacDonnell's comments to his chief throw further light on the problems of administering Ireland. Belfast did not provide its own police force because 'if Belfast like Dublin raised its police it would raise an Orange police who would not be impartial'.²

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 10 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 20 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

Even so, he explained in another letter, the police situation in Belfast was far from ideal:

Before Sir Neville Chamberlain's appointment as inspector-general, the policy was for the police of Belfast to keep aloof from the corporation, who are an orange body; but since Chamberlain came, there had not been that aloofness; because the I.G. in his visits of inspection to Belfast has striven to bring the corporation and the police into touch. This close touch, I gathered, has acted prejudicially on the police force; which is more partisan than it has previously been.....I am sure Chamberlain had none but the best intentions.

1

These examples demonstrate the problems of a liberal government in implementing its chosen policies, but in some cases the policy itself proved difficult to determine. In August 1906 a matter sprang up which was to recur again and again during the following decade. It was a problem which posed itself especially to liberal governments in Ireland, and the 1916 Rising is a dramatic demonstration of their failure to solve it. MacDonnell stated the dilemma in a letter to Bryce on 11 August 1906:

There is a good deal of activity in circulating anti-recruiting literature: a man was caught red-handed What shall we do with the blackguard - Prosecute, and give the leaflet wide publicity: or ignore the business: and encourage such fellows while demoralising the police?

2

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 17 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 11 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms.11013).

Again the liberals found themselves up against the 'system' in Ireland. Bryce was undecided about the question - 'the worst of it is that some foolish judge might give an absurdly severe sentence'¹. The case was ultimately ignored, but MacDonnell, who perceived more clearly than Bryce that 'wait and see' was not applicable in this matter, and that an organised campaign necessitated an organised policy, did not want the matter to rest there. He wrote again a few days later about the general question of seditious pamphlets:

We really must lay down a settled policy...I fancy they are to be found in every county. The chief occasions of circulation seem to be at the gatherings of the G.A.A. and the Gaelic League. Say what Douglas Hyde may, the G.L. Meetings are showing political activity.....It occurs to me that persons caught flagrante delicto may be held to bail for good behaviour by an R.M. under the act of Edward III, and I have referred this point to the law officers. If it is a good point we shall be saved the prosecutions for sedition; and all the uncertainty of trial by jury, and saved from the odium of heavy sentences, and no man need to to jail if he gives bail or sureties. I hope the law officers will help on this: it seems ~~our~~ only refuge from a demoralising attitude and one which must lay you open to great attack in the House.

2

Barry thought the suggestion a good one, but once again Cherry differed from the under secretary: he doubted the legality of the move, and thought

-
1. Bryce to MacDonnell, 13 Aug.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.c.350 f.27).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 25 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

it a 'weak course' to adopt. He thought the pamphlets had no effect, and that a prosecution was what the circulators were really after.

'The government can afford to treat the whole matter with contempt and I think ought to do so'.¹ Despite MacDonnell's continued protests about the demoralising effect on the police of this policy, protests with which Bryce sympathised, the matter was dropped at the wish of the cabinet.² Anti-recruiting activity was still accorded a special paragraph in the monthly police reports, though on November 3 Bryce noted on the file that the secretary of state for war (aldane) advised that there had been no drop in recruiting figures for Ireland and would deprecate prosecutions against those who distributed pamphlets.³

This permissive attitude towards the 'disloyal' element in Irish political life was in the long run a terrible failure. But the decision to omit the peace preservation (Ireland) act, commonly known as the arms act, from the expiring laws continuance bill in 1906 was more immediately deleterious. The nationalists had been campaigning

-
1. Typed memorandum of the law officers' opinions, 22 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11013).
 2. Interview with John Redmond by W.T.Stead, for Review of Reviews, Feb.1907 (cutting in Redmond papers).
 3. Minute by the chief secretary on the Monthly R.I.C.report, Sept.1906 (Dublin,S.P.O.).

for the act's termination for many years, and now felt in a position to make a firm demand: firstly because it was simply a matter of omission, and would not require a time-consuming repeal bill, as would be the case with the crimes act; and secondly because the liberals had supported that demand every year when in opposition.¹ But the demand put the new government in a difficult position: it was one thing to fight unionist opposition to ameliorative social legislation in Ireland, but quite another to do battle over the removal of one of the main links of the law and order machine. Redmond left Bryce in no doubt as to why he was making such an embarrassing demand. The Irish party had not pressed John Morley on the matter in 1892:

....our reason being that the government of the day were engaged in an all-absorbing effort to pass a measure of home rule. we feel however that under the circumstances which at present exist, the present government is bound, as I have already pressed upon you, to repeal the crimes act at the earliest opportunity and to allow the arms act to lapse.

2

MacDonnell meanwhile sought the opinion of Sir Neville Chamberlain, who admitted that the act did not prevent a 'moonlighter' from obtaining a gun with which to commit his outrage, but was sure that it made it more difficult and dangerous for persons generally 'disposed

-
1. Six members of the 1906 cabinet, as well as several junior ministers, had recorded their votes against it at one time or another since 1900. See typed list of 'Liberal ministers voting against the arms act', dated 1905 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond to Bryce, 28 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

towards criminal activity' to obtain weapons, and therefore had a beneficial effect. He felt that the question at stake was:

Whether the present state of the country, and the prospects in the immediate future are such as would justify the executive in depriving itself altogether of the power to impose restrictions on the importation and possession of arms in portions of Ireland.

The act gave power to impose the arms ban on counties individually (all but five counties being under it in 1906), and Chamberlain felt that it would be reasonable to remove the ban on 13 counties, mainly in the east and midlands, but added 'I must however record my strong¹ protest against a total abandonment of the act'.

At the end of November the matter was submitted to the cabinet, in the form of a paper by Bryce which put both points of view. In favour of dropping the act was the fact that the nationalists were pressing for it, that many members of the government had voted against it in the past, that it offered little effective security against crime, and that it was humiliating for the Irish people. On the other hand it might be said that withdrawal might increase the difficulties of the police in certain troubled areas, and might cause general alarm 'on the part of police and officials' as to what sort of measure the Irish council bill would be.

1. Memorandum from Sir Neville Chamberlain to MacDonnell, 22 Aug.1906. (Dublin, S.P.O., C.S.O. 28703).

Bryce put forward compromise suggestions along the lines of Chamberlain's minute, but did not think they would gain the support of the Irish party.¹ On December 7 the cabinet decided to drop the act. Bryce explained to Redmond that:

their decision was taken on the assurance which you gave to the P.M. and myself that you would give your support to a bill for regulating the sale and use of pistols; and, I need hardly add, in the confidence that you and your colleagues will exert all your influence to prevent the dropping of the act from having any unfortunate consequences in the abuse of the power of carrying fire-arms.

2

But this proposed follow-up measure did not appear, nor was the pistols act extended to Ireland, though Redmond fulfilled his part of the bargain in a conciliatory speech at Waterford on 1 February 1907.³ When the cabinet discussed the matter again, in December 1908, Churchill, characteristically, noted in the margin of his copy of the cabinet paper that the dropping of the act was 'the most gratuitously stupid thing that old fool Bryce ever did'.⁴ But Churchill had not been in the cabinet in 1906, and did not know that Bryce had in fact opposed the dropping of the act in cabinet, but had been overruled. Bryce told Fitzmaurice:

As respects the arms act I am now free to tell you, since you are in the cabinet, that I was not, as you suppose,

1. 'The Irish arms act', cabinet papers by Bryce, 26 Nov. 1906 (Cab. 37/85/90).
2. Bryce to Redmond, 8 Dec. 1906 (Redmond papers).
3. Redmond at Waterford, 1 Feb. 1907 (Times, 2 Feb. 1907).
4. 'Firing outrages in Ireland', cabinet paper by Birrell, 7 Dec. 1908 (Cab. 37/96/162).

in favour of dropping that act. On the contrary, I advised the cabinet against it. But I had not a single supporter: all were for dropping: and it is no doubt probable that we could not have carried its retention against the Irish, the labour men, and our own radicals, except by beating up the Tories to support us. You know how much a liberal ministry hates to do that.

1

If Churchill's apportionment of blame was unfair, his general assessment of the decision was very near the mark, as it illustrated by the statistics put before the cabinet in December 1908:

2

Offences involving firearms in Ireland:

1878	30	(including 10 agrarian cases)
1881	272	(210)
1898	85	(45)
1904	33	(13)
1905	29	(11)
1906	39	(12)
1907	87	(49)
To 31 Oct. 1908	113	(71)

The years 1907-8 also witnessed a general increase in unrest of all kinds, as a result of impatience at the government's reluctance to amend the land act and of disappointment with the Irish council bill. But there

-
1. Bryce to Lord E. Fitzmaurice, 30 Nov. 1908 (cited in H.A.L. Fisher, Life of Viscount Bryce (London 1927) p.357). Independent confirmation of Bryce's attitude on this matter is provided by Redmond's interview with W.T. Stead for Review of Reviews, Feb. 1907 (cutting in Redmond papers).
 2. These figures are taken from a table given in 'Firing outrages in Ireland' a cabinet paper by Birrell, 7 Dec. 1908 (Cab.37396/162). They include firing at the person, and firing into dwellings, but exclude shots fired outside dwellings, etc., for the purpose of intimidation only.

can be little doubt that the problems of maintaining order were increased by the absence of restriction on the carrying of arms. Sir Neville Chamberlain reported as 'alarming increase' in the sale of revolvers in Clare and Galway, the two most disturbed counties, and also in Sligo, Tipperary, Meath, and Limerick. Birmingham manufacturers were reported to be advertising cheap pistols in local newspapers at a shilling per week on the instalment plan.¹ Even non-agrarian shooting offences had increased from an average of 20 per year in the period 1897-1906 to 38 in 1907 and 50 in 1908.² Birrell admitted privately to his cabinet colleagues that 'there can be no doubt that the absence of restrictions as to firearms has been an important factor in bringing about the increase in outrages'.³ In a lords' debate in March 1909, Lord Crewe later told Herbert Gladstone, 'our unfortunate dropping of the peace preservation act [i.e. the arms act] naturally came in for comment'.⁴ But though Crewe stated on that occasion that the matter was under serious consideration by the government, still nothing was done.⁵

1. Ibid.

2. 'The state of Ireland', cabinet paper by Birrell, 15 Feb.1909 (Cab. 37/98/31).

3. 'Firing outrages in Ireland'. op.cit.

4. Crewe to H.Gladstone, 6 Aug.1909 (H.Gladstone papers, B.M.Add.Ms.45996 f.22).

5. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 5 series vol.1 col.251.

2. The problem of the labourers.

The attempts of Bryce and MacDonnell to steer the Irish administrative machine along a course which was both progressive and independent of the major political forces in Ireland precipitated them, and to some extent their successors, into the yawning chasm that separated the two stools of nationalism and unionism. But this failure was to an extent redressed by successes in the field of ameliorative legislation. It was no mean triumph in the busy first session of a parliament for the Irish office to achieve the passage of two important sectional measures, a labourers' bill and a town tenants' bill, though the forces which helped them onto the statute book were many and various.

In a country such as Ireland, where the land was both poor and scarce and worked almost entirely by tenant farmers and peasant proprietors, where families were large and chances of employment in the cities slight, the class of agricultural labourers was a difficult one to define. The euphemisms 'landless man' and 'younger son' described a large proportion of the labouring class, and indicate how the size of that class bore no relation to the amount of employment available: if an adult man in the Irish countryside had no land, no capital, and no shop, coupled with a minimal amount of education and initiative, then he was, faute de mieux, a 'labourer', with little chance of escaping from abject

poverty.¹ But the problem varied in both nature and intensity. In east Ulster and in most of Leinster it was least oppressive: the land was generally rather better, access to markets was easier, and the cities of Belfast and Dublin were near at hand to drain off surplus labour. In Connaught and parts of west Ulster conditions were worst of all. But so poor was the land and its population that it could scarcely support a wage-earning class at all: nearly every man was a 'farmer',² for that occupation at least provided a home and subsistence. There being no 'employment', the demand of those who did not leave was for land. It was in some ways a pathetic demand and was certainly, in view of the numbers, a hopeless demand,³ but it was a demand which, at least for the time being, the United Irish League could cater for: a demand for the sale of the 'ranches'.⁴

-
1. The 1903 act defined a labourer as 'any person other than a domestic or menial servant, working for hire in a rural district, whose wages do not exceed 2/6d per day' (Irishland act, 1903, ch.93. Public general acts, 3.Edw.VII,p.223).
 2. In the house of commons on 28 June 1906, John O'Dowd, nationalist M.P. for Sligo South, said that 'in most of the districts of Connaught there was no set agricultural labouring community' (Parlt.Deb.H.C. 4 series, vol.159 col.1172)
 3. 'If every acre of land within the [congested district] board's area were available for redistribution, they would hardly suffice to give each existing landholder an economic holding' ((Royal commission on congestion in Ireland, under the chairmanship of Lord Dudley, final report 1908 [Cd. 4097], p.47).
 4. 'Ranches' was the popular name for the great areas of untenanted land retained by landlords, and usually let out to large graziers on eleven-month tenancies in order that they would not come under the 1881 land act.

It was predominantly in the south of Ireland that there existed a large rural community of genuine 'labourers' who may be fairly clearly differentiated from the small farmers. Probably by co-incidence, it was in Munster also that the nationalist leadership was presented with its greatest challenge from within the movement. The Irish local government act of 1898, which established county and district councils on the elective principle, gave increased political importance to labourers, and by the turn of the century there had been established in the south a Land and Labour Association, with J.J.O'Shee M.P., a Carrick-on-Suir solicitor, as secretary.¹ The main demands of this organisation were for the creation of council cottages and allotments, and for the replacement of the allegedly corrupt contract system by 'direct labour' on the roads.² In 1901 the organisation secured another representative in parliament, when D.D.Sheehan, a barrister and local journalist, was elected for Mid-Cork. Soon the Land and Labour Association wielded a considerable amount of political influence in county Cork, and to a lesser extent in counties Waterford, Tipperary, Limerick. Wherever branches existed they were accorded admission to U.I.L. local and national conventions on the

1. D.D. Sheehan, Ireland since Parnell (London, 1921) pp.174-6.

2. Ibid., pp.176-7.

same terms as other nationalist organisations. But in the late autumn of 1904 a delegation from the organisation approached William O'Brien, who had been at odds with the Irish party leadership for over a year, and invited him to adopt their cause.¹ O'Brien appeared on their platform at Macroom, on 10 December 1904, and formulated 'for the first time a precise legislative scheme on which they might take their stand as their charter'.² This move had not been universally popular however, and at the movement's 1905 convention a split appeared: J.J.O'Shee, who was loyal to the party leadership, in O'Brien's words, 'finding himself hopelessly outnumbered, seceded',³ and D.D.Sheehan assumed the leadership. The dispute does not seem to have been over policy in any way, but simply a division for and against O'Brien in his new independent role. O'Brien's claim as to numbers was probably correct: Cork was the basis of the association, and Cork was predominantly O'Brienite. A party supporter in North-East Cork told Redmond at the end of 1905 that the constituency was loyal, except for a 'proportion of the labourers, who still believe that he [O'Brien] is theirs, and the only man in Ireland to effect any good.'⁴

1. Ibid., p.179.

2. W.O'Brien, An olive branch in Ireland (London,1910) p.389.

3. Ibid., p.390.

4. Rev. M.B.Kennedy to Redmond, 25 Nov.1905 (Redmond papers).

For some years past local authorities had been empowered to borrow money against the rates for the erection of labourers' cottages, but there was no compulsion on them to act, the financial provisions were not attractive, and even the small amount of land necessary often proved difficult to acquire. George Wyndham had intended to include concessions on this question in his 1903 land act, but ultimately decided to leave it for separate treatment in 1904.¹ He was in fact deflected from this course by other issues, but when the liberals took office it was assumed by all nationalists that a fairly radical measure would soon be introduced. Consequently, what O'Brien and the party leaders were competing for was the prestige which the coming labourers' bill would confer on those who secured it. A measure was at once called for by the Irish party, and promised in the king's speech for 1906. Its inclusion was not disputed at all by the government, but its provisions were not discussed in any detail at that stage.²

But the activities of O'Brien made it essential for the Irish party that progress was made at once. At the beginning of the session George Crosbie who was rapidly becoming the party's liaison man in Cork, told Redmond that O'Brien was eager to meet the party leaders in order

-
1. Sheehan, Ireland since Parnell, p.178. Sheehan alleges that it was O'Brien who persuaded Wyndham to prepare a separate bill.
 2. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.152 cols.2-3.

to ensure a common programme for the whole session on such questions as the labourers' acts etc.¹ Redmond's reply was non-committal, but he replied to the many requests of Cornelius Buckley and others who requested him to confer with O'Brien that he was quite prepared to do so, but only if O'Brien would take the pledge and re-enter the party.² At this stage the nationalist leaders felt themselves to be in a strong position in Ireland, with a liberal government in office and promises of far-reaching reforms. They had no need to let O'Brien in for a share of the kudos as anything other than a member of the party. This approach by O'Brien, which was the first of many during the next couple of years, was in part a sign of weakness and in part a device which enabled him to say to the labourers that the Irish party leadership had 'refused to co-operate' with him in advancing their cause. This of course was a device which would be rendered useless by the passage of satisfactory legislation.

Strictly speaking O'Brien himself claimed no official connection with the Land and Labour Association, but his associate, Sheehan, was its chairman. Thus the procedure adopted by the Association (or that

-
1. G.Crosbie to Redmond, 27 Feb.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond to Cornelius Buckley, general secretary of the O'Brienite Land and Labour Association, 5 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).

section of it which supported O'Brien) during the early months of 1906 was to arrange mass rallies and invite O'Brien and the leaders of the party to attend, so that when the latter refused (as of course they would do, when asked to speak at meetings in support of political opponents) it would be possible to denounce the party as being unsympathetic to the labourers' cause. Dillon wrote to Redmond in considerable alarm on March 8, having heard that a labourers' meeting was shortly to be held at Croom, co.Limerick, at which Sheehan and William O'Brien were to be the main speakers. Redmond and Kendal O'Brien were 'rumoured' to be attending, and James O'Grady, labour M.P. for Leeds South, had accepted an invitation. It was clearly important for the leadership to clarify the situation and to prevent any attempt by O'Brien to gain the support of the British labour party, and Dillon was also concerned because the meeting represented the first attempt by O'Brien to gain a foothold in Limerick: 'O'Brien is evidently determined to carry on a most active campaign this spring - and now that Devlin is gone [to Australia] it will be much easier for him to do mischief.'¹

Dillon was anxious for Redmond to respond quickly to this challenge and urged him to address a meeting in Limerick, at Kiltteely, during the easter recess:

And I am convinced that arrangements should be made to start a new Land and Labour League immediately after

1. Dillon to Redmond, 8 Mar.1906,(two letters (Redmond papers)).

that meeting. To leave the labour movement in the hands of O'Brien, Sheehan and co. would be a fatal course - the Land and Labour League started after Kiltteely should claim to be the legitimate continuation of the original league. If this course be adopted Sheehan's league will be confined to portions of Cork and East Kerry..... If this is not done the whole of Munster will be gradually poisoned, and no seat will be safe in case of a vacancy, because we shall be obliged to give full representation to all the bogus branches Sheehan chooses to create.

1

Dillon suggested that Redmond talk over arrangements with J.J.O'Shee² and the members for Clare, Limerick and Tipperary. Redmond agreed to do this and to speak at Kiltteely, mainly on the subject of the labourers' bill, on April 22. He thought it best to announce the meeting as a joint U.I.L./Land and Labour demonstration:

ut I do not quite understand what you mean when you say that a new Land and Labour League should be started in connection with the Kiltteely meeting. I wish you would write me more fully.....As far as I understand the matter at present I certainly would not be willing to be the founder at the Kiltteely meeting of a new organisation.

3

Meanwhile Sheehan had caused a considerable amount of resentment in the party by the speech he had made at Croom, in which he⁴ implied that the party were doing nothing about the labourers' question.

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 25 Mar.1905 (Redmond papers).
 2. Ibid.
 3. Redmond to Dillon, 26 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers).
 4. Sheehan at Croom, co.Limerick, 18 Mar.1906 (W.F.J., 24 Mar.1906).

At least one M.P. called on Dillon to take official action against Sheehan, but Redmond preferred simply to reply to Sheehan in his Kilteely address, but otherwise to leave him be.¹ His idea at this stage was to refuse to give the publicity of expulsion to Sheehan and trust that facts themselves would give the lie to his allegations. He was wary also of playing the O'Brien game of multiplying organisations. Nonetheless others were taking action at a more down-to-earth level; Dillon reported on March 26, that, via William Landon M.P., he had sent £15 to Kilteely, to 'knock the bottom out of the Mallow campaign'.² But Dillon's next letter was rather more guarded in its language and more in tune with Redmond's own view:

I did not intend to suggest that you should take any part in the foundation of a new Land and Labour League. But I do most strongly feel that it would be most dangerous to leave the only labour organisation in the south in the hands of Sheehan and O'Brien - and my suggestion is that Cullinan, O'Shee, Kendal O'Brien, Landon, etc. [all Munster M.P.s] should start an executive of the L. and L. League whose branches would be entitled to representation at our conventions...Your contribution to the work need only be put it clearly in your speech at Kilteely that the latest development of the Land and Labour League was factious and hostile to the party.

3

The danger of embarking on a head-on struggle with O'Brien over this issue, and also the pointlessness of trying to conciliate him

-
1. The M.P. was John Roche. See Dillon to Redmond, 27 Mar.1906, and Redmond to Dillon, 29 Mar.1906 (both in Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 26 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers). Some objected to this rather eighteenth-century approach to political organisation. Alfred Webb wrote to Redmond on 28 June 1906, in connection with a rumour of expected O'Brienite opposition to a meeting in Limerick that: 'Mr.Landon has written to Mr[Denis] Johnston asking to have £5 placed at his disposal to "clear the crowd of them out", and he goes on to say "I am determined to smash up their meeting", I have advised Mr Johnston to reply that he will not advance a penny for such a purpose'.(Redmond papers).
 3. Dillon to Redmond, 27 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers).

was made apparent at another labour meeting, at Tralee on April 15. Tom O'Donnell, a young member of the party who was not closely associated with O'rien, but who occasionally adopted heterodox attitudes on matters of party policy, attended and made a speech which was intended to conciliate O'Brien and win him back to the party. But O'Brien's interruptions were not conducive to agreement. Sheehan followed up with a controversial speech, and the meeting ended with O'Donnell and O'rien arguing on the platform amid cries of 'what about labour? We will upset the lot of you if you go on in this way'¹.

All of this had very much more to do with the struggle for control of the Irish party than it had to do with the cause of the labourers or the shaping of the bill, which continued apace under the direction of MacDonnell. But the publicity did make it even more imperative for the Irish party to ensure that the bill was a good one and went through promptly. When Redmond sent Bryce a statement of his views at the end of March Dillon thought 'it would be safer for us to put forward a demand for a grant in aid as well as cheap money', in view of Sheehan's activities.²

Early in March MacDonnell had seen Sir Henry Robinson, head of the local government board, and laid down the basic aims of the bill.

1. Meeting at Tralee, 15 Apr. 1906 (W.F.J., 21 Apr.1906).

2. Dillon to Redmond, 29 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers).

It would permit the lending of money to local councils at the land purchase rate of $3\frac{1}{4}\%$, with a money grant to cover the difference between that and the standard interest rate of $4\frac{1}{2}\%$; it would simplify legal procedure and remove the right of appeal to the privy council against acquisition of the necessary land; the local government board would be empowered to act directly to erect cottages in cases where the local authority failed to do so; and standard plans¹ for cottages would be laid down so as to eliminate architects' fees.

But the following weeks were not encouraging for the Irish government. Redmond and Dillon proved irreconcilable over the matter of the land commission appointments, and there was disagreement over the personnel of the Trinity College commission. There was some unrest in the west over the grasslands and the lack of progress in restoring the evicted tenants, and this combined with the struggle in Munster over the labourers to raise the political temperature in Ireland. Speakers were already beginning to express general dissatisfaction with the new government.² On top of this came a hint that the treasury was not inclined to be overgenerous in the matter of financing the labourers' bill.

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 10 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).
 2. Redmond voiced the general dissatisfaction in his speech at Kiltely, co.Limerick, 22 Apr.1906 (Times, 23 Apr.1906).

Thus at the beginning of April, MacDonnell began to put pressure on Bryce to postpone the bill altogether. 'I wonder what Redmond would say to that?', he enquired on April 2, and repeated the suggestion twice during the following week.¹ He did not think the treasury would raise their offer of a £37,000 grant any higher than £50,000 and considered £60,000 to be the minimum requirement:

If you cannot do this I really think the labourers' bill should be postponed to the 'scheme' [i.e. the Irish Council bill]. An unsuccessful labourers' bill will affect your power over the House. If the scheme were passed, the labourers question would be one of those to be considered in fixing the contract provision.

2

In another letter MacDonnell made a firm proposal that the scheme be 'substituted for the labourers' bill' in the legislative programme for 1906.³ His fear was that the initial spirit of liberal-nationalist co-operation was breaking up amidst disputes over secondary matters: if the Irish leaders were forced to take up an irreconcilable attitude towards the government, the prospects for MacDonnell's scheme, which he must have known would not arouse much enthusiasm in the nationalist camp

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

2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 10 Apr1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).

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

anyway, would be considerably worsened. It might in fact be much easier to 'rush' the scheme through in 1906 with concessions to labourers and others attached as bait. In view of the crisis within the nationalist movement on the labourers issue, it would have been difficult for the Irish leaders to accept such a suggestion; a third of the session was already through, it was known that the English education bill would take up much of the rest of the year (and be unpalatable to catholics), and they had not yet been given any inkling of the nature of the 'scheme'. O'Brien heard of the plan from 'a high official quarter', and replied bluntly that it would be the easiest way¹ of depriving the Irish council scheme of any sort of hearing at all. The party leaders were no less hostile. Dillon reported to Redmond on April 27:

Finucane was here last night - and I gather from him that MacDonnell's very much depressed and lays all the blame for recent troubles on Bryce. He says that the labourers' bill is hopelessly bad - that Bryce will not fight the treasury - and has again urged Bryce to drop the bill. We must see to this immediately.

2

MacDonnell again pressed Bryce on April 30: 'unless you can get £60,000 for your bill, I hope you will not introduce it'.³ This appears to have

-
1. W.O'Brien, An olive branch in Ireland, p.392.
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 27 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 30 Apr.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

been the end of his efforts in this direction, for although Bryce appealed to Campbell-Bannerman against the treasury decision, explaining that the concession would 'make a great deal of difference to their [the Irish party's] behaviour over the education bill', the measure was presented¹ to parliament with the treasury contribution still at £50,000.

The bill was introduced in the commons by Bryce on 28 May 1906. He explained that since the first legislative provision for labourers, in 1883, less than half the number of cottages provided for had actually been built, the figures being especially low in the north of Ireland. The reasons for this failure, he said, were the costly and tardy procedure under the acts; the failure of some rural district councils to work the acts; and the lack of funds and heavy burden on the rates. Now it was proposed to cut out the appeal to the privy council against the compulsory acquisition of land and substitute an appeal to the local government board, and at the same time simplify the legal process by² short-cutting the usual proof of title. In cases where R.D.C.s did

-
1. Bryce to Campbell-Bannerman, 26 Apr. 1906 (Campbell-Bannerman papers. Add. Ms. 41211 f. 238). For the financial details of the measure, see the speech of Lord Denman, 27 July 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol. 162 col. 33 et. seq.).
 2. 'I am inclined to think that the hair of an ordinary solicitor would stand on end at the manner in which titles are dealt with in this bill', confessed Lord Crewe on 27 July 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol. 162 col. 51).

not do their duty in the matter it would now be possible for the L.G.B. to appoint an officer to carry out the work in any area. But the most important element in the bill was financial: it provided the R.D.C.s with money up to the sum of $24\frac{1}{2}$ M for the purpose of building cottages and providing plots of land (about one acre in size) for labourers to rent, and enabled them to borrow this money at land purchase terms.¹ It was estimated that this would make it possible to provide between 25,000 and 30,000 cottages and plots. The estimated cost, £138,000 p.a., was to be met by £50,000 from the treasury, £23,000 from the Irish ratepayers,² and £65,000 from the tenants themselves in rent at 1/- per week.

Redmond welcomed the bill, though he would not allow Bryce to get away with describing it as a 'final settlement'.³ The Freeman congratulated the chief secretary 'upon having for once confounded the prophets of evil'.⁴ Even Charles Craig, the ultra-unionist M.P. for South Antrim, thought the bill approached the problem 'in a very proper and statesmanlike manner'.⁵ Only the provision that councils would

-
1. i.e. They would have $68\frac{1}{2}$ years in which to repay, at $3\frac{1}{4}\%$ interest.
 2. For a summary of the bill's intentions and provisions, see Bryce's speech on the introduction, 23 May 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.158, cols.107-112).
 3. 28 May 1906. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.158 cols.112-116.
 4. W.F.J., 2 June 1906.
 5. 13 June 1906. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.158 col.992.

receive the exchequer grant in proportion to the amount they had already spent on cottages raised protests from the Ulstermen, but even then those areas that were 'behind' in the matter were not overanxious to draw attention to the fact. T.L. Corbett, normally one of the more irascible Ulster members, did not feel that the bill was 'too socialistic', because he considered that private enterprise had failed in the matter: with the destruction of the landlord class in Ireland, the new landowners (i.e. the tenant purchasers) would be unable to maintain and let cottages.¹ The Ulstermen then, perhaps with one eye on their constituents, decided to accept the bill.

But it soon became clear that the Irish landlords were not prepared to be so accommodating as their Ulster colleagues, and the Irish leaders became concerned lest they should have to face the long summer recess with no bill passed.² Redmond told Dillon that 'we will be put to the pin of our collar to get it through before we separate'.³ In the house of lords it was made plain that the opposition would hold out for an appeal from the local government board to a county court judge: Lord Ashbourne, the former Irish lord chancellor, thought it important that before land was compulsorily acquired the parties should have an

1. 13 June 1906. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 158 col. 1021.

2. See Redmond to G. Whiteley, government chief whip, 18 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

3. Redmond to Dillon, 27 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

opportunity of putting their case before 'a judicial mind'; Lord Mayo dismissed the L.G.B. appeal as 'an appeal from Philip drunk to Philip sober'; and Lord Clonbrock expressed anxiety lest the landowner not be adequately protected against the taking of a particular piece of land 'out of spite' by the local council.¹ During the committee stage Lord Denman announced the government's willingness to alter the appeal machinery to permit an appeal from the L.G.B. inspector to either the L.G.B. or a county court judge - a concession at the landlords' demand.²

A more far-reaching objection was put forward by Lord Arran. He admitted that the amount of land which would come under the bill was insignificant, but thought it a bad precedent to permit the compulsory acquisition of land without 'compensation for compulsion'.³ He persuaded his colleagues to reject the clause precluding any compensation for compulsion, but the speaker ruled that the exclusion of such a clause was not within their lordships' competence.⁴ They therefore withdrew their amendment, but resolved ominously 'that this house.....maintains

-
1. Speeches on the lords' second reading, 27 July 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.162 cols.37-40, 49-50, 40-42).
 2. 30 July 1906. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.162 col.358.
 3. 30 July 1906. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.162 col.367.
 4. 1 Aug.1906. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.162 col.1141.

its right to legislate with regard to the principles of valuation upon which property may be taken for public purposes'.¹ The bill was thus passed, and received the royal assent on August 3.

The passing of the labourers' bill was significant in three ways. Although a sectional measure involving only about 25,000 families, it demonstrated that a liberal government could 'deliver the goods' in Ireland, and so justified the Irish party's co-operation with them. Equally important, it eased the party's position in Munster, by taking the wind out of the sails of the O'Brienite Land and Labour Association: the labourers' future demand would be for land, a demand to which the U.I.L. was specially geared. Sheehan's Land and Labour Association continued in existence throughout our period (O'Brien claimed 178 branches in February 1909),² but became more and more simply a constituency organisation for the O'Brienites. The rival association under O'Shee also continued, though it could only muster 31 branches at its 1907 convention, and its main purpose was simply to prevent an O'Brienite monopoly of the labourers' cause.³ But perhaps the most significant feature of the passage of the labourers' bill, from the point of view

1. 2 Aug.1906. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.162 col.1306-1317.
2. Letter from W.O'Brien to Fr O'Flynn of Cork (W.F.J., 23 Jan.1909).
3. W.F.J., 24 Aug.1907. An attempt to re-unite the two executives in October 1909 ended in failure (Irish Weekly Independent, 9 Oct.1909).

of both the government and the Irish party, was the attitude of the house of lords. Being basically a proposal to spend more treasury money in Ireland, the bill was virtually non-contentious as between nationalists and unionists. But even so, the Irish landlords in the upper chamber had taken action; in the words of one nationalist M.P. they were 'willing to wound but afraid to strike'.¹ Arran's speech especially revealed their fears about how the liberals might go on to tackle land legislation, fears which revolved basically round 'compensation for compulsion' and the matter of price. Lord Balfour of Burleigh maintained that the dispute was over nothing, since in practice an arbitrator never revealed whether he had allowed for compensation or not.² But this was not really the point: if the law gave any hint that a higher price might be given for land compulsorily acquired, then few men would sell their land voluntarily, and the whole procedure would be very much slowed down and complicated. In fact this discussion was not so much about the acquisition of the one-acre patches of land for labourers which the bill proposed (the whole number of which could have been fitted into less than one half of Lord Clanricarde's Alway estates) but with the

1. Speech by J.J.Clancy, 1 Aug.1906 (Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.162 col.862).

2. 2 Aug.1906, Parlt.Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.162 col.1315.

effect which the procedure being then established might have on the amending land bill which was expected to follow the report of the Dudley commission.

3. The town tenants' bill.

The position of tenants in the small towns of Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century was deeply affected by the system of land ownership. Often, whole towns had grown up on the estates of great landlords. It was frequently the case that the tenant had rented only the land, and had built the shop or house at his own expense. This situation of course applied mainly in the country districts, though it was not unknown in the cities also: Lord de Vesci and Lord Longford owned all of Kingstown between them for instance, just as Lord Clanricarde¹ controlled the towns of Loughrea, Woodford and Portumna, in East Galway.

either was this situation confined to catholic Ireland. In the north-east there were also trouble spots: Ballymoney was a one-man town, while Lord Antrim controlled the whole of Portrush.² Even where the demand for town property was not great these landlords and many others like them

1. Speech by Dillon, 21 Nov.1906 (Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.165 col.862).

2. Speech by T.W.Russell, 18 May 1906 (Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.157 col.809).

were in very strong positions: a tenant of limited resources whom they deemed undesirable might find it difficult to secure any premises or accommodation in his local area. Generally speaking, the town tenant in Ireland had no security of tenure, and was entitled to no compensation for any improvements he had made, with the result that he often refrained from making any improvements. Thus many Irish towns looked to be in a more advanced state of stagnation than they actually were.

This problem had been passed over in the great struggle for the land. It was only after the 1903 act that a Town Tenants' Association was formed, under the aegis of William Field, nationalist M.P. for Dublin St. Patrick's, with J.M. Coghlan¹ Briscoe as secretary. The presence on the committee of Lindsay Gawford, founder of the independent orange order, gave the movement a non-political appearance, though in fact Briscoe worked in close collaboration with the Irish party leaders and other nationalist politicians in Dublin, and Dillon and Davitt were frequent speakers at conventions. Nonetheless, there was a bi-partisan element in the movement: the grievances of the town tenants were felt in the north as well as the south of Ireland, for there was a higher proportion of small to middle-sized towns in counties Antrim, Armagh, Derry and Down than

1. It was founded in Dublin in March 1904 (See report of the 4th executive meeting of the Town Tenants Association, W.F.J., 23 June 1906).

there was in the more rural counties. It was in fact alleged that the defeat of William Moore M.P., Ulster unionist candidate in North Antrim, at the 1906 election, was the result of his opposition to the abortive town tenants bill of 1905.¹ During the east Tyrone by-election in June 1906 it was suggested in the Freeman's Journal that those 'moderate unionists' who were unsullied by orange bigotry might even vote for the nationalist candidate rather than return another member of the party which was 'furtively attempting to wreck the town tenants bill'.² By June 1906 Briscoe could report that the association had 130 affiliated branches in Ireland and another 60 not yet affiliated with the central body.³

At the third general meeting of the Town Tenants' executive, on 5 March 1906, it was announced that the Irish party had been successful in the annual parliamentary ballot, and would give first place to the introduction of a private member's bill dealing with the town tenants' question. Lindsay Crawford denounced the previous year's

1. Speech by T.W.Russell, 18 May 1906 (Parlt.Deb.H.C. 4 series, vol.157 col.808).

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

3. W.F.J., 23 June 1906.

measure as having been dangerously weak: it would, he said, have blunted the agitation and so been an advantage to landlords. The new measure would be a strong one, and both Davitt and Dillon expressed hopes that it might reach the statute book. Dillon, who was present, condemned especially the prevalent practice of middlemen snatching the tenants' improvements: 'there is to my mind no remedy for this condition of things except the remedy of the Land League days.....The only remedy is to have a scarecrow of two or three houses in these towns which nobody will take'. He urged the association to make the bill a strong one, since it would be sure to pass in the commons by a sweeping majority: 'the lords may mutilate it, but however that may be, I would strongly press on you the real necessity¹ for vigorous agitation'.

The bill was introduced into the commons by W. McKillop and J.J. Clancy of the Irish party on May 18. It was indeed a thoroughgoing scheme, with three main objects: compensation for tenants' improvements, so that premises could not be taken back in toto by the landlord at the end of a short lease and put on the open market without regard to the existing tenant's interest; provision for the tenant to receive a 'moderate amount' of compensation on quitting his holding, when the disturbance was caused by the landlord (as was already the case on

1. 3rd general meeting of Town Tenants executive (W.F.J., 10 Mar.1906).

agricultural holdings); and an arrangement whereby the tenant would be entitled to buy the landlord's interest in the holding at a price fixed by a county court judge, in cases where, on the expiry of the lease, the landlord called on the tenant to pay a higher rent or quit the holding.¹

For justification of so strong a measure the Irish party were able, as so often in the past, to point to the activities of Lord Clanricarde, who was in the process of evicting a local U.I.L. official, Martin Ward, from his shop in Loughrea. The case was without doubt an extreme one. In the spring of 1905, Ward, as secretary of Loughrea U.I.L., had written to a local grazier who rented a farm on the eleven-months system:

At a meeting of the U.I.L. held on 21st inst. a resolution was adopted calling on all graziers within the parish to surrender their farms on May 1 next, in order to facilitate the division of the land amongst small landowners and those having no land in the parish, in anticipation of a sale. I am directed to write to you and request you to surrender Tully Hill Farm. I hope you will see your way to comply with this request, and fall into line with the other graziers in the district who have promised to surrender.

2

On 29 April 1905, apparently as a consequence of the above letter, Ward

-
1. Speech by W.MacKillop, 18 May 1906 (Parlt.Deb.H.C. 4 series, vol.157 782-787).
 2. Read out by Col.Saunderson, 26 July 1906 (Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.161 col.1529).

received the following communication from Shaw Tener, Lord Clanricarde's agent. Although he had always considered Ward to be an honourable and efficient man of business, who had always payed his rent, Tener felt obliged to give him notice to quit:

I do not believe you personally desire to cause pain, annoyance or injury to anyone, but as secretary of the Loughrea branch of the U.I.L. you have done so. I feel bound to use the argumentum ad hominem in the shape of this notice now served upon you.

1

This letter of course could have been tailor-made nationalist propaganda: it explicitly exonerated Ward from any personal failing as a tenant, and was unashamedly political in purpose.

2

The Irish party's bill nonetheless excited strong criticism on both sides of the house of commons. Most of the Ulstermen who had supported the 1905 bill declared this one to be a totally different matter: T.L. Corbett condemned it as 'a wild and reckless measure'; Charles Craig thought the proposal for compulsory sale was 'revolutionary', and regarded the whole plan as a move towards the creation of fair rent courts for town properties. The government were also critical. The Irish attorney-general, Cherry, opened with a vigorous attack:

3

-
1. Read out by J.J. Clancy, 18 May 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.157 col.791).
 2. The W.F.J. published a facsimile of Tener's letter with its edition of 24 Nov. 1905.
 3. 18 May 1906. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.157, cols 818 and 799.

the government, he said, would have willingly supported the measure had it been restricted to compensation for improvements, but the other provisions were totally unacceptable. Compensation for disturbance would necessitate a rent-fixing law, as had been the case with land, whilst the retrospective clauses gave power to set aside leases, and therefore destroyed the sanctity of contract. But after further criticisms, Cherry paused for a word with Bryce, and quickly wound up his speech with a few general comments on the iniquities of the existing law. ¹ He would, he declared, vote for the second reading. Redmond, Campbell, and later the Freeman's Journal ² all drew attention to the inconsistency of his performance. Bryce was rather more successful in steering a moderate course through the bill's provisions: a measure, he thought, was necessary, but the mechanism under discussion was ill-chosen, and went further than was either necessary or desirable. ³ Thus, although government support won the bill its second reading, few expected it to appear again until the 'massacre of the innocents' at the end of session. When Field asked the prime minister on May 23 whether it

-
1. 18 May 1906. Parl. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.157 cols. 836-843.
 2. Speeches of Redmond and Campbell, 18 May 1906 (Parl. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.157 cols.844,836); W.F.J., 26 May 1906.
 3. 18 May 1906. Parl. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.157 cols.845-8.

was the government's intention to accommodate the bill he was told:

The sympathy entertained by the government with some of the provisions of the bill was expressed in debate last Friday, but in the present state of public business I fear it is impossible to make any promise to give government time to any private member's bill.

1

And there the situation might have remained had it not been for Martin Ward.

Ward's case had been through the courts, but he had continued his resistance, and an eviction had been arranged for the end of May 1906. Not unnaturally, the U.I.L. were handling the affair with the maximum amount of publicity, a Ward indemnity fund was underway, and the the bishop of Clonfert had offered a plot of land in Loughrea for new premises. Maurice Sweeney of Loughrea, secretary of the indemnity committee and local U.I.L. official, wrote to Davitt after the failure of Ward's appeal:

If Martin Ward (even now) gives a verbal expression of regret Tener will withdraw the proceedings, but Clanricarde, the man that for twenty-five years we have been trying to get a dint into, will laugh at us. So will the rest of his class.

2

-
1. Parl. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.157 col.1265.
 2. Maurice Sweeney to M.Davitt, 24 Mar.1906, forwarded by Davitt to Redmond (Redmond papers). It is interesting to note that a man named as 'Maurice Sweeney of Loughrea' played a prominent part in the sinn fein convention in Dublin, on 28 Nov.1905 (See R.P.Davis, 'The rise of sinn fein, 1891-1910', (Dublin University, M.Litt.thesis 1958), p.109).

As the eviction-date approached it became clear that Ward intended to defend to the last, and an old-style siege was planned, not in a country cottage, as in land league times, but in the town of Loughrea itself, already the most disturbed town in Ireland. The government were worried. On May 25 Dillon sent Bryce one of those near-hysterical letters which he used so often to stir the chairman of his own party to action.¹ But the chief secretary had not had the opportunity to develop any of Redmond's immunity to such alarums, and wrote anxiously to Redmond on May 30 begging him to use his influence for peace, 'now that the resistance made at Loughrea has called attention to Clanricarde's behaviour and the hardship of the present law'.² But Redmond's reply was very sharp and to the point: 'I have your note. The way to allay excitement would be to let me announce that facilities will be given to the town tenants' bill'.³ Bryce, who was in the midst of preparations to cross to Dublin for Whitsun, immediately wrote to Campbell-Bannerman, who agreed to a bargain. He telegraphed: 'assistance with modified bill and cessation of disturbances'.⁴ Bryce notified Redmond privately of

-
1. Dillon to Bryce, 25 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. Bryce to Redmond, 30 May 1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. Redmond to Bryce, 31 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 4. Vaughan Nash (secretary to the prime minister) to Bryce, 1 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

the government's offer and received a hopeful reply, though Redmond¹ still urged him to postpone the eviction.

This was not deemed good policy however, and on the following day, June 2, Sir Antony MacDonnell made tracks for Loughrea, and remained there until the eviction was accomplished, returning to Dublin on the 5th, when he sent Bryce a very full account of his triumph. He thought Ward's case a very hard one, and found him to be 'a very respectable young fellow of the tradesman class'. But the local M.P., William Duffy, he thought devious and eager to make further capital out of the affair.² If Duffy knew, as he probably did, about Bryce's concession to Redmond, he may have thought MacDonnell equally eager to make capital (though it is fair to point out that MacDonnell succeeded in averting serious trouble, and was accorded unusual praise in the nationalist press). MacDonnell's account continued:

...I was threatened, cajoled, and entreated to make this, that, and the other promise, especially in regard to future legislation. But having judged that I should gain my point without making any use of your letters to me or of the P.M.'s telegram to you (as justification for a promise) I absolutely refused to discuss the matter of any promise or any legislation, and at last they gave in.

-
1. Bryce to Redmond, 1 June 1906 (Redmond papers); Redmond to Bryce, 1 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 5 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

After five hours of talk, the U.I.L. committee ordered their 'garrison'
 to withdraw.¹ MacDonnell then went to see Shaw Toner, who was friendly,
 and who expressed readiness to restore Ward unconditionally if Clanricarde
 would agree. This may have been a ruse to get rid of Mac Donnell however,
 for a week later Lord Aberdeen reported to Bryce that MacDonnell was
 'rather depressed' about the business, and that 'the attitude of the old
 offender [Clanricarde] is disappointing'.²

Redmond had meanwhile held his peace about Bryce's concession
 on the bill (though he may have privately confided in Duffy, in which
 case some of the glitter is removed from MacDonnell's diplomatic
 triumph), for the Freeman's Journal was still in the dark on June 9:

That Sir Antony MacDonnell negotiated with the law-breakers
 is the clearest indication of his view of the law and the
 necessity for its amendment. He gave no definite pledge,
 it is true. He was not in a position to pledge the
 government [in fact, of course, he was]. But the
 honourable personal obligation on himself is nonetheless
 imperative.

3

-
1. Ibid. MacDonnell's account of the discoveries then made underlines, as it was doubtless intended to do, the importance of his successful negotiations. He wrote: 'On entering the "house" the police found it very strongly barricaded with wire entanglements, etc., and it was an arsenal of pitchforks, reapinghooks fixed on poles, boulders and small stones; and cauldrons of boiling water, kept on the boil. Worst of all, the garrison were armed with revolvers, of which the police relieved them. It was God's mercy that there was no fight. The night before, all the married men in the garrison had been removed, and single men substituted....'
 2. Lord Aberdeen to Bryce, 9 June 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 3. W.F.J., 9 June 1906.

On June 19 Bryce announced, in answer to a commons question, that the town tenants bill was to be sent a grand committee, with an understanding that those parts which might give rise to lengthened discussion would be dropped.¹ He had already told Redmond privately that the government hoped the bill might be reduced 'to a form in which it will be far less, perhaps wholly not controversial as between members for Ireland'.² Long talks were then held between members of the government and the Irish leaders, as a result of which Cherry announced in the commons that the whole of the third part of the bill, dealing with the enfranchisement of tenancies and the setting aside of leases, had been dropped, while compensation for disturbance would be confined to cases where the landlord had unreasonably exercised his right to terminate a tenancy: Cherry 'did not think there would be much opposition to that (cries of "oh!")'.³ The unionists predictably protested against the manner in which a controversial bill had been taken furtively under the government's wing and smuggled into a grand committee, thereby denying the house a chance to discuss it.⁴ But by

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 159 col. 51.

2. Bryce to Redmond, 19 June 1906 (Redmond papers).

3. 6 July 1907. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 160 col. 414-419.

4. Speeches of C. Craig, J. H. M. Campbell, 6 July 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 160, cols. 415, 418-20).

July 27 the bill was through committee, and the remaining stages were left over till the autumn session. Redmond told Dillon that 'it will undoubtedly be vigorously opposed'.¹

This was an important measure for the Irish party. They had been very much geared in the past to winning land legislation, and had paid little attention to town grievances. It was true that the land question had been the most pressing, and involved the greatest number of people, but the countryside can perforce take only a spasmodic interest in politics, and even in Ireland a party could not hope to survive indefinitely without the steady political strength of the towns behind it. It was perhaps because of this anxiety about the support of the townspeople that Dillon appeared at the association's convention in Dublin on August 30 to deliver the main address. He concentrated especially on the reasons which had made it necessary to compromise with the government on the bill, after they had supported a second reading. He pointed out that although the Irish party were very dissatisfied with the attitude of the attorney-general and the government towards the bill, it had in fact been a very strong measure, and in exchange for modifying it the Irish party had been granted the all-important concession of a 'guarantee' that it would reach the statute book. It was, he maintained, still a measure which safeguarded essentials: compensation for improvements, and a provision for disturbance

1. Redmond to Dillon, 27 July 1907 (Redmond papers).

which went a long way towards safeguarding the shopkeeper's goodwill. Dillon concluded with a plea to the convention not to attack the bill¹ as it stood: 'you have still the house of lords across your path'.

It was not until November 19 that the report stage of the bill was reached in the commons. The main unionist attack was again based on the 'stealthy' manner in which it had been brought forward. Balfour prepared the way for a rough passage in the lords by fulminating against 'this hole-in-the-corner method which the government has adopted of dealing with property'.² Charles Craig alleged that the government's motive was simply to keep the nationalists quiet for the remainder of the session, and Campbell insinuated that the bill had been adopted as a result of some agreement made by MacDonnell with Ward and his associates in Loughrea, in return for peace.³ Bryce replied that⁴ MacDonnell expressly denied having made any sort of bargain. This

1. Dillon in Dublin, 30 Aug.1906 (W.F.J., 8 Sept.1906).
2. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.165 col.415. Balfour expressed a wish that the nationalists would invoke the name of Lord Clanricarde a little less often in their demands for legislation: if Clanricarde was so bad, argued Balfour, then he was an isolated case, and the law should be directed against him personally. Accordingly, on 28 November 1906, under the ten-minute rule, Wm.Duffy brought in his Clanricarde estates (expropriation) bill, with the names of five liberals and five labour men, as well as five nationalists, on the back. Campbell-Bannerman considered the gesture 'a worthwhile protest' (Parlt. Deb.H.C. 4 series, vol.166,cols.89-92).
3. Speeches by C.Craig and J.Campbell, 19 Nov.1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series vol.165 cols. 420-425).
4. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.165 col.426.

was true of course: as we have seen, the bargain had already been agreed between Bryce and Redmond before the under-secretary made his journey to Loughrea.

On November 30 the bill was given a third reading by 201 votes to 28, and sent up to the lords. Lord Denman, for the government, presented it to their lordships as a modest measure, full of humanitarian feeling; compensation for disturbance, he explained, would be limited to shops and business premises only, and it was intended by the government that increasing the rent should not in itself be deemed an 'unreasonable action' on the part of the landlord (and, therefore, fair rent courts would not be necessitated).¹ Denman expressed a hope that the bill would be passed without substantial amendment, but Lord Ashbourne, in reply, dashed that hope immediately.² It was clear that the lords intended to radically alter the shape of the bill. Having made a token gesture to 'democracy' by passing the second reading they set about safeguards in committee which drew most of the teeth of the bill. The twenty-year retrospective clause was removed from the section dealing with compensation for improvements; the amount of that compensation was limited to the 'capitalised value of the addition to the letting value',

1. 6 Dec.1906. Parlt.Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.166 col.1119 et.seq.

2. 'I cannot hold out any expectation that his hope is likely to be realised' (Parlt.Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.166 col.1134).

as assessed by the courts; and the courts were directed to bear in mind the length of time a tenant had enjoyed the benefit of his improvements. Various restrictions were attached to the provision for compensation for disturbance, so that a tenant was required to show 'capricious disturbance', whilst the amount of compensation he might receive under this head was limited to a maximum of three years rent. But Lord St. Aldwyn prevailed on his colleagues not to follow Lord Ridley's advice to throw the clause out altogether.¹

Bryce considered that, taken together, these amendments destroyed the value of the measure. But in the face of protests from Redmond he decided to accept them, provided that the lords withdrew on two points; retrospective compensation for improvements, and removal² of the three years' rent limit on compensation for disturbance. The lords had maintained that the retrospective clause was unfair in that it denied the landlord the option (which he would have in future) of making the improvements himself - but had it not been retained, the threat to the property of most existing tenants would not have been met.

-
1. Committee stage of town tenants' bill in the house of lords, 11 Dec. 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 167, cols. 352-370).
 2. Town tenants bill: commons' discussion of lords' amendments, 19 Dec. 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 167, cols. 1531-1570).

The measure was at last allowed through on December 20, with the retrospective period reduced to ten years. Lansdowne, in a speech which foreshadowed his performance on the Irish land bill three years later, sought to pacify his extremists by reciting a great list of amendments which the lords had secured.¹

The parallel between these two bills is in fact quite a close one. Both were measures which effectively impinged on landlords' rights and which were allowed to pass by the house of lords - though not in the same radical form as they had left the house of commons. Furthermore, both were passed in the face of 'backwoods' opposition on the advice of the unionist leaders, who had one eye on developments in other fields; as the 1909 land bill was passed because the lords were more anxious to reject the budget bill, so the town tenants' bill was passed because they preferred to take their stand on the English education bill.

4. The English schools question.

The English education act of 1902 provided for all state schools in England and Wales to come under the supervision of the county and county borough councils and be maintained out of the rates.

1. Town tenants bill; lords' discussion of commons' views of lords' amendments, 20 Dec.1906 (Parlt Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.167,cols.1606-1629).

Educationally it represented an advance (it is still the basis of our educational system today), but its attempt to reconcile within the same structure both the schools provided by the state and the 'voluntary' schools built and managed by the various religious denominations, was to be a major source of political strife for another decade. The chief opponents of the act were the nonconformists, who taught no 'denominational' dogma in their own schools, and objected to the subsidisation of anglican and roman catholic 'propaganda' out of the rates. Their demand was for direct local authority management of all schools receiving rate-aid (which implied for the voluntary schools a choice between financial starvation on the one hand, and bringing an end to denominational management and religious tests for teachers on the other) and the provision in them of 'simple bible teaching', otherwise called Cowper-Templeism. This, the nonconformists maintained, was 'undenominational', though in the eyes of catholics (and anglicans) it amounted to state¹ endowment of nonconformity to the exclusion of other faiths.

-
1. 'Give the children the bible, if you want to teach them the christian faith...Stop this brawling of priests in and around the schools'. Speech by Lloyd George, Dec.1902 (cited in F.Owen, Tempestuous Journey (London 1954) p.127). The catholic archbishop of Westminster described 'simple bible-teaching' as 'the establishment and endowment of protestantism in its simplest form' (W.F.J., 3 Mar.1906).

It was certain that the amendment of the 1902 act along these lines would have high priority in the programme of the next liberal government. But the Irish party, as almost the sole ¹ representatives of catholicity at Westminster, had already taken their stand on the side of the 1902 act, and been denounced for it by radical sympathisers like Lloyd George. ² Those people who regarded themselves first and foremost as catholics were in the main anxious to prevent a liberal victory in the election of 1906. The position of the Irish party in this election was a difficult one, with catholics in England out to divert their supporters and critics in Ireland ready to publicise their every error. ³ Redmond's answer was to call for trust in his integrity, confidence in his wisdom, and carte blanche to decide his policy and tactics:

...The Irish party...is not a catholic party...but it is a national party, and just because it is a national party it is unanimous in its determination to protect the interests of what we regard as the national religion of Ireland....Is any man at the next election to be told it is his duty to vote for men who are not only anti-home rulers, but who are pledged to reduce by one quarter the number of defenders of the catholic interests in the house of commons?

4

-
1. Only eight catholics were elected for English constituencies in 1906 (Liverpool Catholic Herald, 3 Feb.1906). They were: Lord Edmond Talbot and R.Hunt (unionists); H.Belloc, I.Herbert, and C.J.O'Donnell (liberals); J.O'Grady and S.Walsh (labour); and T.P.O'Connor (nationalist).
 2. Owen, Tempestuous Journey, pp.125-6.
 3. The bishop of Limerick alleged that under a liberal government 'the borough council of any English town can turn out the nuns and priests and put declared infidels and agnostics, or members of any sects of protestants to teach catholic children...Catholic fathers are being pressed into voting for these men' (letter in W.F.J., 20 Jan.1906).
 4. Redmond at Sunderland, 8 Nov.1905 (W.F.J., 18 Nov.1905). The unionists had in 1905 introduced a redistribution of seats bill, which would have very much reduced the number of constituencies in rural Ireland.

Nationalist speakers elaborated on this theme in their own ways. Some, like Davitt, had little patience with a church which sought to blur the vital social and political issues.¹ Others, like T.P.O'Connor, played down the significance of the schools question in a more discreet fashion:

Behind the question of the catholic child in the English slum....there is the greater question that not only his health, his happiness, but the happiness of future generations can be really advanced and really maintained if we go to the poisoned root of the whole thing and destroy and pull down the whole fabric of bad government in Ireland that has drained her sons and daughters from her own glorious and fertile shores to seek their bread in the slums and alleys of foreign cities.

2

But fortune and circumstances were on the side of the Irish leaders in this contest. The Tories had been in office for ten years, and the electorate were tired of them. It was not difficult for any public speaker to find half a dozen reasons why voters should oppose them. And when the election was over the liberals were found to have won by so great a margin that it could with justice be claimed that any attempt to prevent their victory would merely have alienated their sympathies. When Redmond and Dillon had a talk with Archbishop

-
1. 'Popular education in England is a home rule issue for England and Englishmen', declared Davitt at Battersea on 2 Dec.1905 (W.F.J., 9 Dec. 1905).
 2. T.P.O'Connor at Holborn, 18 Dec.1905 (W.F.J., 23 Dec.1905).

Bourne of Westminster on 16 February 1906 'he said our action in supporting liberals in general election was providential. If we had acted otherwise we would be powerless now'. Bourne did not ask the Irish leaders to make any frontal attack on the liberals' principle of popular control of schools, but 'hoped he might by finesse get more advantages for catholics such as where a great majority of the children in a school were of a particular religion that the parents might demand¹ from the local authority that the teachers should be of that religion'.

But despite ecclesiastical finesse and nationalist intercessions with the education minister, Augustine Birrell, the bill which appeared a few weeks later offered little security for catholic interests.

'Mr. Birrell's bill is all take and no give', declared the Freeman's² Journal. It proposed to make representative control of elementary schools receiving tax and rate aid universal; to establish 'undenominational' religions teaching on the rates; to abolish tests for teachers; and to leave the question of religious minorities to the discretion of the local authorities.³ In schools where four-fifths of the pupils were of a particular creed, the parents might ask the local authority to suspend

-
1. 'Note of an interview with Archbishop Bourne, 16 Feb.1906' in Redmond's hand (Redmond papers).
 2. W.F.J., 21 Apr.1906.
 3. W.F.J., 14 Apr.1906.

'Cowper-Templeism' and provide for the teaching of that creed by members of it, but this clause (cl.4) was not mandatory on the authority, and there was no appeal against its decision. Redmond thought it best for the Irish leaders to remain silent until catholic reaction and the chances of government amendments had been gauged.¹

Clause 4 did not contain the firm safeguard which Bourne had hoped for. Nonetheless, extreme nonconformists had been against the inclusion of the clause at all, and the sole catholic member of the cabinet, the Marquess of Ripon, urged Bourne to let it through and then go for amendments, lest it be eliminated altogether.² But catholic feeling was well enough satisfied with the existing law, and objected not merely to the optional nature of the proposed clause 4, but to the limitation of its application to urban areas of over 5,000 population, and also to the 'confiscatory' endowment clauses in the measure.³ The English catholic

1. Redmond to Dillon, 5 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).
2. Ripon to Bourne, 18 Apr.1906 (Ripon papers, B.M.Add.Ms.43545 f.54); see also Redmond's 'Note of an interview with Mr Perks, 26 Apr.1906' (Redmond papers). R.W.Perks was a leading Roseberyite and nonconformist M.P.
3. See Bourne to Ripon, 26 Apr.1906 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms.43545 ff.57-60); and a resolution 'Handed to me by Archbishop Bourne, 26 Apr.1906' (Redmond papers).

bishops thus announced their strong opposition to the second reading, and were fully backed up by their colleagues in Ireland.¹ In the circumstances the Irish party had no option but to follow their lead, though their opposition did not prevent the bill from passing with a majority of 206.² This action was, not surprisingly, popular with the U.I.L. branches in Britain,³ though it caused a certain amount of heart-searching among protestants and anti-clericals in the national movement.⁴ But though he had been forced to take a firm stand against the government on important aspects of the bill, Redmond was still determined to maintain an independent position and avoid, if possible, any association with the unionists' general opposition to the bill. He appeared on the platform at a mass catholic demonstration in the Albert Hall only after it had been agreed that neither he, nor the duke of Norfolk, nor any other politician, would be called on the speak.⁵

1. W.F.J., 5 May 1906.

2. W.F.J., 19 May 1906.

3. W.F.J., 5 May 1906 et.seq.

4. Alfred Webb and Michael Davitt were for a time most concerned at what they mistakenly took to be the adoption of an irreconcilable attitude on the part of the Irish party leadership. See Webb's letters to Redmond of 3,5,6 and 7 May 1906 (Redmond papers).

5. See Redmond to J.W.Gilbert, 4 May 1906 (Redmond papers), and W.F.J., 12 May 1906.

His position became somewhat easier once the token gesture of a vote against the second reading had been made. The serious business of compromise could then begin. It was not the attitude of the government which was at fault, Redmond said (for the speeches of both Birrell and his parliamentary secretary, T.J. MacNamara, had been conciliatory) but the fact that the bill as it stood did not embody that conciliatory attitude.¹ It was now possible for the Freeman to pronounce the catholic demand 'capable of being met by fair concessions that will not interfere with the reasonable objects of the bill'.² It was 'of the utmost importance....that the bill should reach the lords in a shape in which the Irish catholics of England should be able to accept it'.³

Archbishop Bourne was also at this stage eager for compromise. 'Anything is better', he told Redmond, 'than that dilemma which Mr Birrell⁴ proposed to me last February: "Accept my bill or be starved out of existence"!

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.156 col.1514.
2. F.J., 22 May 1906. The bishop of Limerick was now very much out on a limb in declaring openly (though perhaps not alone in believing inwardly) that 'amend it as you will, it was a bad and unjust bill' (letter in W.F.J., 30 June 1906).
3. W.F.J., 2 June 1908.
4. Archbishop Bourne to Redmond, 15 June 1906 (Redmond papers).

For a few days in June it seemed that the difficulty might be surmounted by a change of heart on the part of the government. On the 12th Birrell brought a stormy interchange to a halt by agreeing to an appeal to the board of education in cases where the local authority refused, for any reason,¹ to take over a voluntary school. A week later the English bishops intimated to Redmond privately that they would consider an appeal to the board of education against the local authority on clause 4 to be as acceptable as their previous demand that the clause be made mandatory on local authorities.² This concession was made by Birrell, but other demands were not met, and the nonconformist blanket seemed to smother further hopes of compromise.³ Bourne wrote again to Redmond on July 9:

It seems to me that our attitude should now be to make it clear that, owing to the action of the government on clause 4, the bill is for us radically unjust and unworkable. As 50% of our schools are excluded from, and only the other 50% may if the L.E.A. be fairminded receive public support, it will be impossible for us to make arrangements for any of our schools, as we cannot in honour abandon the weaker half to save the stronger....We have done our best to be conciliatory, and the ministry have forced us into this attitude of uncompromising hostility to their proposals.

4

-
1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol. 158 col. 839.
 2. A note, 'Handed to me by Archbishop Bourne, 19 June 1906' in Redmond's hand (Redmond papers).
 3. 'The house knew perfectly well that the government would have made the clause [4] mandatory but for the threats of the extreme nonconformists' (W.F.J., 30 June 1906).
 4. Archbishop Bourne to Redmond, 9 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

The summer recess was thus reached with the Irish party opposing the third reading of the bill, reluctantly unable to take their place alongside the government in the expected tussle with the house of lords.¹ But Redmond had at least avoided a serious split in the catholic camp, which might have destroyed the 'Irish vote' in England and given fuel to the 'factionists', especially Healy, at home. Both the archbishop of Westminster and the Duke of Norfolk wrote to thank Redmond for his efforts during the session in defence of catholic education.² Only Cardinal Logue in Ireland lent his dissident voice to that of the bishop of Limerick. At Armagh on August 4 he said that the concessions won by the party were:

....very few and very unimportant....The fight should have been at the polls...[then]....there would not have been so many heirs of Cromwell sent into the house of commons.

3

United action by catholics was relatively easy while straight opposition was the order of the day. It can have been no surprise to Redmond that the government steered away from compromise while the measure was still in the commons, for it was certain that concessions would have to

1. See Redmond's speech on the third reading of the education bill, 30 July 1906 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.162, col.490-6).
2. Archbishop Bourne to Redmond, 1 August 1906; Duke of Norfolk to Redmond, 12 July 1906 (both in Redmond papers).
3. Cardinal Logue at Armagh, 4 Aug.1906 (W.F.J., 11 Aug.1906).

be made on a large scale in the lords if there was to be any hope of the bill passing into law. When the government really became earnest about concessions, then would catholic nationalists, catholic ecclesiastics and catholic Tories have to sort themselves out into those who would do their best to get an acceptable bill through and those who would prefer to kill the bill altogether. If there was to be any prospect of liberal-nationalist cooperation in future sessions, the Irish party had to strive to be in the former category. Equally, when it came to the final battle with the lords, the government would very much prefer to have the 70-odd catholic votes in the commons cast in favour of the bill rather than against it.

At the beginning of November it did not seem that this would be possible. Dillon warned the government that they were drifting into 'a conflict with the house of lords in which the house of lords are in the right and they are in the wrong'¹. But on November 27 Redmond and Dillon had a private interview with Birrell and Campbell-Bannerman which was 'on the whole of a very satisfactory kind'. They found that the government was now willing to reduce the limit for the application of clause 4 from a minimum of four-fifths of the pupils being of any one creed to a minimum of three-quarters, and also to do away with the geographical limitation of the bill to urban areas of over 5,000 population. In the

1. Dillon at Liverpool, 11 Nov.1906 (W.F.J., 17 Nov.1906).

appointment of teachers however, the government were willing to give the parents' committees a 'consultative voice', but not a veto. The Irish leaders told them that if a negative veto was given in appointments, then they would be prepared to vote for the bill.¹

This information was communicated via Archbishop Bourne to the English bishops, who expressed the opinion that if the amendments were not obtained, then it would be better if the lords succeeded in destroying the bill. If the amendments were granted however, the bishops felt that catholic members would be justified in not opposing the bill, 'not because such amendments make it satisfactory, but because it seems the safer course in the present every critical situation'. In conclusion they introduced a new demand, to the effect that the provision of new catholic schools in the future should not be left to the whim of the local authority.²

The bishops thus descended cautiously alongside the Irish party on the side of compromise and acceptance. It was perhaps no accident that as they did this the catholic unionists acted in the opposite direction: a deputation led by the duke of Norfolk, purporting to speak for the 'catholics of England', waited on Lord Lansdowne and plainly ranged

1. Redmond to Bourne, 30 Nov.1906 (Redmond papers).
2. Bourne to Redmond, 4 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers); Bourne to Ripon, 8 Dec. 1906, forwarded by Ripon to Campbell-Bannerman (C.B. papers, Add.Ms.41225 f.191).

themselves under his banner. Redmond told Bourne that this action was 'a great mistake, and has made our task in endeavouring to safeguard the schools under this bill much more difficult'.¹ The archbishop agreed with him that the decision had been a 'lamentable' one.²

Bourne may have sensed a dangerous situation brewing for him, as primate, and a couple of days later he informed Redmond that he was departing immediately for Paris on 'urgent business', from whence he did not return until the crisis had reached its climax.³

On December 12 Redmond had another talk with Birrell, and learned that the cabinet had agreed to all his requested amendments, including a provision to make the concurrence of the parents' committees necessary for appointments to clause 4 schools, and that they were willing to meet the bishops' request on the subject of new schools.⁴ On the same day the Irish party voted with the government to reject the lords' amendments en bloc.⁵ The bishop of Limerick denounced their 'discreditable vote' before the world, but he was virtually on his own.⁶

-
1. Redmond to Bourne, 30 Nov.1906, second letter of the day (Redmond papers).
 2. Bourne to Redmond, 1 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. Bourne to Redmond, 4 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers); Bourne to Ripon, 8 Dec. 1906 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41225 f.191).
 4. Redmond to Bourne, 12 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers).
 5. Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.167 col.467. T.M.Healy, Wm.O'Brien, and A.Roche voted with the opposition.
 6. Letter from the bishop of Limerick, in F.J., 15 Dec.1906. He asserted that it was 'all settled in the Eighty Club by one of the political brokers that carried the Irish vote in his breeches' pocket'.

Dillon thought it 'rather fortunate that O'Dwyer has come out in such an outrageous manner. It will make the others unwilling to follow such a lead. He nonetheless warned Redmond that 'the Duke of Norfolk and his gang' would be doing their best to get the English bishops to declare in some way against the Irish party.¹ But when Redmond called on Bourne on December 17 he found him most friendly, and in fact preparing to write to O'Dwyer, remonstrating with him concerning his outburst.

Redmond reported to Dillon:

He told me that at the meeting of bishops there were only two or three in favour of wrecking the bill, and all the rest took his view very strongly indeed that if we got the terms for which we were negotiating they would be well out of it and that the proper policy would be to facilitate its passage. The matter of our vote with the government the other night he said he regarded purely as a matter of tactics, and as a matter of tactics he said that his own individual opinion was that we did the right thing.

2

Those branches of catholic opinion which were hostile to the Irish party were thus unable to make much capital out of the affair, and recriminations were made to seem somewhat pointless once the government decided to drop the mutilated bill altogether. The episode

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 15 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond to Dillon, 17 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers).

seemed if anything to have strengthened the bonds between the Irish party and the English catholic body: the secretary of the catholic education council, Mgr Tynan, conveyed to Redmond his opinion 'that the Irish party acted with great political insight in the working out of catholic principles all through this very involved question'; and Archbishop Bourne, in a speech in Birmingham in January 1907, declared that there could be no such thing as a 'catholic party' in English politics, and that the church leaders had no right 'to ask any man to depart from his allegiance to the party of his choice.'¹

This limited cooperation between the Irish party and the English hierarchy was continued during the next two years: the abortive education bills of McKenna and Runciman were never carried far enough to occasion any split in the catholic forces, whilst in the dispute over the convent inspection clauses of Herbert Gladstone's factory and workshop bill of 1907, Redmond was able to command the assistance of Archbishop Bourne as a mediator between himself and Cardinal Logue.²

-
1. Mgr Tynan to Redmond, 21 Dec.1906; Archbishop Bourne at Birmingham, 22 Jan.1907 (both in W.F.J., 26 Jan.1907).
 2. Without success, however, See various letters among Redmond's papers, especially: Redmond to Bourne, 11 and 19 July, and 1 August, 1907; Bourne to Redmond, 18 July 1907; Cardinal Logue to Bishop Sheehan (two telegrams) 3 August 1907; and Redmond to Bishop Sheehan, 5 Aug. 1907 (all in Redmond papers).

But in 1908 the control of the U.I.L.G.B. over the Irish catholic vote was challenged at a number of by-elections in England, notably at North-West Manchester, and the government's belated prohibition of the eucharistic procession through London on September 1908 worsened liberal-catholic relations further, and postponed any attempt to settle the schools question by consent.¹ In the Yorkshire municipal elections it was reported that in Bradford the Irish catholic vote went to liberal and labour, while in neighbouring Leeds it went equally solidly to the conservatives.²

In fact, as a possible end to the parliament of 1906 came into view, English catholic bodies began to show less willingness to bend before the nonconformist storm than they had during the first flush of its power. Even as the 1906 education bill was being destroyed in the lords, the first signs of recalcitrance were appearing: when Redmond heard of a proposal to organise catholic associations in London he wrote to tell Bourne that he 'would regard such a move as hostile to our political organisation', but received the reply that Bourne himself was behind the idea, that the associations would not be antagonistic to any

1. See *infra*, ch.6; Also Bourne to Walter Runciman, 24 Sept.1908 (copy in the Redmond papers).

2. W.F.J., 7 Nov.1908.

existing organisations, and that 'to manifest hostility....would certainly be regarded not only as an act of great unfriendliness to London catholics and to myself personally, but as a challenge to my authority as archbishop'¹. In fact, as the north-west Manchester election later showed, the catholic associations, when under the direction of priests unsympathetic to Irish nationalism, could act as a political pressure group competing directly with the U.I.L.G.B., and their success would involve the extinction of the latter organisation as a serious political force.

The split between English and Irish catholics was made fully manifest by Bourne himself in an address to the Catholic Truth Society at Manchester, on 20 September 1909. Every one of the liberal education bills, he said, 'would have done the gravest injury to the sacred cause of catholic education'. He went into some detail over the negotiations of December 1906, explaining that the bishops had given encouragement to them in the hope that they might form not a settlement, but simply a 'modus vivendi' in view of the grave situation for the catholic schools at that time. But, he continued, the concessions promised by Campbell-Bannerman and Birrell to Redmond at that time had not, in the circumstances,

1. Redmond to Bourne, 4 Dec.1906; Bourne to Redmond, 8 Dec.1906 (both in Redmond papers).

been either discussed in cabinet or presented to the house of commons, and subsequent education ministers had made it clear by their actions (and in Runciman's case by an explicit statement to Bourne) that they did not feel themselves bound by what had taken place in December 1906. In the circumstances Bourne felt it 'providential that these negotiations proved abortive'. Passing on to the matter of the catholic associations he re-iterated his doctrine that the church did not dictate party politics to its members, but now slanted that doctrine plainly against the U.I.L.: 'it must be understood that we cannot allow any political party or political organisation to dictate to us the manner in which we are to discharge our sacred duty of protecting the interests committed to our charge'¹.

Not all influential figures in the English catholic church followed Bourne's course. Mgr Tynan, of the Salford catholic schools association, wrote to tell Redmond at the end of December 1909 that 'all would be united here in a policy to return a liberal government, but not so strong as to outnumber the Irish party'². Fr W.F.Brown of Vauxhall, perhaps the most politically active of the London priests, also felt that 'it is perfectly certain that, given the desire, the government can devise

1. Bourne at Manchester, 20 Sept.1909 (W.F.J., 25 Sept.1909).

2. Mgr Tynan to Redmond, 30 Dec.1909 (Redmond papers).

a plan whereby the schools remain in the national system subject to popular control, yet catholic schools in the fullest sense of the word'.¹
But these men were by inclination liberal-nationalists in politics. The bulk of English catholic opinion followed Archbishop Bourne, whose policies in 1909 seem to represent a complete reversal of his previous position. But this volte-face was simply the result of changed political circumstances: in 1906, the best course for the defence of the catholic schools lay in co-operation with the government; in 1909 it might be thought to lie instead with a change of government.

1. Rev. W.F.Brown to Redmond, 2 Dec.1909 (Redmond papers).

CHAPTER III. THE IRISH COUNCIL BILL, 1906-7.

1. Sir Antony MacDonnell and his 'great scheme', 1906.

Sir Antony MacDonnell was appointed under secretary for Ireland by the unionist government in October 1902. He had been recommended to the chief secretary, George Wyndham, on his retirement from the Indian civil service, where his administrative abilities had won him both a knighthood and a privy councillorship. But he was an Irishman and a catholic, whose brother had been a nationalist M.P., and who was himself rumoured to be a home ruler. Indeed, the Irish party had offered him a seat in parliament on his return from India, but he had refused, Lord Lansdowne told Wyndham, because:

He considers an Irish parliament out of the question, and objects to the tactics which have led to the obstruction of useful measures in the hope that such obstruction would eventually bring about home rule.

1

This assurance, coming from a senior cabinet minister who was also an Irish landlord, silenced Balfour's tentative objection. But the conditions of MacDonnell's appointment, had they been more widely known, would have brought the full weight of Ulster unionist opposition to bear on Wyndham's policy two years earlier than was in fact to be the case

1. Lord Lansdowne to G.Wyndham, 11 Sept.1902 (J.W.Mackail and Guy Wyndham, Life and letters of George Wyndham (London, 1925), ii. 754).

Wyndham explained to Lansdowne that MacDonnell's plans to co-ordinate the Dublin Castle boards accorded well with his own ideas:

Co-ordination of boards ought to be attempted. We cannot rest satisfied forever with the natl.bd. of education! Nor, I think, with the L[ocal] G[overnment] B[oard]; the new department [i.e. the D.A.T.I.]; the C.D.B.; the public works as an outpost of the treasury; all as separate entities....[Sir David] Harrel acted as my premier in an informal cabinet. That is why I deplore his loss and look to Sir A.M. as a possible substitute who might help me further on the road of co-ordination.

1

In fact MacDonnell did not regard Harrel's position as at all satisfactory.

The power of individual departments to communicate direct with the chief secretary, he thought, precluded any worthwhile 'co-ordination', and left to the under secretary the burden of repressive police work (Harrel had previously been inspector-general of the R.I.C.), for which MacDonnell personally had no taste.

2

Wyndham therefore agreed to appoint MacDonnell on his own terms, which far exceeded the usual powers of a permanent official. MacDonnell took office specially to attempt specific changes, and on condition that 'I am given adequate opportunities of influencing the action and the policy of the Irish government and (subject of course to your control) am allowed freedom of action within the law'.

3

-
1. Wyndham to Lansdowne, 12 Sept.1902 (Mackail and Wyndham, George Wyndham ii. 755).
 2. Lansdowne to Wyndham, 11 Sept.1902 (Mackail and Wyndham, George Wyndham, ii.754).
 3. Sir A.MacDonnell to Wyndham, 22 Sept.1902 (Mackail and Wyndham, George Wyndham, ii. 761-2). MacDonnell's stated aims were: the solution of the land question on the basis of voluntary sale; co-ordination of the administration with the aim of 'conciliation'; and a university settlement 'on the basis of Mr Balfour's views.'

Meticulous as always, MacDonnell sought to consolidate his position further by consulting also with the liberal opposition, through Lord Ripon (whose connection with MacDonnell was both Catholic and Indian), before accepting the appointment. Ripon had initially advised him to steer clear, since the possibilities of an administrator achieving anything under a tory government were minimal ('the days of Thomas Drummond are over'), but later agreed that since Wyndham had met his conditions, MacDonnell was justified in accepting.¹ Had Wyndham known of this, he might even then have doubted the wisdom of appointing a man whose disregard for 'politics' permitted him to whisper such confidences through the party wall.

The outline of MacDonnell's stormy career under the unionist government is well-known - the successful treatment of the land question, the failure to evince enthusiasm or agreement on a university settlement; and the 'misunderstanding' over the devolution proposals which culminated in the resignation of Wyndham - though perhaps it is worth noting that not only was MacDonnell as under secretary 'associated' with Dunraven's proposals, but was himself the author of them.² Wyndham's resignation

-
1. Lord Ripon to MacDonnell, 20 and 29 Sept. 1902 (Ripon papers, B.M. Add. Ms. 43542 ff. 89, 94).
 2. 'The "Dunraven" scheme was drawn up by me', wrote MacDonnell to James Bryce on 11 Feb. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11012).

and the appointment of Walter Long marks the final defeat of moderate unionism in the tory party and the return to a policy of resolute coercion. His party already badly split by the tariff controversy, Balfour was in no position to take up the cudgels against the powerful Irish unionist group. Wyndham was forced to resign, and only a determination to justify his own conduct prevented MacDonnell from doing likewise. Long felt that to dismiss his under secretary would cause unnecessary trouble in the country and arouse suspicions of anti-catholic prejudice, and so MacDonnell stayed on, though he had no interest in implementing a coercionist policy.¹ It was perhaps best for both of them that a severe illness kept him away from Dublin Castle for most of Long's tenure.

By the spring of 1905 it was clear to all sides of the political world that nothing less than a miracle (or, feared some liberals, a declaration by their leaders in favour of Gladstonian home rule) could save the unionists from a heavy electoral defeat. It is no surprise, therefore, to find MacDonnell once more in communication with the liberal leaders at this time. He talked with either Campbell-Bannerman or Ripon in February, and wrote to the liberal leader via Ripon in May 'regarding

1. C. Petrie, Walter Long and his times (London, 1936) p.81.

the adaption to Ireland of the Indian system of provincial finance' and the possible creation of a financial council in Ireland. The evidence for this (in Lord Ripon's papers) is scanty and not very explicit, but it seems probable that the communications marked an attempt to establish a basis for co-operation between the under secretary and a future liberal government.¹ Further progress during the summer was precluded by MacDonnell's illness, but on October 1, T.R. Buchanan reported to Campbell-Bannerman that MacDonnell intended to stay on in Ireland.² MacDonnell himself confirmed this in a letter to Ripon a few days later, in which he explained that he had declined a seat on the India council, at least until a general election decided the future, 'believing as I do that a liberal government can do much for Ireland (even short of Gladstonian home rule)'.³

-
1. Rough note in MacDonnell's hand dated 21 Feb.1905, with Ripon's addition: 'This paper was given to me on 9/5/05 to be sent to Sir H.C.B. (Ripon papers, Add.Ms.43542 f.155). At about the same time the prime minister, A.J.Balfour, was writing to the king about MacDonnell, 23 Feb.1905: 'There seems to be strong grounds for believing that he has communicated the substance of official documents to members of the opposition' (P.R.O., Cab.41/31/11).
 2. T.R. Buchanan to Campbell-Bannerman, 1 Oct.1905: 'Antony MacDonnell has forty gallstones taken out of him, and says that now he will stick to the Irish office' (C.B. papers, Add.Ms.41238 f.64).
 3. MacDonnell to Ripon, 6 Oct.1905 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms.43542 f.156).

Eight weeks later a liberal government was in office, and the under secretary was working on a scheme along the lines of those proposals which a few months previously had been the cause of Wyndham's downfall. MacDonnell had greatly miscalculated if he ever really believed that a unionist government could have implemented his plan, but for the liberals, desperately in need of a compromise Irish policy, his ideas seemed providential. Liberal candidates everywhere were able to shake off the shackles of Gladstonian home rule and swing into line behind a policy of tackling the Irish question 'along the lines laid down by Mr Wyndham'.¹ Not until later was it realised that opinion in Ireland was not prepared to swing in the same direction - though MacDonnell never ceased to claim that it had.

Redmond met MacDonnell in Dublin at the end of December 1905, and was told that the under secretary was already drafting a scheme for the reform of Irish government, which would probably be introduced in 1907. Redmond warned that the 'Dunraven' scheme would not be acceptable to the Irish party, but MacDonnell assured him that the new scheme would be on a much larger scale.² Redmond came away from the interview with

-
1. The phrase was used by Lord Crewe, speaking at Crewe on 2 Jan.1906
(Times, 3 Jan.1906).
 2. The 'Dunraven' scheme, drafted by MacDonnell and published by Lord Dunraven's Irish Reform Association in 1904, had suggested a financial council of 12 elected and 12 nominated members to control Irish expenditure (The Earl of Dunraven, The outlook in Ireland (London,1907) pp.271-80).

the impression that the scheme 'would place every department of Irish government and finance under the control of an Irish body, in which the elected element would be supreme (probably 3/4)¹'.

Had Redmond been able to see the first draft of the scheme, which MacDonnell sent to Bryce a month later, he would have been less optimistic. The draft provided for an executive council to 'advise and assist' the government of Ireland, consisting of 30 members, ten to be nominated by the lord lieutenant and twenty to be elected indirectly by delegates from the county councils, voting by provinces as electoral colleges. The scheme retained the full supremacy of parliament over Irish affairs, and was intended as 'essentially a development of the existing system of local government in Ireland'. Its immediate aims, MacDonnell said, were:

- (a) To co-ordinate and bring under a reasonable measure of popular control all the departments of government now working in Ireland without radically altering the constitution of any (except the education department) and (b) to confer on the Irish government such control over Irish expenditure as will enforce efficiency and economy.

2

-
1. 'Note of an interview with Sir A. MacDonnell' in Redmond's hand. No date, but internal evidence places it at around 31 Dec. 1905 (Redmond papers).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 3 Feb. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11012). The following summary of MacDonnell's scheme is based on this letter and on a typed draft 'Outline of Irish constitutional reform, 14 Feb. 1906;' (MacDonnell papers, Bodleian Library, Ms. c369 ff. 1-14).

In fact, however, a number of 'imperial services' could not be handed over to the council, and control of police, justice, and land purchase finance was also to be retained by parliament.¹ Those departments and boards which were transferred² would be administered by committees (each composed of five councillors) which would submit resolutions to the full council. Permanent heads of departments would take part in committee discussions, but not vote.³ The supremacy of parliament would be secured by the lord lieutenant's power to suspend the operation of any council decision for one month while it was laid on the table of both houses at Westminster. The lord lieutenant would also be president of the council.

Co-ordination of departments as much as democratic control was the keynote of this scheme.⁴ The semi-independent boards and the heads of the departments would, through the medium of the council, be brought

-
1. The most important 'imperial services' were the inland revenue, the board of trade, the customs, and the post office.
 2. The most important ones were the local government board, the congested districts board, the department of agriculture and technical instruction, the public works commission, and the national and intermediate education boards.
 3. The under secretary would be an ex officio member of all committees, though MacDonnell stressed that he personally would retire as soon as the scheme was brought to fruition.
 4. For the administrative structure of Ireland under the union see R.B. MacDowell, The Irish administration, 1801-1914 (London, 1964).

under a centralised control. Only in the sphere of education was MacDonnell dissatisfied with the administrative machinery at intra-departmental level. In place of the unpaid boards of national education (established 1813) and intermediate education (1878) and the technical instruction branch of the D.A.T.I. (1899), he proposed a single administrative agency under a permanent, paid, 'director of public instruction', responsible to the appropriate committee of the council. To meet the special difficulty of popular control of schools in a catholic country, the lord lieutenant would, in addition, be empowered to appoint ten men (or women), not being members of the council, as a sub-committee to consult with the director, and sit if necessary with the council committee. The great merit of the arrangement thought MacDonnell, was that:

....it throws overboard that balancing of protestants against catholics which has hitherto been thought high statesmanship in Ireland. Let the people choose whom they please; and let government only nominate to give minorities and expert knowledge a chance.

1

In the matter of finance MacDonnell inclined more to deference. He proposed to leave the details to a small group of experts, and was content simply to outline broad principles. The imposition and collection

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 8 Feb.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms.11012).

of taxes would remain with the British treasury, but the financial administration of Ireland was to be delegated to the 'lord lieutenant in council' (in practice the majority will of the council) 'in pursuance of a reasonable contract for five years made by the treasury with the Irish government'. Each year the treasury would pay into an Irish fund under the control of an imperial officer (the 'treasurer for Ireland'), a sum based on the estimated expenditure of the services transferred, plus an amount to compensate for the overtaxation of Ireland, assessed on the basis of the Childers commission report of 1896.¹

Bryce was generally pleased with the draft, and thought it furnished 'a promising basis'. But he pointed to a number of difficulties. The possible criticism that voting by provincial electoral colleges might result in total non-representation of even quite large minority groups within each province (e.g. Ulster might be all conservative or all nationalist) was to be guarded against. More important, against the constitutional precedent of equality of powers between lords and commons (except in the case of finance) had to be weighed the fact that to grant the lords power to annul council

1. Royal commission on the financial relations between Great Britain and Ireland. final report, 1896, C.8262.

resolutions would be fatal to the future of the council. (In later drafts, the lord lieutenant's reference back was specifically to the house of commons). Bryce also thought it would be more prudent from the point of view of British opinion to specify the topics which were to be referred to the council, rather than merely to list the reserved ones,¹ and this suggestion was adopted.

During the following weeks the outline was considered by a committee of financial experts of the liberal persuasion, under the chairmanship of Spencer Walpole, the most prominent members of which, Lord Welby and Sir Francis Mowatt, ventured far beyond the strictly financial sphere in their assistance.² The financial proceedings of this committee remain shrouded in mystery however, but judging by the occasional reports which Welby and Mowatt sent to Bryce, there was little controversy. In the field of finance the main struggle, as might be expected, would be with the treasury.

-
1. Bryce to MacDonnell, 9 Feb.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.c.350 f.21).
 2. MacDonnell had intended to consult Thomas Sexton, the leading nationalist financial expert, at this stage, but was persuaded against this by Mowatt See MacDonnell to Bryce, 14 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms.11012).

It is as well to pause here and look at some of the intentions behind the scheme as it had so far emerged. MacDonnell had proposed a body of 30 members, clearly designed to be an administrative council and not a deliberative assembly. The nominated members guaranteed that it would not become a vehicle for nationalist partisans, as had the general council of county councils. But some concession to the principle of majority rule would nonetheless be expected, and MacDonnell soon decided that a council composed of twenty elected and ten nominated members was not likely to satisfy this demand:

If it were thought (as it would be by suspicious nationalists) that the nominated members would be more unionist than nationalist, the inference would at once be drawn that the nationalists would be kept in a permanent minority on the council. That would not do.

He thus proposed a slight modification, to make the body three-quarters elected: a council of 32, to include only eight nominated members:

The division by political creed would be nationalists 16, unionists 8, nominated 8. It would be hard to object to a scheme which gives 24 elected members out of 32, i.e. 3/4 elected. But in the circumstances an equilibrium of forces would be produced if any very revolutionary proposal were made.

1

It was scarcely a great concession in the direction of democratic control. Such a concession, MacDonnell felt, would have prejudiced the scheme's chances of acceptance by moderate unionists. Equally important, perhaps, was his fear that a nationalist majority, even one indirectly elected,

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 10 Feb. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11012).

would, without a strong moderating influence, not approach the problems of government in the way he would like. He was supported in this view by Sir Francis Mowatt, who wrote to warn Bryce against Lord Aberdeen's proposal to increase the size of the council to 56: 'the controlling influence of the government will be swamped'¹. This was a basic assumption of the MacDonnell scheme - that the government should retain a controlling interest, beneath democratic trimmings.

By the beginning of May 1906, MacDonnell had in fact increased the size of the council from 32 to 36, but the additional four were to be nominated members (i.e. the proportion of elected members was back to two-thirds). He strongly advised Bryce to introduce the scheme on this basis: 'afterwards it would be a great concession to give them a further proportion of elected members'². The point at issue was that whatever the size of the council, if it were three-quarters elected the nationalists could (under fair electoral divisions and given the existing political climate) count on a working majority, whereas if only two-thirds were elected, they could not. If MacDonnell had anything to do with the appointment of the nominated members one could be fairly certain, even though he called them 'nationalist' (he regarded himself as a

-
1. Mowatt to Bryce, n.d. probably March 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms.11012)
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

nationalist sympathiser), that they would in fact be men of the Irish Reform Association type, efficient landowners and 'business men' of moderate views, men 'with a stake in the country': nationalists, maybe, in the sense that their main aim was to improve the condition of Ireland, but anti-nationalist in that they were more or less the same people who had wanted to 'kill home rule by kindness'.

Pointing in the same direction as the idea of a small council only two-thirds elected, was MacDonnell's plan for indirect election by county councillors or their delegates. As the nominated members would strengthen the voice of 'business' against 'politics' so, MacDonnell hoped, the use of county councillors as electors would produce men of this type among the elected members also. He wrote to Bryce on May 15:

I hope you give Redmond no encouragement to think that the scheme will proceed on the basis of direct election. You must keep the decision on that very important point over till you come here in the autumn and winter and are able to take soundings in all classes of people. As at present advised I think that the county councils form the best electorate; and the most likely to give the scheme a fair chance. Election by the parliamentary voters will be likely to produce men who strive to wreck the scheme in the hope of going further. Moreover, the adoption of the county council electorate will give you a chance of appealing from Redmond to the country: which an astute politician like Redmond will not neglect. My surmise is that the R.C. priests will be against the co.councils plan and in favour of the direct one: for the county councils are showing some independence of clerical dictation.

It would be an enormous gain if you had the county councils on your side. Then a great party on moderation would arise in Ireland.

1

A further restriction on democratic control was embodied by MacDonnell in the committee system. The government would have the casting vote in all committees of which the under secretary was a member (all of them, in fact), except the finance committee, where the government would have a clear majority. This arrangement, thought MacDonnell, was 'not too much, not too little'.² Even Lord Aberdeen, who in the later stages of negotiations was to throw all the influence he could muster behind MacDonnell's point of view, considered that this was too much. The lord lieutenant, as the crown's representative, should not, he thought, be given the majority of votes on any committee except the one for finance. To do otherwise would 'excite suspicion'.³ But MacDonnell hoped that nationalist suspicions as to the scope of the measure would be overcome by the generosity of the financial settlement.⁴

This raised problems in another quarter. Sir George Murray, the head of the British treasury, was but little impressed with the provisions drafted by MacDonnell and his financial committee, and the ⁵ at the end of April sent Bryce a lengthy critique. MacDonnell, however,

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 15 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 7 Apr.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
 3. 'Irish constitutional reform', a cabinet paper by Lord Aberdeen, 12 June 1906 (P.R.O., Cab. 37/83/54).
 4. MacDonnell to Bryce, 21 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 5. G.H.Murray to Bryce, 28 Apr. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

was 'not frightened by it...If Sir George knew how all his difficulties were met by the Indian practice he would be less sceptical'.¹ The basic problems were the power of parliament over the council's estimates between the quinquennial contract revisions, and the place of land purchase finance in the new scheme.² These problems were still unsettled in the summer, when the treasury chiefs submitted a paper to the cabinet in which they denounced the whole plan as an extension of the grants-in-aid system, which was becoming 'a means of withdrawing the expenditure of increasingly large sums from the proper and necessary parliamentary control'. They urged that, with important branches of administration such as police and land purchase necessarily reserved, 'there will be little scope for such re-adjustments as might compensate for the disturbance of existing arrangements'.³ It is difficult not to

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 29 Apr.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).
 2. It was agreed that the council could not be permitted to take over completely the administration of £100M. of British credit, but MacDonnell felt, rightly, that the nationalists would not agree to the total exclusion of land purchase operations from the scheme. He was also 'very strong on the point that, if possible, the Irish government should share during the currency of the contract in the growing prosperity of the country...the alternative would be short-term contracts and constant quarrels over the bargain'. MacDonnell to Bryce, 7 and 29 Apr.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).
 3. Cabinet paper on the financial provisions of the outline scheme of Irish reform, by E.W.Hamilton, G.H.Murray, and W.Balin, 2 July 1906 (Cab. 37/83/61).

agree with Sir Francis Mowatt's tart reply:

The arguments of the treasury appear to be directed against the principle of any devolution of Irish domestic administration, rather than against the particular proposals of the scheme now under consideration....It is probable that the government, in coming to a decision, will be influenced by many considerations other than those of financial convenience.

1

Mowatt's view seems to have commanded more support in the government, for despite wide-ranging treasury criticisms, the preparation of the scheme continued apace. Papers were first put before the cabinet in June 1906 (though no discussion then took place) and a cabinet committee was appointed to discuss details. Membership included Bryce, Asquith, Haldane, Crewe, Grey, Burns, and Lloyd George. It met twice during July, once to consider general provisions and once to consider finance. MacDonnell's cabinet paper of June 19 offered the committee a choice of four schemes: election might be direct or indirect; the proportion of elected members might be two-thirds or three-quarters; and the number of members could be anything from 28 to 56. The proceedings

-
1. 'A note on the treasury memorandum', cabinet paper by Sir.F.Mowatt, 9 July 1906 (Cab.37/83/64).
 2. Elizabeth Dillon to Edward Blake, 9 Dec.1906 (Blake papers, N.L.I. microfilm, p.4683 f.584).
 3. There may have been other members. This information is gathered from various references in letters from MacDonnell to Bryce, esp. 12 Mar.1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015); and from references in John Burns' diaries (Burns papers, B.M. Add.Ms.46324-6).
 4. MacDonnell to Bryce, 20 July 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 5. 'Outline of Irish constitutional reform', cabinet paper prepared by the Irish office, 19 June 1906 (Cab.37/83/58).

of this committee have not come to light. But on July 26 MacDonnell submitted a revised draft, presumably as a result of its suggestions. Most of the modifications were minor ones, relating to the appointment of officers of the council, and to the provisions for equivalent grants. But one important political decision was taken. Preference was expressed for a fifth schedule, 'scheme E', which MacDonnell had submitted concerning the constitution of the council: election was to be indirect, and only two-thirds of the members were to be elected, but the size of the council was to be increased to 55 (thirty-seven elected). The reason for this increase however, as against the later increases made to pacify the nationalists, was that a council that was any smaller would be unable to provide enough manpower for all the committees and yet still have a reservoir of a dozen or so members without commitments.

Thus far, the development of the scheme had been undertaken in great secrecy.² The king's speech on 19 February 1906 had announced that 'my ministers have under consideration plans for improving and effecting

-
1. 'Outline of another scheme', cabinet paper by the Irish office, 26 July 1906 (Cab.37/83/71.)
 2. MacDonnell especially stressed this. He was very annoyed with Mowatt for discussing some points with a fellow-financier back in March 1906. See MacDonnell to Bryce, 20 Mar. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.Ms.11013).

economies in the system of government in Ireland, and for introducing into it means for associating the people with the conduct of Irish affairs'.¹ But this was scarcely a very explicit statement, and the implications of its vagueness did not quickly become apparent to the nationalist 'man in the street'. The historian G.P. Gooch M.P., rebuked by Bryce for lifting the veil from the government's plan whilst touring in the west of Ireland in September 1906, protested that 'a lot of people did not realise that we were pledged to bring in no home rule bill this session, and I think it is important that they should not expect what they will not get'.²

The Irish leaders knew better than this of course, although as we have seen, Redmond and MacDonnell had not completely understood one another at their meeting prior to the general election.³ No public mention was made of the scheme during the first seven months of the year, nor were Redmond and Dillon consulted at all. Certain impressions were formed, probably based on hints picked up from W.F. Bailey and M.Finucane, the estates commissioners, who were on confidential terms

1. Parl't. Deb., H.L. 4 series, 152 col.1.

2. G.P.Gooch to Bryce, 30 Sept.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11014).

3. See supra p. 185.

with both MacDonnell and Dillon, but by July the nationalist leaders were becoming somewhat anxious as the end of session approached and they had nothing to offer their constituents. The labourers' and town tenants' measures were useful reforms, but their appeal was sectional only. The Wyndham act had lost most of its glitter, especially in the west, whilst 'government according to Irish ideas' appeared to mean not consultation on day-to-day administration with Redmond and Dillon, but a free hand for Sir Antony MacDonnell, who pursued, as in all things, a highly individual course. At the end of July Dillon wrote anxiously from his home in Mayo, pressing Redmond to demand a clear statement from Bryce as to when he proposed to consult them on the scheme.¹ Redmond had discussed the problem with Bryce on the same day, and was told that the cabinet would probably authorise Bryce to lay the whole scheme before them in September, when he returned from holiday. Redmond viewed the position with more equanimity than did Dillon, and had heard from 'one of our friends in the cabinet' that the scheme was only in skeleton form, 'and Bryce assures me that nothing will be done in the direction of reducing it to a draft bill until we have considered it fully'.²

MacDonnell, however, had different ideas. He wrote to Bryce on July 30: 'until the bill is drafted, and we see how it looks, is it

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

2. Redmond to Dillon, 26 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

wise to show the scheme to Redmond and co?¹ Since Bryce did not anyway intend to tell Redmond anything until he reached Dublin in September, there was no need to take a hasty decision, the under secretary urged. Furthermore, he considered that to inform Redmond of the principles of their plan would necessitate communicating the great bulk of the scheme, and 'if you communicate the whole scheme.... any modifications of detail afterwards introduced may create suspicions. I should much prefer to talk the matter over with you before a decision is come to'.²

There were a number of motives for MacDonnell's reticence on this matter. Firstly, the financial settlement had not been finally agreed, and he considered that the best way of ensuring nationalist co-operation was to obtain and publish a very generous settlement, which the Irish leaders would not dare reject. Furthermore, he had little confidence in the constructive ability of these leaders, and hoped to have as much as possible of the detail of the scheme worked out and agreed on by the government before it was exposed to nationalist criticism. If, as MacDonnell must have feared, the Irish leaders would not like the scheme very much, it would not be politic to allow them to have the summer recess in which to manoeuvre public feeling against it.

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 30 July 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 4 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

MacDonnell's anxiety on this point explains another little incident which occurred about this time. On 1 August 1906, as guest of honour at a dinner given by the Master Builders' Association in Dublin, MacDonnell made a speech which, The Times' Dublin correspondent reported, provoked 'eager discussion and surprise in political circles'. The under secretary expressed his firm belief:

...that the coming year, 1907, would see the fruition of many of those hopes which the best Irishmen had for many years entertained. It might not be the fruition of everything Irishmen had hoped for but it would be, he believed, the fruition of so much that Irishmen, if they were true to themselves, would make it the fountain and the source from which the whole of their hopes might be fulfilled.

1

The vagueness and optimism of this speech combined to produce rather more public interest than MacDonnell had hoped for. Bryce rebuked him somewhat for making it, and MacDonnell complained that all the newspapers other than The Times had taken his remarks to mean more than they in fact did. Arch-unionist William Moore, in a speech at Dungannon on August 13, denounced the episode as another scandalous intrusion into politics by MacDonnell, and interpreted his words as a declaration for

1. Times, 3 Aug.1906.

home rule.¹ Contrary to his intentions, MacDonnell had raised the passions of the unionists and the hopes of the nationalists. He explained to Bryce that:

The few words I said at the builders' dinner were intended to promote quietness during the recess, by reminding people that there was hope in the future. In what I said, I did not mean to go beyond what you and the P.M. had said previously. The Times alone reported me correctly.

2

MacDonnell sought to spread a little peace and goodwill in another direction also. On August 4 he told Bryce that he had, 'without unbosoming myself', talked discreetly round the subject of the scheme with William O'Brien, and was greatly pleased at the response he had received. He hoped that when the time came, Bryce would take O'Brien into confidence to some extent, for all that was needed to secure his support was a generous contract provision: something

-
1. Times, 14 Aug.1906. This study is not concerned with the 'embarrassing letters' affair of September-October 1906, when Walter Long attempted to embarrass the tory leadership by new allegations concerning the circumstances of MacDonnell's appointment and career under Wyndham (see R.Fanning, 'The unionist party and Ireland, 1906-10', in I.H.S., Vol.XV, no.58, Sept.1966). It may be, however, that MacDonnell's speech at the builders' dinner, interpreted as it was by unionists as a home rule declaration, sparked off Long's accusation four weeks later. It seems certain that the purpose of Long's outburst was to force zeal for the union back into the forefront of a party programme which was rapidly becoming bogged down in the tariff reform issue.
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 9 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

in the region of £1 million per annum above 'the strict test of current necessities', including savings. O'Brien told MacDonnell that what the people expected from the liberals for the time being was the creation of an elective body to supervise the greater part, if not all, of Irish administration.¹

But this sudden intrusion of politics into the game of constitution-making so shocked Bryce, normally timid and almost deferential towards MacDonnell where Irish politics was concerned, into an unusually forthright statement of his views:

I read an interview with William O'Brien in Saturday's Tribune. He is reasonable, though he must have a bit at those who parted from him on the conference question. But I fear he has interpreted your words as meaning much more than the bill of next year can contain. The exclusion of any legislative function may prove to be a grave disappointment to all sections of nationalists; and instead of stimulating discussions on the subject, I should wish them to be in a frame of mind which would expect little and be grateful for what it got. What one fears is that the ultra party, the fenian dregs, the sinn fein men, etc., etc., will, when our little chicken is hatched, cry out "so this is all the result of your parliamentary party and its dealings with the English government!" J.E.R., who already thinks himself in a tight place, will be in a tighter one, and the house of lords, when it considers whether to reject the bill, will say "As it is plain that this measure will not conciliate Ireland, why attempt a certainly difficult, possibly dangerous experiment, with no good result to follow?" However, we must go on, and can't enlarge the scheme much further, whatever R. and D. may say. It is of course a much greater step forward than they will admit: so long a step that it is important to do everything to get it through the lords. 2

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 4 and 15 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11013).
 2. Bryce to MacDonnell, 13 Aug.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.c.350 f.27).

There was no significant increase in disorder during the recess, but MacDonnell's hope of maintaining a 'quiet' atmosphere, let alone Bryce's aim of getting the Irish leaders into a state of mind 'where they would expect little and be grateful for what they got', was not achieved. The rash of speeches which followed MacDonnell's declaration was in fact part of a general campaign by the nationalists to assemble the weight of public opinion behind their political wagon before it was trundled into detailed negotiations with the government in the autumn.

Dillon, speaking in Leitrim on August 15, said that the government would find the Irish people reasonable and ready to make concessions if they offered a genuine system of self-government which included complete administrative control of the country through the directly elected representatives of the people. But any artificial system which was 'calculated to make Irish self-government ludicrous or contemptible' would end in disaster. The government would be trusted only when they introduced a measure for Ireland as good as that given to the Boers.¹ Three days later at Mallow, with Pavlovian predictability, William O'Brien expressed the hope that Irishmen would consider the promised legislation extremely carefully, and warned that:

1. Dillon at Leitrim, 15 Aug.1906 (Times, 21 Aug.1906).

... to tell the Irish people that the bill will give them all at once, and as a minimum, nothing less than the Boers had got in the way of complete, responsible government, is nonsense - pernicious nonsense - and nobody knows that better than Mr Dillon.

1

MacDonnell's behind-the-scenes efforts had not been completely wasted. But this kind of public debate was not at all what Bryce wanted, and he was at least wise enough in the ways of Irish politics to realise that no advantage could come to the government through associating with the O'Brienites against the official Irish party, unfortunate though that might be. As G.P.Gooch lamented, 'it is a great pity that O'Brien's journalistic and other attacks on his old friends have made him so unpopular outside his own district, and therefore rendered him not only useless but dangerous as an ally'.

2

Bryce therefore wrote once more to caution MacDonnell, whose political sense was always somewhat blurred on questions of this nature by his belief in the imminent possibility of a strong moderate party emerging in Ireland: a party which O'Brien might be associated with, but which by its nature precluded any Dillonite influence and implied the destruction of the nationalist party. MacDonnell's reply was a polite

1. Wm O'Brien at Mallow, 18 Aug.1906 (Times, 21 Aug.1906).

2. G.P.Gooch to Bryce, 30 Sept.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11014).

but sweeping denial. It was also a clear demonstration that the allegation that, so far from being the top authority on the Irish political question, MacDonnell did not really understand it, was more than just a nationalist sneer:

I detect in your latter signs that you believe harm has been done by the remarks I made at the builders' dinner. The only reason I have for regretting having spoken at all is that you have been made anxious. Personally I am satisfied that the effect of my few words has been distinctly good. They have not been misrepresented. It is well known in the north as well as the south and the west that there cannot be a bill in the Gladstonian sense; and there is not any man in Ireland, not excepting Dillon, who expects anything like a parliament. I heard an advanced nationalist (this term was usually used by MacDonnell to mean, not someone of the *sinn fein* or separatist persuasion, but to describe anyone favouring a more rapid policy on home rule than MacDonnell himself) the other day lament Dillon's extravagances. It is part of the game of 'bluff' they will no doubt play: but the country is not deceived; and was glad to learn that next year business was meant. My information is that the unionists have ceased to be alarmed at the prospect; and that Saunderson [leader of the Ulster party] and co. will have a small following. The days of "Ulster will fight" etc., are gone.

1

But Bryce's confidence in the scheme seemed to have cracked, and MacDonnell's letters for the rest of the year are full of attempts to remove his doubts. In August MacDonnell tried vainly to make something

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 21 Aug. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11013).

out of a proposal to house the Irish council in 'the old house on College Green' (more recently the Bank of Ireland). He wrote:

You have misgivings whether the scheme is sufficiently large. We cannot well make it larger on the accepted basis; but here we have a means of striking the Irish imagination and of suggesting hope, which goes a long way with my countrymen.

1

Bryce was also concerned about the financial settlement. Agreement had still not been reached with the treasury, the points in dispute now being not so much questions of principle or financial administration, but rather the basic one of how much Ireland should receive as a contract provision, firstly to meet her strict requirements and, secondly as an additional bonus attraction in respect of past overtaxation and wrongs, to help her to 'catch up' with Great Britain. The justice of this second amount was disputed by the treasury altogether, and Bryce suggested that the point be left out of the bill, to be worked out later on whilst the main structure of the scheme was on its way through parliament. MacDonnell was strongly opposed to this, partly because it would necessitate two bills, but mainly because he thought the contract provision would be the great attraction of the bill in Ireland, and

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 18 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

'the strongest passport for its acceptance'¹. Within a couple of days he had mustered support for this argument in the shape of Lord Aberdeen and added the further point that 'neither the Irish party nor the house of lords will accept a bill of principles without seeing before them how far it will lead'².

It seemed as if Bryce's flagging spirits would receive another blow on September 23, when Redmond emerged from his country estate to deliver a very forthright speech at Grange, co.Limerick. The Irish leader repudiated any responsibility for the proposals of 'administrative home rule' which the government were 'rumoured' to be discussing, and made it clear that the Irish party had not been consulted. He re-iterated the usual claim that nothing short of a parliament in Dublin with an executive responsible to it could ever bring peace, prosperity, or contentment to Ireland.³ Not the most promising prelude to discussions on the bill, one would think, but the intention behind politicians' actions are not always what they seem, and despite its intransigent tone, Bryce considered Redmond's speech 'fairly reasonable'.⁴

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 21 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11013).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 23 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 3. Redmond at Grange, 23 Sept 1906 (W.F.J., 29 Sept.1906).
 4. Gooch to Bryce, 30 Sept.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11014): 'I am glad you considered Redmond's speech fairly reasonable'.

For him to interpret the speech in this way was a rationalisation of the position, but not an outlandish one. Bryce realised that whatever the merits of the government's proposals, and whatever MacDonnell may have thought, 'step-by-step' was conceived to get round a problem within the liberal party, and perhaps (though this hope was fading as the year advanced) to avoid a clash with the lords on the Irish question. It had never been sought by the Irish party, who (as Blake was to stress to Redmond a few weeks later) had to be quite firm¹ about accepting no responsibility for such proposals. With these facts in mind, Bryce may therefore have thought that Redmond was simply setting the record straight before getting down to serious negotiations. But any such illusions as to Redmond's inner thoughts were soon destroyed.

Dillon, who was in Mayo, approved of the Grange speech, and warned Redmond that:

Finucane informed me confidentially that the scheme was to be submitted to you, to me and to Sexton next week... From the few hints he (F.) has dropped, I expect the scheme will be very unsatisfactory and that the difficulties you dwelt on in our last conversation will be very great.

2

-
1. Blake to Redmond, 30 Nov.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 26 Sept.1906 (Redmond papers).

Five days later Redmond heard from Bryce that the draft scheme was almost ready for the perusal of himself and Dillon. Meanwhile, perhaps activated by what he had just learnt of the scheme through the Dillon-Finucane link, he used his platform at Athlone on October 7 to make some rather more pointed and specific references to the question of self-government. At Grange he had simply made it plain that the Irish party had not asked for devolution, and would not regard it as a settlement of their claims: at Athlone he hinted that he would discriminate between different devolutionary schemes. His secret breakfast with Campbell-Bannerman on 14 November 1905¹ had committed him to non-resistance to the principle of devolution as a first step towards home rule, but the Athlone speech was a firm warning to the government that he intended to fight hard within that framework. The government, he declared:

..would find it easier to pass in the house of commons, and indeed, in the house of lords, a bold statesmanlike scheme which will honestly embody the principle of national self-government, than a cramped and halting scheme which, even if passed, would inevitably end in failure, and would mean one more muddle of the Irish question by an English government.

2

1. See supra, ch.1 p.26.

2. Redmond at Athlone, 7 Oct.1906 (W.F.J., 13 Oct.1906).

The great scheme was at last shown to Redmond (Dillon was still in Mayo) on October 8. The draft was, in essentials, the scheme as it had emerged from the cabinet committee at the end of July. It proposed a council of 55 members, two-thirds elected, with indirect elections by county councils and corporations.¹ The interview between Bryce and Redmond was not a happy one, Redmond saying nothing to Bryce 'except that at first sight it seemed beneath contempt'.² Bryce reported dejectedly to the prime minister that the Irish leader was 'profoundly disappointed', and thought the scheme could bring him no nearer his ultimate goal:

....and [Redmond] conceives that the creation of a new body in Ireland created irrespective of the existing Irish members would totally reduce the importance of the latter and practically deprive them of the power of criticising most branches of the Irish administration. He also objects to a body chosen by county councils.

3

Campbell-Bannerman was able to do little to revive Bryce's spirits. Lady Campbell-Bannerman had just died, and C.B.'s own health had weakened under the pressures of office, much as his doctor had warned

-
1. There is a draft scheme dated 3 Oct.1906 in the MacDonnell papers (Ms. c.369 f.59). It shows only slight alterations from a draft dated 4 Aug.1906 in the Bryce papers (Bodleian Library, Ms.20).
 2. Redmond to Dillon, 8 Oct.1906 (Dillon papers, cited in M.A.Banks, Edward Blake: A Canadian statesman in Irish politics (Toronto,1957), p.309).
 3. Bryce to Campbell-Bannerman, 8 Oct.1906 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41211 f.344)

him it would a year previously. He had been ordered to rest, he explained to Bryce, and was writing only few letters. At all events, he was prepared to offer little in the way of leadership at that juncture. His reply to Bryce, on October 10, was no more than 'wait and see':

As to the scheme, I am not surprised that Redmond is a little nasty about it - his recent speeches have had that tone: but I hope Dillon and Sexton will be more reasonable. I am glad the latter is brought in, for my impression not only of his intelligence but of his honesty is good.

1

Further advice of a negative kind came the following day, from Lord Aberdeen, who was now coming more under the influence of MacDonnell (his argument, that Redmond was bluffing, was resorted to again and again by MacDonnell in the later stages of the conflict):

Of course one feels regret at hearing that he [Redmond] expressed disappointment regarding the scope of the scheme. At the same time, without accusing him of forcing, one may perhaps assume that even in a confidential pourparler with you he might feel it necessary to take up the attitude referred to, at least to begin with.

2

But Redmond's attitude was only one of Bryce's worries after this first meeting. Non-cooperation was also threatened from another quarter.

1. Campbell-Bannerman to Bryce, 10 Oct.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11014). Bryce felt that Sexton's inclusion in discussions would be useful, both because he was a financial expert and because he owned the Freeman's Journal (Bryce to C.B., 8 Oct1906, op.cit.).
2. Aberdeen to Bryce, 11 Oct.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11014).

MacDonnell had not been present at the interview with Redmond, and called on Bryce afterwards to complain at being left out. He had not disagreed with the course Bryce had adopted on that particular occasion, but threatened to resign if he was excluded from future discussions or if there was any suggestion implanted in the minds of Redmond and Dillon that he did not enjoy Bryce's full confidence. Bryce answered that MacDonnell's apprehensions were groundless - that he was known to have full confidence, and that he would always be present when questions of detail were discussed, and at all times, excepting any special occasion when Bryce or the Irish leaders thought they should meet alone. Bryce expressed the opinion that the nationalists did not mistrust MacDonnell personally, nor did they doubt his good intentions towards Ireland, but were rather afraid of him, feeling that he would try and argue them down. MacDonnell replied that, although he had never enjoyed a better working relationship than that with Bryce, he would nonetheless resign if he was in any way excluded from full confidence. Bryce assured MacDonnell that his participation at the highest level was absolutely essential to the policy the government¹ were trying to carry out in Ireland.

This last assurance would have evoked little enthusiasm in nationalist circles. Redmond's first public speech after seeing the

1. 'MacDonnell's position', a note in Bryce's hand, 8 Oct.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11014).

scheme must have brought it home to Bryce, if it was not already apparent, that the nationalists did not regard the 'half a loaf' argument as applicable to the devolution policy and, moreover, had no faith in MacDonnell as the baker. Speaking at Coalisland, on October 14, Redmond warned:

But, fellow countrymen, the national movement may be destroyed in another way. Ireland, one of these days, may be offered what is called "administrative reform", sometimes called "administrative home rule", put before them in such a form as to make the continuance of the national movement difficult or impossible, and, for all we know, that may be actually part of the plan of some of the architects of the scheme themselves. Now I warn the country against this danger. If we were to accept any such scheme and the national movement fell to the ground, we would be in the position in which Ireland was when Grattan agreed to the abandonment of the Irish volunteers.

1

These dark warnings against MacDonnell were supported a few days later by a resolution of the Irish general council of county councils, 'that the people of this country will be satisfied with nothing less than a full measure of home rule'. The Freeman observed that:

Such sentiments must prove highly disappointing to those politicians who thought that they saw in the county councils elements for the creation of that division in the Irish national forces against the possibility of which Mr Redmond warned the country.

2

1. Redmond at Coalisland, 14 Oct.1906 (F.J., 15 Oct.1906).

2. F.J., 19 Oct.1906.

Another opportunity of getting a blow in at MacDonnellite policies was provided at the end of the month by a by-election in Galway city (a constituency with a record of unpredictability), where Captain Shawe-Taylor, the convenor of the land conference and a prominent devolutionist, was opposing the U.I.L. candidate, Stephen Gwynn. The contest was considered important enough for Dillon to direct the last stages of the campaign in person, and Shawe-Taylor's defeat came as a welcome relief for him and the party.¹ But it could be put to good use in the drive for nationalist unity, as he demonstrated in a speech at Liverpool, on November 11. Like Horace Plunkett and his department, said Dillon, Shawe-Taylor was part of a great unionist trick 'to burst up and destroy the national party':

You may hear it said that conciliation is a good thing. Yes, it is a very good thing. It is a nice name, but it depends on the nature of the conciliation. It is not against conciliation which is based on manly friendship for any man who is willing to be the friend of Ireland, that I am fighting in Ireland: but it is that conciliation which comes with honeyed words upon its lips but in its heart the dark design to destroy the national movement and dash from the lips of our people the cup of freedom in the very hour of victory.

2

-
1. S.L.Gwynn (Nat.) 983
J.Shawe-Taylor (Ind.Nat.)559
W.F.J., 10 Nov.1906.
 2. Dillon at Liverpool, 11 Nov.1906 (F.J., 12 Nov.1906).

Meanwhile Bryce had discussed some details of the scheme with Dillon and Sexton in Dublin, and he held a second meeting to discuss principles on October 16. MacDonnell was present at this meeting, along with Redmond and Dillon, and afterwards sent Bryce an aide-memoire of what had taken place. Once again the scheduled constitution of the council was the main point of discussion - both Redmond and Dillon objected to it strongly, and at this stage put forward their alternative proposal, which was, in MacDonnell's words, that the whole 'parliamentary party' should sit as the Irish council (presumably he really meant by this all the Irish M.P.s). Bryce replied that many of the best friends of home rule considered that the proposed schedule 'E' (55 councillors, two thirds elected by county councils, the rest nominated) was the best calculated to disarm unionist opposition, and that the 'parliamentary party' was too large for a satisfactory council. But nationalist opposition to the schedule continued, and Bryce finally conceded that it might be possible to alter the schedule in favour of direct election by the parliamentary electors (though not by parliamentary constituencies). According to MacDonnell, Redmond then proposed that the council should be elected from the parliamentary party, though Bryce 'did not so understand him'. At all events this approach found no favour, and MacDonnell then suggested (perhaps rather disingenuously), that if the elections to the council were by the parliamentary electors 'it ought to be possible for Mr Redmond

and his friends to secure the return of M.P.s':

The matter rested there - Messrs R. and D. holding on to the principle that membership of parliament should be a condition precedent to membership of the council: we not accepting that principle but admitting that the election for the council might be direct, by the parliamentary electors.

1

Further discussion in Dublin was curtailed by the commencement of the autumn session at Westminster, where the fate of the English education bill became of more immediate importance to liberals and nationalists alike. But the 'great scheme' was still kept under observation during the autumn, and various attempts made to break the impasse. The cabinet committee met at least once, and in connection with this MacDonnell sent Bryce a long telegram from Dublin, on October 25. He re-iterated his concurrence in direct election on the parliamentary register if necessary, but stressed that the nationalists had taken no serious objection to the suggested proportion of nominated members (one-third). He also thought no harm would come of making some slight concessions in the sphere of the lord lieutenant's powers - his power of reference back to Westminster had to be retained, but it might be limited to certain categories of cases, 'following the Indian analogy'; the lord lieutenant's power of appointment should also be generally

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 17 Oct.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11014).

retained, but it might be possible, saving the rights of existing civil servants, to arrange for the lord lieutenant to have regard to the council's recommendations with regard to the appointment of heads of departments and other important officers. On financial affairs the treasury would have to be consulted, though MacDonnell felt that the council might be permitted to create new permanent charges within the limits of the contract provision.¹

But these were all minor concessions in the sphere of the council's powers, and did not touch on the problems about which Redmond and Dillon had been mainly concerned. As Alfred Webb wrote to Redmond:

Supposing the government have not the wisdom to introduce a full measure of home rule, our acceptance of whatever they do propose will depend less upon the powers given to some constituent body than upon the character of that body.

2

MacDonnell's new proposals having met with no response, the cabinet sent Lloyd George, who was already beginning to emerge as an unusually gifted reconciler of opposing (and even mutually exclusive) standpoints, to see

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, (telegram), 25 Oct.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms.11014).

2. A.Webb to Redmond, 4 Nov.1906 (Redmond papers).

Redmond - the first of his many attempts to solve the Irish question. Lloyd George's mission was the earliest and the most calculated effort made by the cabinet to put the council scheme and the whole question of Irish government back into cold storage. Bryce was in despair, Lloyd George explained, and he had been sent by the cabinet to tell Redmond that they could not agree to alter the constitution of the council in the way the nationalists desired. But the cabinet wished to make a new proposal. The plan Lloyd George then put forward was influenced not only by the attitude of the nationalists to the scheme, but by the growing struggle in British politics between the government and the house of lords. He suggested that the king's speech for 1907 should contain promises of an Irish land bill and an Irish government bill, but that the government would concentrate on an English land bill first; if the lords rejected the education bill and the plural voting bill in 1906, and the English land bill in 1907, then the government would dissolve and go to the country on the lords issue, and if returned would either reform the house of lords or curtail its powers. Redmond recorded that he 'expressed no opinion' on these ideas, but arranged to meet Lloyd George again soon.

1. 'Interview with L.G.', a note in Redmond's hand, 1 Nov.1906 (Redmond papers).

There is no evidence that this second meeting did occur, although since both men were at Westminster during this period, it probably did. But whatever happened, the plan was not followed up. On the liberal side it may well have been decided that non-conformist education, electoral modifications, and land reform were not sufficiently broad-based issues on which to appeal to the country, whilst the argument (quite a fierce one) within the cabinet between those who favoured reforming the membership of the lords and those who wanted simply to remove or restrict its veto on legislation, postponed any firm decision on that issue. Lloyd George's plan can scarcely have had much attraction for Redmond either. Firstly there was a possibility that the Tories might win the proposed election: unlikely perhaps, but a row over home rule, or some new crisis in foreign or domestic affairs might do it. But again, if home rule was not put in the forefront of the hypothetical election campaign by the liberals (and there seemed every likelihood that it would not be), could the Irish party risk supporting them once more? O'Brien was no weaker than he had been a year previously, and the extremists had become more active under their new Sinn Féin slogan. We may be certain that the Irish party at this time much preferred to press for a strong bill which would be defeated in the lords and take its place in the 'cup' of rejected measures.

On the same day as Lloyd George spoke to him, Redmond called on another sympathiser in the cabinet, John Burns, but received little in the way of practical advice. Burns' entry in his diary merely indicates what an impasse had been reached, and how hollow had been the agreement come to with Campbell-Bannerman before the election:

J.R. called at room, and we discussed for some time alternative schemes. He is really in favour of something like it, but is afraid of rivalry to the Irish party, and perhaps right. He is fearful of cranks and.....others getting on the new body, and would like a grand committee of all Irish members as an Irish national council. We must find some way out.

1

Little progress had been made, either with minor concessions regarding the powers of the council, or with attempts to revolve the political wheel anew in the hope of hitting upon a different approach. Bryce and MacDonnell now began casting about for some new slant to their scheme which might break the deadlock, and their ideas during November
2
revolved abround new schedules for the composition of the council.

-
1. John Burns' diary, 1 Nov.1906 (Burns papers, Add.Ms. 46324).
 2. A formal draft bill was printed on November 10, but it did not deal with the size of the contract provision nor with the constitution of the council, execept to re-assert that the elected element would be two-thirds. See the 'Draft scheme for an Irish administrative council', 10 Nov.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.369 f.63).

They had a further meeting with Redmond and Dillon at the end of November, but the Irishmen proved as intransigent as before. Bryce must have hinted at a readiness to concede, for MacDonnell was now scraping the barrel of reasons for standing firm. He suggested that Bryce should keep the financial provisions secret from Redmond and Dillon for as long as they refused to abate their demands, in other words to use cash as a bargaining counter: 'You gain nothing by seeking them, but everything by letting them seek you'¹. In the same letter MacDonnell mentioned a suggestion which had reached him for giving representation on the council to Irish peers. To permit this, he proposed amending the draft scheme so that it still provided for 55 members, but would replace eight of the nominated men by Irish peers, elected from amongst themselves: 'There will still be a small nationalist majority.....There must be a nationalist majority, otherwise the scheme might not work'. D.Talbot Crosbie, a moderate unionist landlord, had shown MacDonnell a letter from Lord Clonbrock, 'a leading light of the Irish peers', who apparently 'showed no aversion' to the idea of a council along the lines MacDonnell had indicated.² This

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 27 Nov.1906 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms. 19). This is a complete reversal of the advice he had given in August, when he had advocated declaring the financial advantages of the scheme as soon as possible, in order to win Irish support. See supra, this chapter, p.207.

2. Ibid.

sounds very much like a carrot held out by MacDonnell to persuade Bryce that maintenance of a moderate line and resistance to Redmond's demands might result in the passage of the scheme through the house of lords, under the benevolent gaze of the Irish landlords. The case for standing firm was argued further in MacDonnell's next letter:

Wm O'Brien is making great headway, especially with the tenants who have already purchased and who are seary 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;...This alarm gives a clue to Redmond's great desire to get some concession from you before Christmas.

I do sincerely hope that there will be no concession of the kind R. and D. have been pressing: it would seriously prejudice the chances of the scheme as a working organisation. R. justifies his claim because he represents the country. Why then should he refuse to let the country have a voice in the election of councillors?

1

Meanwhile, the resolve of the Irish leaders was also being strengthened, as the veil of secrecy was lifted slightly from the scheme. On November 8 a mischievous report in the Healyite Dublin Evening Herald hinted that Redmond and Dillon were on the verge of accepting a hopelessly weak scheme. Patrick Ford, the veteran Irish-American

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 30 Nov.1906 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.190).

nationalist, saw this and alerted John O'Callaghan (secretary of the U.I.L. in America), who warned Redmond that such a move would put his organisation out of business: 'such action by the party of Redmond would, I am sure, rejoice no Irishman in America except John Devoy and those of his kind'¹. To forestall further criticisms such as Ford's, Redmond sent off to O'Callaghan (and also to Blake in Canada, Devlin in Australia, and T.P.Gill at the D.A.T.I.) a copy of a memorandum² on the scheme which he, Dillon, and T.P.O'Connor had drawn up for Bryce. The comments of the four recipients are interesting, in that they throw light on the sort of pressures Redmond was under, both from his political organisers (Devlin and O'Callaghan) and from his expert advisers (Blake and Gill).

Devlin thought the scheme 'simply an insult, and if accepted would leave things in a much worse position than they were before'. If such a plan ever saw the light of day, he thought, 'it will disappear before the ridicule and contempt of all parties in Ireland'³.

-
1. J. O'Callaghan to Redmond, 10 Nov.1906, enclosing Patrick Ford to O'Callaghan, 9 Nov.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. M.A.Banks, Edward Blake. p.312 ft., regrets that Redmond's memorandum sent to his colleagues abroad has not come to light. It seems probable that it was the same document (or an earlier draft) as the one submitted by Redmond, Dillon, and O'Connor to Bryce, and printed for the cabinet in December 1906 (P.R.O., Cab. 37/85/97). This source would not have been available at the time when Miss Banks' study was prepared.
 3. Devlin to Redmond, 2 January 1907 (Redmond papers).

O'Callaghan, too, thought the proposed council 'a petty little board'. He objected most strongly to the nominated element, considering that this, along with the retention of the chairmanship by the 'Castle gang', showed that the true intention was to secure permanent unionist control of the council. He advised Redmond to stand strictly to his demand that the whole parliamentary representation be made the nucleus of the council. His suggestions were in the main unrealistic, in that they assumed the existence of the old Parnellite balance of power at Westminster. But where the financing of the nationalist movement was concerned, O'Callaghan's advice was not to be ignored:

If it [the scheme] were law tomorrow, it would not by one jot or syllable do anything to remove the necessity of having the Irish representatives still dependent on voluntary popular support for their maintenance, a thing which I think should be rendered unnecessary by any scheme at all acceptable to Ireland at this time. Mark my words, in ten or a dozen years from now, with the way in which our Irish people in this country are becoming amalgamated with other peoples and so speedily forgetting their own traditions, it will not be easy to arouse them, even against England, to the contributing point. Any scheme you accept now should enable you to levy whatever amount may be necessary for the upkeep of Ireland's representatives, without having to appeal to anybody outside to do so.

1

The criticisms of the experts, Blake and Gill, were more

1. O'Callaghan to Redmond, 6 Dec.1906 (Redmond papers).

constructive. Edward Blake was something of a portent in nationalist circles. He had left a leading place in Canadian political life to join the Irish party, and occupied in their counsels much the sort of position Sir Antony MacDonnell might have held from 1902 onwards had he not preferred Dublin Castle to the Irish benches at Westminster. Blake stressed that the constitution of the new council was of infinitely more importance than the extent of the powers conferred in the first instance. Weak and limited powers could always be strengthened, but an 'anti-popular constitutional foundation' might be a worse precedent than no precedent at all: 'our first work would have to be not to build on the foundation or enlarge the superstructure, but to tear down the edifice erected by professedly friendly architects'. He did not object so much to the nominated members (provided they did not upset the basic political balance), but thought that the political heads of the transferred departments (i.e. the committee chairman) should be elected from and responsible to the council, not to the lord lieutenant and the Castle. Furthermore, though he was not opposed in principle to safeguards to meet the fears of the tory-orange elements, he felt that there might be 'grave objections' to an imperially appointed 'director of education'. Blake even feared (and this indicates the extent of Irish mistrust of Bryce and MacDonnell) that the scheme might be ruined by financial starvation. He also wanted to know why it was necessary to have a separate committee on finance, with a built-in

-
1. He added: 'As to the whole question of education however, I feel we must walk warily and have due regard to the feelings of the hierarchy, to which you refer, in any suggestion we make'.

'Castle' majority, and what had become of the old and tried British principle of financial initiative and control resting with the 'cabinet'.

But, he concluded:

Let us do all we can consistent with principle to bring the scheme to fruition; and give no avoidable excuse to the government for abandoning it; while we press to the uttermost, consistent with prudence, for its improvement.

1

T.P.Gill shared Blake's technical objections to the scheme, but his analysis paid more heed to the existing political situation, and his conclusions differed accordingly. He was the only critic who allowed in his assessment for the intrusion of the house of lords. He distinguished, where Blake did not, between a policy which might be adopted towards a bill which would become law in 1907, and one which would fail in the lords and take its place in the cup of rejected liberal measures:

I assume that the lords would throw out this scheme whether amended or not. I may be wrong in this assumption: and in this region of speculation you have a great deal better information than I. If I am wrong.....then of course there is much to be said for trying to get it amended before it is introduced.....and trying to get it amended further in the house. But I proceed on the assumption that the lords would throw out any bill on this subject. In this case

1. Memorandum on the Irish council scheme by Edward Blake, 6 Dec.1906.
(Redmond papers).

I think it is better to endeavour to get the government to substitute a new measure for this scheme. By a genuine measure I mean not necessarily a full home rule scheme, but a measure (a) providing for a legislature for certain devolved subjects with an executive responsible to that legislature, and (b) a measure that would work.

Gill thought that from the point of view of nationalist morale in Britain and in America, a 'timid and mistrustful measure' passed would be much worse than 'a genuine measure' rejected in the lords. The latter, he thought:

would place home rule effectively in the forefront, with other matters, of the liberal campaign of 'filling the cup'. To me at any rate it seems quite evident that the lords will have to be fought before even a partial scheme of home rule can be carried..... An abortive scheme which nobody would believe in would only strengthen the hands of the lords and gain them kudos for throwing it out.

The existing scheme, Gill thought, was not a plan for the real extension of representative government at all, but one for the increased bureaucratic control of Irish government: 'a finance committee governs the council and the castle governs the finance committee....It is a scheme not to devolve power upon the Irish party but upon the Castle'. Even on constitutional grounds Gill objected to the implementation of a committee structure, preferring a system of departmental 'ministers', with a chairman equivalent to a prime minister: 'an executive of committees means

the maximum of useless interference with the minimum of real control'. Gill thought that if the liberals could not accept the principle of placing confidence in the people, then it would be better for them not to touch the government question at all.

But another of Gill's arguments seems less practical, especially in the light of later developments. He sought to show that a stronger scheme than that proposed would in fact gain more support from conservative-unionist elements in Irish society than the 'weak' policy which was intended to win them over. In the north of Ireland the democratic movement, and even the 'big unionist businessmen', he said, hated 'the Castle' as much as it was hated in the south, and they would thus oppose the scheme as it stood. They would, Gill thought, be much more likely to support a plan which increased public control over the powers of Dublin Castle. A further piece of diplomacy 'which the government ought to manage' was to swing the support of Dunraven's devolutionist group behind a larger scheme: 'if Sir Antony MacDonnell can be persuaded to agree to the change, he can bring the devolutionists¹ with him. His coming and their coming would be essential.'

1. Typed memorandum on the Irish council scheme (Redmond papers). Attributed by the National Library of Ireland to Thomas Sexton, but from the arguments it puts forward it seems clear that it was prepared by T.P.Gill, and is the document referred to in his letter to Redmond of 14 Dec.1906 (copy in the Gill papers, N.L.I.).

MacDonnell in fact defended the idea of a 'weak' scheme to the end, because, despite what he was told, he believed it could pass the lords. It is surprising that Gill did not seem to be aware of this, as indeed is the whole business of his high estimate of MacDonnell's importance. Most nationalists, if they detected in the scheme a desire to strengthen bureaucratic government, put it down ^{positively} (and correctly) to the 'Hindoo' influence of MacDonnell himself, and felt, like Elizabeth Dillon, that 'if some eastern post of honour could be found for Sir Antony, we might ¹ start fair once more'.

From December 1906 onwards, the pace of events connected with the council scheme increased considerably; the English education crisis was brought to an end, and the Irish scheme became a top legislative priority. (It was generally expected, or feared, that the next session ² would be 'an Irish one') . A whole year had been allowed for backstairs preparation, yet no agreement had been arrived at. Some sort of rapprochement was required to retain Irish co-operation, and it was at this stage that Campbell-Bannerman made his first intrusion into the

-
1. Elisabeth Dillon to Blake, 9 Dec.1906 (Blake papers, on microfilm in N.L.I.,p.4683, f.584).
 2. Ripon to Campbell-Bannerman, 5 Jan.1907 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms.41225 f.192)

Irish government since the election. On successive nights in early December he entertained first Redmond and Dillon, and then Sir Antony MacDonnell, at 10 Downing Street. Dillon and Redmond had for weeks been pressing for an interview with C.B., and they put before him the views about the composition/^{of the council} which they had already urged on Bryce. They were told that MacDonnell's scheme had in fact never been discussed by the cabinet (no mention was made of the cabinet committee) but that it would be very soon, and C.B. agreed that ministers should be shown a print of the memorandum prepared by Redmond, Dillon and O'Connor.¹ Redmond and Dillon left the prime minister with their hopes somewhat revived, but so too did Sir Antony MacDonnell on the next evening. He told his wife that he thought he had demonstrated clearly to C.B. how insubstantial were the objections made by the Irish leaders, and how disastrous it would be to accept their suggestions:

On the whole, I was fairly satisfied with the conversation ...Sir Henry is not demonstrative, and he did not seem anxious for more detail than enabled him to see the bearings of the main parts of the policy: but he struck me as a man of cool judgment and common sense, without being brilliant....

2

The cabinet met on December 15, and had before it the nationalists' memorandum, which provided a full statement of their objections to the

-
1. The meeting is recounted in Elisabeth Dillon's letter to Blake, 9 Dec.1906, op.cit.
 2. MacDonnell to his wife, 9 Dec.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e.216 f.155).

scheme:

At best it will put a very severe strain on our influence on our countrymen to accept so modest a step....Unless there is some distinct concession to national sentiment, and a clear indication that the proposed measure of Irish reform is only a step towards better things, to be carried out in friendly co-operation with the Irish national party, we are convinced that our utmost influence, even if we were disposed to use it, would fail to secure for the scheme any substantial measure of support from the Irish race.

Within the past few days they had been shown a new scheme, which they thought better since it embodied the principle of direct election, but it was still open to 'the gravest election'. But council membership was still to be only 55, while the distribution of the elected seats (14 for Ulster, 12 for Leinster, 8 for Munster and 7 for Connaught) appeared to support the unionist claim for a redistribution of parliamentary representation. Furthermore, the proportion of elected members was still only two-thirds, and the Irish leaders doubted if the scheme would in fact 'give a working majority to the representatives of the present national movement'. They thus re-iterated their demand for a council composed of the Irish M.P.s plus a small nominated element, to give some voice to the minority, but not to tip the balance. The Irish party would be prepared to accept some measure of responsibility for such a scheme, and would be able to work in harmony with the council. ¹

1. Memorandum on the Irish office outline of constitutional reform by Redmond, Dillon and T.P.O'Connor, printed for the cabinet, 14 Dec. 1906 (Cab. 37/85/97).

A paragraph which was in fact omitted from the final draft of their memorandum reveals even more clearly the true nature of the Irish leaders' fears about the scheme:

A system which creates two sets of constituencies and two sets of elections must lead in the end to two sections and two policies in Ireland, even in the nationalist ranks. As will be shown presently there is little doubt that the acceptance by the Irish national party of such a modest scheme of self-government as is suggested in the outline of constitutional reform, will place upon the Irish national party a heavy burden of responsibility; and their action is certain to be criticised and probably contested. Under a system of double elections and different constituencies, temptation is held out to attacks on the policy of the Irish national party in accepting a modest instalment of home rule.

1

Little is known of the cabinet meeting which met to make a decision on these points, except that it proved fruitless. ² Two factors combined to produce this indecision. Firstly the British ambassadorship in Washington had fallen vacant, and Bryce was extremely eager to take it. He had been very disappointed at the reception given to his scheme by the nationalist leaders, and had been no happier with day-to-day administration, over which he had received a buffeting from unionists and nationalists alike for a policy which was largely directed

-
1. Early draft of the memorandum by Redmond, Dillon and O'Connor, n.d. (Redmond papers).
 2. Writing to Campbell-Bannerman about the scheme on 5 January 1907, Lord Ripon commented: 'I do not yet know how far we are going ourselves, as nothing was settled at the last cabinet' (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41225 f.192).

by MacDonnell anyway. He had sought to govern not by conciliating the various interests, but by administering open-handed (the nationalists thought high-handed) justice between them. In an interview with W.T. Stead, in December 1906, Redmond is reported to have said that Bryce was:

a splendid old fellow, but he is a pedant and pig-headed as can be, and obstinate to the last degree....He has never asked me for my opinion since he has been in office...He has fallen under the influence of the Dublin Castle officials, who all need to be cleared out. They were all appointed by the unionist government, and the poison has penetrated unfiltered into Bryce's system until he has become full of it.

1

As early as December 9, Elisabeth Dillon had heard from T.P. O'Connor a rumour that Bryce was to resign,² and by the 16th Aberdeen was writing to Bryce to suggest a successor. He favoured the appointment of a retired treasury chief, Sir Francis Mowatt, on the grounds that he was already familiar with the details of the scheme, and that he was: 'trusted, or not distrusted, by the nationalist members. He would get on³ with Sir Antony - of what other man could this safely be predicted?'. The Irishmen however, as they had done in 1905, asked for Thomas Shaw,

1. Cutting from The Review of Reviews, Feb. 1907 (Redmond Papers)

2. Elisabeth Dillon to Blake, 9 Dec. 1906 (Blake papers, on microfilm in N.L.I., p.4683 f.584).

3. Aberdeen to Bryce, 16 Dec. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11014).

latterly lord advocate for Scotland, a forthright speaker and the holder of strongly radical opinions. But for the second time Shaw preferred to keep the way clear for his promotion to the bench. After Shaw, the nationalists favoured Augustine Birrell or John Burns.¹ They did not trust Winston Churchill and would not have him: 'that slip of a boy would have been a bond-slave to Sir Antony MacDonnell', said Redmond.² Campbell-Bannerman's first preference was for Lewis Harcourt, who refused to go, as he also refused an offer of the board of education a few days later.³ The post ultimately went to Birrell, who had got on well with the Irishmen whilst at the board of education, but whose work there had come to a dead-end with the rejection of the education bill. But this appointment was not made public until late January.⁴ With the post of chief secretary more or less in abeyance in the second half of December 1906, there was little prospect of important decisions being taken on the council scheme. It still remained to be seen whether the new secretary could surmount Irish intransigence where his predecessor had failed.

-
1. Redmond's interview with W.T. Stead (The Review of Reviews, Feb. 1907 cutting in Redmond papers).
 2. Ibid.
 3. Morley to Campbell-Bannerman, 1 Jan. 1907 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms. 41223 f.207); Harcourt to Campbell-Bannerman (C.B. papers, Add.Ms. 41220 f.201). Harcourt preferred to keep his semi-sinecure at the board of works until he could enter the cabinet simply on his reputation as a reliable Gladstonian, rather than take on a post involving onerous departmental duties. He calculated well, for he entered the cabinet three months later, still at the board of works.
 4. See *infra*, this chapter, p. 244.

Another reason why nothing was decided at the cabinet of December 15 was that the cabinet itself was divided on the issue. About this time John Morley offered C.B. his resignation, Lord Esher told the king, 'urging his age and the probable disagreements with his colleagues during the coming session'. The prime minister, Esher continued, had remonstrated vigorously with Morley, who had withdrawn his request, but the situation was still unsettled.¹ Esher thought that Morley had initially been disgruntled at not being consulted over the appointment of Bryce to Ireland, and that subsequent events had tended to keep this wound open. Also, the Irishmen had been trying their best to influence the cabinet through Morley:

...whom they look upon as the repository of the Gladstonian tradition....The P.M., as your majesty is aware, is not a voluble correspondent, and Mr Morley feels that he cannot get into complete touch on these matters, which he considers of first-rate importance. [i.e. the chief secretaryship and the Irish council scheme] with his chief, hence a little feeling..... It is clear that the three Irish bills contemplated for next session [i.e. council, university and land bills] are bound to lead to difficulties, to great differences, within the cabinet, which it will require all the P.M.'s suavity to accommodate.

2

-
1. Morley tried to resign again a month later. His reasons then were departmental: partly petulance at not getting the junior minister he wanted (T.R. Buchanan) and partly fear of the big problems facing him at the India office. C.B. was advised that Morley was no use on the house of commons or on the platform, but felt nonetheless that his name was a great asset, and that he was 'sound in cabinet'. See Campbell-Bannerman to J.Sinclair, 30 Jan.1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41230 f.171).
 2. M.V. Brett (ed.), Journals and letters of Viscount Esher (London, 1934), ii.211).

Esher of course was an incorrigible intriguer and gossip. He had no official access to information of this sort, but he was an influential link between the Court and Westminster, and liked to know what was going on in the highest political circles. He also liked the king to think he (Esher) knew what was going on, and so may have been on occasion somewhat fanciful. But in this instance the general drift of his allegations is confirmed by a letter sent by Morley to C.B. on 1 January 1907, which included a comment that 'the danger to the cabinet and its solidarity seems to be Ireland and Mr Haldane'¹. Morley may have felt himself more closely tied in with the problem by a letter he had received from Dillon on December 19, which brought home the delicacy of the liberal-nationalist relationship. Dillon's letter is worth quoting in detail, as it is one of the few full confidential statements of the nationalist standpoint on the council scheme:

In the memorandum which has been circulated to the cabinet we have put our view as to the main points of the new schemeIt is a true statement of the facts of the situation. We are much oppressed by a gentleman of whom you know who moves in an Indian atmosphere, quite aloof from the facts of the situation, and who is incurably convinced that he understands Irish politics better than any of us. His idea appears to me to be to break up the Irish party machine and dominance in Irish politics and get a kind of Indian council composed of that favourite abstraction of amateur solvers of the Irish problem -nonpolitical business men - and so turn Ireland into a loyal and peaceful country, very subservient and manageable, purged of politics and devoted

1. Morley to Campbell-Bannerman, 1 Jan. 1907 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms.41223 f. 207).

to the breeding of pigs and the making of butter. I daresay MacDonnell's intentions are excellent but his lights are Indian and therefore so far as Ireland is concerned they are will o' the wisps. It will be a deplorable business if he succeeds in bringing about a deadlock between us and the cabinet. It will be useless to attempt to deal with all the details of the situation in a letter, but one of the dangers is that MacDonnell has to some extent indoctrinated Bryce that it will be possible to get the lords to pass his ridiculous and unworkable scheme. Whereas, as I am sure you know well, the lords will kill a weak, unworkable scheme, brought in without the approval of the Irish leaders with a much lighter heart than they would deal with a defensible scheme which we could stand over and approve of. We know perfectly well that the lords will kill any scheme which professes to be a step towards home rule, and our programme is to stand in for a share of the spoils in the fight with the house of lords; and if we can get the house of commons to pass next session by a majority of 330 a really good measure which the people of Ireland will recognise as an honest step towards home rule then we shall be satisfied that we have done a good year's work and with genuine radical administration in Ireland I, for one, would be satisfied that home rule would come within a very brief period.

1

Probably because he realised the impossibility of securing the cabinet's assent to this policy, Morley made the second attempt (Lloyd George's had been the first) to get the government off the hook by postponing the scheme altogether: the cabinet, who always tended to assume that once

1. Dillon to Morley, 19 Dec.1906 (copy in the Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11014).

the Irish government question came up dissolution must be just around the corner, might feel more inclined to take a bold stand, say in 1908, than they were at the end of a very unsatisfactory first session in 1906. As Morley explained to C.B. :

In answering Dillon I threw a fly (on my own account) about postponing the Irish council until 1908. A year of effective co-operation with the British liberals would incline the said liberals to a strong bill; the chances of a strong bill would ripen, etc., etc. I don't suppose they will assent, but I will let you know what he says.

1

Morley also pressed this view on T.P.O'Connor, but John Sinclair (secretary of state for Scotland), who reported this to Campbell-Bannerman, did not think such a proposal could be accepted by the Irishmen: it was too obviously convenient for those ministers who opposed any real reform of Irish government, 'including some people who have just moved to the new war office'.

2

Sinclair's view was the correct one, for Morley's 'fly' caused a flutter of alarm in the nationalist ranks. Redmond had been away, and on January 17 Dillon sent him a typically anxious account of the situation, urging him to seek a personal interview with the prime minister. Dillon

1. Morley to Campbell-Bannerman, 1 Jan.1907, op.cit.

2. Sinclair to Campbell-Bannerman, 8 Jan.1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41230 f.207). Haldane was secretary of state for war.

considered that a postponement of the scheme would land the party in
 terrible difficulties and make a conflict with the government inevitable.¹
 He therefore sent Morley a forceful reply to his proposal. When Bryce
 took office, Dillon claimed, the nationalists had told him that he might
 postpone an Irish government bill until the third year, but Bryce 'treated
 us as nought', and the game was now different: MacDonnell had been
 allowed to promise a bill (in his builders' dinner speech), and had
 never been contradicted; and delay now would ruin the credit of the Irish
 party and play into the hands of the extremists, who were again active.
 Any bill which the nationalists could tolerate would be kicked out by
 the lords, continued Dillon, and so the Irish vote in Great Britain might
 easily be won for a firm anti-lords policy (regardless of the English
 schools question). But a 'weak' bill would 'refrigerate' the Irish
 vote and provoke an open rupture between nationalists and liberals in the
 house of commons. 'So much for John Dillon', Morley reported to C.B.,
 'Pretty well what was to be expected....The situation for Birrell will
 be mighty difficult, for he will have to bear all the odium of Sir A.M.
 on his back, and that's a heavy load'.²

1. Dillon to Redmond, 17 Jan.1907 (Redmond papers). Dillon also passed
 on an alarming (though false) rumour that the chief secretaryship
 had been offered to MacDonnell.

2. Morley to Campbell-Bannerman, 20 Jan.1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms. 41223
 f.229).

2. A new departure: Birrell takes the helm, January-May 1907.

It is not surprising that the nationalists were in a state of some anxiety and confusion about the government's intentions, for some members of the cabinet were equally in the dark. They had dispersed at the end of the 1906 session without drawing up any firm legislative programme for the following year. Crewe complained to Ripon on January 22 that Asquith was still in Italy and Campbell-Bannerman in the Highlands, yet only one bill had been definitely scheduled for introduction in the coming session.¹ Although a senior member of the government, with some special interest in Ireland, Crewe had 'no conception of the effect which the change of chief secretary is to have on the Irish proposals'.² Nothing had in fact been decided since the abortive cabinet discussion of December 15.

As late as 18 January 1907, T.P.O'Connor could 'not confirm or deny' rumours that Birrell had been appointed to Ireland.³ In fact the change-over had been settled before Christmas, though it did not take effect for another month. Bryce's experience at least meant that his successor had few illusions about the task he was attempting, and Birrell's

-
1. This was the licensing bill, which was not in fact introduced until 1908.
 2. Crewe to Ripon, 22 Jan.1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43552 f.109).
 3. T.P. O'Connor to Redmond, 18 Jan.1907 (Redmond papers).

letter of acceptance, though sanguine, was also cautious:

My talk with Bryce was on the whole reassuring. I'm afraid another impasse may lie before me - but I don't mind anything purely personal, so long as we are moving forward towards a final goal which has no terror for either of us.

1

Birrell was a politician of stiffer fabric than Bryce. Although his work at the board of education had come to nothing at the hands of the lords, he had won praise from many sides for his sympathetic handling of the sensitive and conflicting interests which had lined his path. Of nonconformist background himself, he had got on well with all but the most extreme tory catholic group, and especially well with Lord Ripon, the leading catholic liberal, and with the nationalist leaders. The Irish hierarchy were somewhat suspicious of him, but T.P.O'Connor agreed with Morley that these suspicions were 'moonshine', and that Birrell had done everything possible for catholics in his bill. C.B. was pleased at Birrell's acceptance: his 'administrés' would like him, 'which goes for something', he wrote, perhaps reflecting on the lack of harmony during the previous session. Morley's letter of congratulation

-
1. Birrell to Campbell-Bannerman, 23 Dec.1906 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms. 41239 f.192).
 2. Morley to Campbell-Bannerman, 1 Jan.1907 (C.B.Papers, Add.Ms.41223 f.207).
 3. Campbell-Bannerman to Birrell, 25 Dec.1906 (Birrell collection, Liverpool University Library, Ms. 10.2. f.22). George Wyndham congratulated Birrell in his own more colourful way, on 24 Jan.1907: 'At worst a chief secretary is but a Ghibbeline duke in a Guelph duchy. That is better than surveying the stationery in a middle-Victorian office each day of one's life. At the best, you are back in the sixteenth century, with people who care for causes and disdain commerce' (Birrell collection, Ms. 10.2. f.10).

shows that he was thinking along the same lines. He told Birrell:

The Irishmen welcome you: I have it under seal. That is the main element at the start. Two other men coveted the post. Neither would have done. The P.M. knew very early that you must be the man...You know the lie of the land as well as I do, though I have had the experience of being chief secretary twice. Only let me drop you a hint about Sir A.M. Our friends hate him with a virulence only felt by one Irishman for another. Do not allow yourself to appear too close with him.

1

The radical element in the cabinet was pleased at Birrell's appointment, though there is no reason to suppose that the Asquithians were in any way hostile. Asquith and Birrell were personally on very good terms,² and the chief secretaryship was not pace Morley, a very popular post. The appointment did not necessarily imply a more radical line on home rule on the part of the government, since no decision of any importance could be made on the subject without cabinet consent. In his daily administration the new appointee could (and did) bring about a change of policy, especially in the fields of law and order and the land acts, but this was a matter on which the cabinet were in much closer agreement. Indeed, they were eager for a more placatory policy, since

1. Morley to Birrell, 15 Jan.1907 (Birrell collection, Ms.10.2. f.24). Churchill was probably one of those who 'coveted the post'. Burns may have been the other.

2. See R. Jenkins, Asquith, p.557.

it might reduce the pressure for action on the larger question. After his interview with Campbell-Bannerman, MacDonnell had written to his wife:

I think on matters other than the scheme, the cabinet are likely to go further in connection with Ireland than I think is quite prudent or politicaat the present juncture; but no doubt many members find themselves bound by promises and votes given when they were in opposition.

1

The nationalists also were pleased with Birrell's appointment.

T.P.O'Connor reported to Redmond a comment by C.B. that: 'Birrell is a strong man, and will keep Antony MacDonnell in order'. Redmond himself told John O'Callaghan that he regarded the appointment of Birrell as an advance along the right lines, and his speech at Waterford on 1 February 1907 was more reasonable from the government's point than any he had made since he had been shown the scheme:

As practical men we know the limits within which governments can work; we know their difficulties, largely, let me say, of their own creation, not the creation of the electors of Great Britain at all; but their difficulties we know, and as practical men we must realise and face them. We must not ask or expect the impossible, but we must press on the government this consideration: that we also act within certain limitations in this matter. We are in this question of self-government unchangeable and unchanged....If anything less is offered to us, we will look at it solely from the point of view of home rule.

4

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 9 Dec.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e.216 f.155).
 2. T.P.O'Connor to Redmond, 27 Jan.1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. O'Callaghan to Redmond, 8 Feb.1907 (Redmond papers).
 4. F.J., 2 Feb. 1907; .

If the appointment of Birrell seemed likely to produce more harmony in the cabinet's relations with the nationalists, its effect on relationships within the Irish government was less beneficial. MacDonnell spent much of the first four months of 1907 in London, but already by mid-February was writing to his wife that he did not find the 'enthusiasm' for his measure which he had hoped for.¹ Birrell he found to be uncommunicative, and he had therefore simply left him the relevant papers to peruse, without comment. This, he later confessed to Bryce, had been a mistake:

I then left him [Birrell] to ruminate over them [the papers], and to talk to Davies.² He also seems to have talked to Redmond and Dillon. So that when I did ultimately speak to him I found him ill-disposed to take up the business at the point and on the lines where you had left it. I found him rather reticent, due, I now think, to his perception that he and I were not of one mind, and that full discussion might develop inconvenient differences of opinion. In the end, the cabinet committee was re-appointed, but with the addition of Morley.

3

The revised cabinet committee met at the house of commons on February 22, in the absence of Grey, but with MacDonnell himself

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 13 and 17 Feb. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.220. f.43, 63).
 2. W.R. Davies, the chief secretary's private secretary, who acted as head of the Irish office in London.
 3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Mar. 1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11015).

¹
 called in. Despite strong protests from MacDonnell, the committee proposed a complete revision of the scheme. 'It was evident', MacDonnell recalled later, 'that the intentions of the most active members of the committee were to give Redmond and Dillon all they wanted, both as to the constitution of the council and the control of appointments'². The chief opponent of MacDonnell's views was Morley, and the discussion was probably accompanied by some acrimony, for MacDonnell afterwards told his wife that Morley objected to his presence at the meeting, and had in fact taken a personal dislike to him.³ The committee proposed to transfer the power of appointment of civil servants from the lord lieutenant (i.e. Dublin Castle) to the council, to create an executive of ministers instead of committees⁴ and, most important, they suggested that the council should have a membership of between 100 and 120, elected directly by the parliamentary electors. They did not go quite as far as turning the Irish M.P.s into the council, but by expanding the size of the council and recommending the parliamentary franchise they made it possible for the U.I.L. to achieve such an end by careful constituency organisation.⁵ John Burns wrote in his diary:

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. MacDonnell to his wife, 23 Feb.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.5),

4. This is something of a guess. T.P.Gill seemed to think that such a change had been made, though if it had it was rapidly reversed. See T.P.Gill to Birrell, 25 Feb.1907 (Gill papers).

5. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Mar.1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015).

22.3.07. Irish committee. Raised from 70 to 100 plus 25 nominated. No peers, pay struck out, left to them, veto defined; reports, duties, authorities shall go. I took the lead. J.M [orley] supported, as did L.G [eorge], but latter wanted a minority protection clause, which I laughed out of court, to the rapturous delight of philosophic John M[orley]. "Hush, hush, hush, here comes the broker's man" nearly made him fall off his seat as a description of the planted nonconformist on every committee. A very good day's work for poor old Ireland. Is it in vain?

1

Birrell reported to Redmond on the day after the meeting that 'we had our meeting yesterday with, I think, satisfactory results. But I must speak to you about it on Monday'.² MacDonnell's report to his wife, written on the same day, illustrates the great chasm which had already appeared between him and his chief:

The results of yesterday's meeting are altogether unsatisfactory; and ...are not such as I can accept and act on. I had a long talk with the chief secretary today, and after pouring out my objections to him, I suggested certain courses to him which, if adopted, might re-establish the situation. He agreed to these courses being placed before the committee again.

3

-
1. Burns' diary, 22 Feb. 1907 (Burns papers, Add. Ms. 46325). Burns' diaries, though extremely useful, are of little help in assessing the part played by Burns himself in any affair. To make this criticism it is not necessary to support fully the extreme position taken up by Burns' biographer, who described the diaries as 'mirrors in which Burns admired himself.... [They]....brought a nausea I could not convey to my readers without boredom' (W. Kent, John Burns: Labour's lost leader, (London, 1948), preface).
 2. Birrell to Redmond, 23 Feb. 1907 (Redmond papers).
 3. MacDonnell to his wife, 23 Feb. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.5).

MacDonnell was surprised at the acquiescence of Haldane, Asquith and Crewe in the 'new departure', and so may we be. Possibly they were out of depth in the level of detail at which the scheme would have been discussed (we have already seen that the cabinet as a whole knew little about the scheme in 1906): never a very sympathetic figure, MacDonnell may not have been a very convincing advocate in such high-powered company. More probably the cabinet were swayed by the argument that, since the lords would reject any scheme, it was as well to retain the confidence of the nationalists by formulating a strong one. Birrell's urbane manner could well have made this appear the sensible view.

MacDonnell wrote to his wife:

I don't think now the cabinet is taking the matter seriously: and believing that the house of lords will throw out the bill in any case, are willing to let Dillon and Redmond have their way as to an extreme measure. Mr Birrell asked me today to write a memorandum setting my views clearly forth. I can do that of course: but as Mr Birrell does not take up Mr Bryce's attitude, I don't think much will come of it. This being so, has not the time come to leave?

2

But the apparent harmony between Asquithians and radicals, with its promise of a better relationship between the government and the Irish party, was to prove as brittle as it seemed.

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Mar.1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015).
 2. MacDonnell to his wife, 27 Feb.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.220 f.45).

Three steps taken by MacDonnell during the days following the cabinet committee's 'new departure' indicate the political importance he had assumed in the government of Ireland. For if a civil servant's duty ends with responsibility to his political chief, MacDonnell far over-stepped the mark. His activities were not quite 'disloyal': it was rather that he acted as if he were himself a political member of the government, and Birrell simply a rather tiresome colleague with adjacent responsibilities. MacDonnell's first step was to tell Birrell that he would resign if the cabinet accepted the new proposals of their committee, or if Birrell intended to advocate the sending up to the lords of a bill which was sure to be rejected.¹ Then he lobbied Lord Aberdeen, who wrote on his behalf to the prime minister urging that the size of the proposed council be reduced once more, and safeguards re-introduced in the sphere of patronage. Aberdeen stressed the importance of electoral arrangements which would secure 'fresh blood' on the council and not result simply in a transference of the existing Irish party:

On both the above points I suspect that the opinion of the newest member of the cabinet committee would be in the opposite direction to anything I have indicated. But if I may be allowed to speak freely to yourself, one cannot but remark that Morley's judgment on Irish matters has not always proved to be the best; as when Sir Robert Hamilton "besought him

1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Mar.1907, op.cit.

and he would not hear" regarding the finance proposals of 1886. Also as to mode of procedure. Besides, Morley is supposed to be much influenced by Dillon at present; and though no doubt Dillon is a "fine fellow", I am afraid he is politically revengeful, and that can hardly coincide with reliable judgment. But now let me ask if you could see Sir A. MacDonnell before he returns to Ireland....Sir A.M. has worked at this subject with great ability and with complete disinterestedness for years; he has also shown adaptability [one might have thought this was just what he had not shown]. I know that thenationalist leaders dislike him; but so also do the unionists. His manner is against him. I recognise that as much as anybody. But he has done real good service - and if he felt it necessary to go it would be very unfortunate. I am sure a talk with you would hearten him up.

1

But it was MacDonnell's third step which really swung developments back in his favour once more. Grey had not been present at the committee meeting, and a day or two after it met MacDonnell approached him on the subject. He explained his objections to the proposed changes in the plan, and secured Grey's support:

I do not know what happened immediately afterwards; but it transpired a few days later that Asquith bethought himself of his previous attitude, and joined Grey in his renunciation of the conclusions of the latest cabinet committee. The matter was therefore referred to a special full cabinet; and I was requested by Mr Birrell to write a paper on the whole question. This I did, going over the main points, defending our previous position, and criticising the new proposals.

2

-
1. Aberdeen to Campbell-Bannerman, 26 Feb. 1907 (C.B. papers, Add Ms. 41210 f. 87).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Mar. 1907. op.cit.

The great cabinet meeting took place on March 9. Ministers had before them, as well as MacDonnell's paper, a memorandum on the subject by Birrell himself. MacDonnell had three main objections to the new proposals. Firstly, the provision for the council to deal directly with the departments, notifying the lord lieutenant (i.e. the chief secretary and the under secretary) only incidentally of its decisions would, he thought, not give effective security to parliament against abuse of the council's powers. Secondly, the transfer of patronage from the lord lieutenant to the council he thought unnecessarily revolutionary in appearance: it created for the first time a class of offices held other than from the crown, and might lead to a political civil service, impairing efficiency and preventing Anglo-Irish interchange of personnel. But most important, in MacDonnell's view, was the constitution of the council. He preferred a small council, administrative rather than deliberative, which would not be large enough to lend colour to the view that the Irish M.P.s should be converted into the council:

In explanation, it may be said that anything directly suggestive of home rule was regarded as inadmissible, while nothing, it was thought, could be more suggestive of home rule, or more likely to create general alarm and opposition among non-nationalists or moderate men than the conversion of the entire Irish parliamentary representation into the council. It is earnestly contended that M.P.s are elected to discharge quite different functions from those which members of the Irish council will discharge and that, with a view to disarming opposition to the bill and to procure to the council an infusion of fresh blood and of that business capacity which very many members of county councils are now displaying in Ireland, it is essential to give the country an opportunity of expressing a free and fresh choice.

As a compromise MacDonnell was prepared to accept a larger council than he had previously envisaged, provided its mode of election was not suggestive of home rule: it was tolerably certain that parliamentary electors voting by parliamentary constituencies would return members of parliament to the council. Thus MacDonnell did not think satisfactory the cabinet committee's proposal of a council of 100 to 120 elected members:

...unless some plan of election were adopted whereby the conversion, directly or indirectly, of the parliamentary parties into the council would be avoided.....It is believed that in Ireland there is a large body of moderate opinion, catholic and protestant, to which expression is not now given owing to party organisation and it is highly desirable that in such a measure as that contemplated, opportunity should be given for the expression of such opinion.

1

Birrell's memorandum opposed MacDonnell's view on almost every point. Though agreeing that effective parliamentary supremacy must be maintained through the lord lieutenant's veto, Birrell argued that the powers given to the council must be genuine: if it did not have patronage, i.e. power of dismissal, it would not control the departments. He admitted the danger that the Irish party might become "boss" of an American-style machine, and proposed a compromise for the first five years, but concluded that 'either we are prepared to give this control to the

1. Memorandum on the Irish council bill prepared by the Irish office (i.e. MacDonnell) for the cabinet, 28 Feb.1907 (Cab. 37/87/26).

dominant party in Ireland, or we are not. If we are not, the whole scheme is impossible'. He also favoured a council of close on 100 members: the smaller body proposed by MacDonnell and Bryce would, he thought, 'be insignificant in appearance and open to the charge of being nothing more than another board put on top of the 43 existing boards'. Furthermore, Birrell urged that the tiresome and controversial business of redistribution could only be avoided by using the parliamentary constituencies. The safeguarding of minority interests could best be secured by the straightforward device of a nominated element. The real alternative to making these modest concessions to the nationalists was not, in Birrell's opinion, the adoption and enactment of MacDonnell's plan, but the probable dropping of the scheme altogether.¹

This dispute between Birrell and MacDonnell was partly the traditional conflict between politician and administrator. MacDonnell wanted to improve and make more efficient the machinery of government in Ireland, create a new, non-political climate in which to do this, and break up the troublesome pressure group which was the Irish party. Birrell wanted to concede to the nationalists so far as this was compatible

1. Memorandum on the Irish council bill by Birrell, 5 Mar.1907 (Cab.37/87/26).

with English opinion: partly because they were Ireland's representatives, partly because they were a pressure group who might otherwise make things intolerable for the government in Ireland and at Westminster. MacDonnell's whole case rested on the assumption that a 'weak' bill would pass the house of lords. Birrell's memorandum concluded:

From enquiries that I have made, it seems to me to be tolerably clear that no council scheme, however moderate, which will transfer, as transfer it must, the control over the transferred departments to the Irish nationalist party, has any chance of passing the house of lords in the present session or any session of this parliament. This is a factor in the case, the importance of which need not be dwelt on. What personally I cannot contemplate with pleasure is the introduction of a bill into parliament which will be exposed to the fierce assaults of the unionist party, to the ridicule of the Irish nationalists, and to the indifference and tepidity of our own supporters who sit behind us. Such a measure is hardly likely to proceed beyond a second reading. If it does not, it is a blow to the authority of the government. Could we send up to the house of lords a measure backed by a huge majority in the commons, it would not matter so much what the lords did.

1

The throwing down of this gauntlet to the cabinet did not produce the clear-cut decision Birrell must have been hoping for. Crewe, Haldane and Asquith, reinforced by Grey, had now reverted to their original 'moderate' outlook on the scheme, and the cabinet discussion revealed

2

'sharp differences'. Burns wrote in his diary:

1. Ibid.

2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Mar.1907, op.cit.

9.3.07. Cabinet at 11.....Lords and then Ireland. The first element of serious dissent arose. I took the line of a large council, transferred powers, parliamentary franchise, civil servants retained. Police, judges, magistrates, out. A [squith] and G[rey] for a small advisory council. J. M[orley], C.B., L.G., L.C[hancellor], with me.

1

No final decision was reached at this meeting, but MacDonnell reported that the general tendency (not surprisingly in view of the reversion of the powerful Asquithian group) had been more in favour of the earlier ideas on the constitution, whilst on the question of control of appointments, a compromise was favoured which would secure his views for the first five years.² A laconic letter from Asquith to Crewe after this meeting suggests that the chancellor of the exchequer, at any rate, was now little concerned about the future of the bill, and would be happy to see it quietly destroyed by a treasury non possumus. After some observations on the lords' question, Asquith wrote:

On another point the discussion last Saturday was useful in clearing the air and ground. I did not, for the moment, think it necessary to point out that the essential, and to the Irish all-important, feature of the proposal now before us is that in addition to the fixed contract provision - making allowances for natural increases - for five years, we are asked to vote fo Ireland an extra million from the imperial exchequer. I could never assent to this - nor would either England or Scotland.

3

-
1. Burns' diary, 9 Mar.1907 (Burns papers, Add.Ms. 46325).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 15 May 1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I. Ms.11015).
 3. Asquith to Crewe, 11 Mar.1907 (Asquith papers, Bodleian Library, Ms.46 f.161).

Two more meetings of the cabinet followed during the next few days, at which these issues were again warmly contested.¹ But no-one except MacDonnell was now very much concerned with the scheme simply on its merits. As Campbell-Bannerman explained, in what was for him an unusually informative cabinet letter to the king:

It is not possible.....as it has not been possible on the last two occasions, to state any definite conclusions arrived at. The time was occupied with a conversation regarding the detailed application and machinery of the Irish^{council} bill and the licensing bill, and the consideration of difficulties in each which had been encountered by the committees to which these subjects had been referred; the discussion turning not so much on these details themselves as on the effect they had on the prospect of progress with the respective bills through the house of commons, and therefore as to the tactical advantage of one or the other being given priority. It becomes more and more evident that with other necessary legislation such as the budget, it will be exceedingly difficult to pass these great bills through all their stages, and therefore this question of their respective priorities becomes difficult, and is vital. It requires the closest consideration, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman can as yet report no conclusion upon it.

2

Although it was ultimately decided to leave the licensing bill over until the following session, the future of the council bill remained in jeopardy for some time - Birrell told MacDonnell on March 11

-
1. Burns' diary, 13 Mar. 1907 (Burns papers, Add.Ms. 46325).
 2. Campbell-Bannerman to the king, 13 Mar. 1907 (P.R.O., Cab. 41/31/9).

that it might not appear at all, and that the government might offer
 Ireland simply an evicted tenants bill instead.¹ Bryce also warned
 MacDonnell that such a step was the usual way out of the sort of impasse²
 which the cabinet had now reached on the scheme.

But during the third week in March more progress was made,
 and although the bill's introduction was never completely assured right
 up till the last minute, it was at this time that a measure of substantial
 agreement was reached within the cabinet. MacDonnell, still busily and
 anxiously lobbying at the door of the cabinet room, reported to his wife
 on March 16 that there was 'a tendency to improvement', and on the 19th
 that the latest cabinet had decided in his favour on one main point, and
 made a 'rotten compromise' on another. It was at this stage that
 MacDonnell came to the decision that enough of his work had been retained
 to oblige him to remain at his post and see the bill through (if he had
 ever really intended not to).³

After cabinets on March 22 and 23, Campbell-Bannerman could
 report to the king that the main provisions of the bill were settled,
 except for the financial clauses. It was decided that the council should
 consist of 93 members, including 71 elected. The relation of the council

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015).
 2. Bryce to MacDonnell, 22 Mar.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.35).
 3. MacDonnell to his wife, 16 (telegram) and 19 Mar.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.354 f.110, and e.220 f.47).

to Dublin Castle, said C.B., would be not unlike that of the L.C.C. to the British government. As to finance, a certain 'generous' sum would be granted.¹ MacDonnell had by this time returned to Dublin, but the cabinet's decision reached him almost immediately, and on March 25 he did his best to communicate his opinions directly to the highest level, by means of letters to Sir Edward Grey and to Arthur Ponsonby, the prime minister's secretary. He deplored the decision to increase the membership of the council ('I think it to be 50% too large', he told Grey) as it would weaken the chances of the bill in the lords, but he presumed the size to be finally settled. Probably he was relieved that at least the demand for a 'parliamentary' council had been resisted. His main concern now was the relationship of the council with the lord lieutenant (i.e. Dublin Castle). The cabinet had agreed that the departments should communicate with the council through the lord lieutenant, but some members were still urging that the council should communicate its resolutions direct to the departments. MacDonnell told Grey that this would be 'a wrong procedure - calculated to weaken the lord lieutenant's position and lead to friction'. In the matter of patronage MacDonnell once again urged that the lord lieutenant's powers should be retained:

1. Campbell-Bannerman to the king, 23 Mar.1907 (Cab. 41/31/11).

There is little doubt that if the council has the making of appointments and the power of removal, there will be great changes: I consider such changes undesirable. Things should go slowly... I believe that if our moderate scheme were persisted in by the cabinet the house of lords would pass it. And I know the Irish party would not have ventured to reject it.

1

The cabinet meanwhile had dispersed for Easter, and did not reconvene until the evening of April 10. At this meeting further refinements were made to the plan, and Birrell was authorised to re-submit the whole scheme to the Irish leaders for discussion of details. He told Redmond 'most positively' that he hoped to introduce a bill around the end of the month.² It was at this time probably that Redmond was handed the undated document in Birrell's hand entitled 'skeleton of a plan'.³ The new proposals were referred by the Irish leaders for detailed analysis to Edward Blake, who thought them less a 'skeleton' than a 'jumble of bones', and in that respect inferior to the draft he had been shown at Christmas. Blake considered the lay-out and ordering of the various provisions to be so bad as to render their true meaning and application difficult to grasp

-
1. This summary of MacDonnell's views is taken from MacDonnell to Grey, 25 Mar.1907 (Grey papers, P.R.O., F.O. 800 vol.99). Similar arguments are put forward in MacDonnell to Arthur Ponsonby, 25 Mar.1907 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms.41239 f.234); and in MacDonnell to Ripon, 10 April 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43542 f.180).
 2. Redmond to Dillon, 10 Apr. 1907 (Redmond papers).
 - 3;. 'Skeleton of a plan', n.d., Birrell's hand (Redmond papers).

(the truth of this was borne out later by public reaction to certain aspects of the bill).¹ Generally, Blake was not at all pleased with the scheme: 'I fear it is not intended by this scheme to give in any effectual way responsible administration. If it is intended, a few words would make the intention manifest. I have not found them yet'.²

The cabinet met again on April 19, and confirmed their decision of the 10th as to the size of the council: 60 to 70 members elected on the local government franchise, plus 20 nominated members. The financial machinery and details were all settled except for the amount to be granted.³ John Burns considered that the bill had been 'improved somewhat'.⁴ A couple of days later it was decided to postpone the licensing bill until the following year - a sure sign that the council bill was now regarded as a serious piece of parliamentary business.⁵ Birrell told MacDonnell on April 19 that at least the bill was certain to be read a second time! Little else is known of this cabinet meeting - even MacDonnell found the situation difficult to grasp:

-
1. See *infra*, this chapter, pp. 276-7, 280.
 2. Notes of the 'Skeleton of a plan' in Blake's hand, n.d. (Redmond papers).
 3. Campbell-Bannerman to the king, 22 Apr. 1907 (Cab. 41/31/14).
 4. Burns' diary, 19 Apr. 1907 (Burns papers, Add. Ms. 46325).
 5. Campbell-Bannerman to the king, 22 Apr. 1907 (Cab. 41/31/15).

So far as I can understand, this incomprehensible cabinet have again upset what had been approved of from last July; and the bill has to be redrafted on these points. So far as I could follow, the cabinet have now come back in some ways to my^vvery first proposals, and in others gone away from them; but until the bill is drafted I cannot be sure.

1

MacDonnell therefore decided to remain on in London to help with the drafting of the measure: 'if I am absent now, much may be undone'.² Even if the cabinet were convinced of the wiseness of MacDonnell's policy, he feared that 'owing to the wilfulness of Mr Thring, the draftsman, the bill will not in its drafting carry out the above policy'.³ He was, however, now more confident that the cabinet understood his views, and he urged Lord Ripon to stiffen his colleagues against further concessions:

The bill in its main features is now more like the original conception. In some important details it still admits of improvement, but I am not without hope that here some modification may be introduced. But always at the twelfth hour Mr Birrell tells me that he proposes again, at the instance of the Irish leaders, to raise the question of the constitution of the council....They want to have the present Irish parliamentary representation converted into the council: or failing that to have the council elected by what would be practically the parliamentary constituencies. This would be universally understood in Ireland to be a long and undisguised step towards Gladstonian home rule; and the moderate party in Ireland, who will accept the bill

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 19 Apr. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e.220 f.49).
 2. MacDonnell to his wife, 24 Apr.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.10).
 3. MacDonnell to Ripon, 10 Apr. 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms.43542 f.180).

as it stands, will take alarm and oppose. The house of lords would have an obvious argument for rejecting the bill, and we should have made no impression on the country by the moderation of our proposals. The Irish leaders have no patience; and are not prepared to go through an apprenticeship before they come into their patrimony....I think the present formation of the council - 62 elected members and 20 nominated - to be ample; and I trust your lordship may be able to advise against further change. I am satisfied that the Irish leaders will ultimately accept that figure; and they are now only 'flapping'.

1

But by the following day MacDonnell had become much more alarmed, and now regarded the renewed nationalist criticisms as 'a violent onslaught'. The explanation for this change of mood lay in a conversation MacDonnell had had with Birrell, at which the latter had spoken as if he were 'disposed to yield' to their demands. MacDonnell registered a 'vehement protest', and threatened to resign. Birrell, however agreed to his laying another memorandum before the cabinet, alongside the criticisms of Redmond and Dillon.² MacDonnell then went to call on Ripon, in the hope of securing his advocacy in the cabinet, but obtained no satisfaction. Ripon told him that the parliamentary situation might require the adoption of what he (MacDonnell) regarded as the worse scheme. He also expressed the opinion that although the adoption of such a scheme would mean the defeat

1. MacDonnell to Ripon, 24 Apr. 1907 (Ripon papers, 43542 f.182).

2. MacDonnell to his wife, 25 Apr. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.12).

of the bill in the lords, a more moderate bill would equally certainly
 be defeated.¹ MacDonnell refused to accept this, and laid his troubles
 before Lord Aberdeen, but was once more warned that Birrell would
 probably concede to the nationalists' demands.² MacDonnell thus had
 but one remaining hope: 'unless.....the more conservative members of
 the cabinet hold out, I fear the game is up: and the bill has no chance
 of passing the lords'.³

Birrell would have agreed with this last point, but like his
 colleague Ripon, felt that no bill would pass. On April 27 Birrell
 sent Campbell-Bannerman a long statement of his views on the situation,
 which illustrates clearly the extent to which, pace MacDonnell, the
 whole issue had become simply one of political strategy:

I had to leave the cabinet rather abruptly yesterday
 else I had intended to ask for one more cabinet on the
 eternal Irish bill. I have received a memo. from
 Redmond and Dillon on the one outstanding point which
 I propose to print and circulate with a copy of the
 bill on Monday. Sir A.M. is strongly opposed to its
 reasoning, and as he is entitled to his opinion I shall
 also circulate his view.

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 28 Apr.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e.217 f.14).
 2. Aberdeen did, however, write once more to the prime minister, throwing
 his 'little all' in advocacy of MacDonnell's views. Aberdeen to
 Campbell-Bannerman, 1 May 1907 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms.41210 f.99).
 3. MacDonnell to his wife, 28 Apr.1907 (MacDonnell papers, e.217 f.14).

I do not deny that he has something to say for himself - in fact the whole subject is highly speculative. He says that if the monetary provision (to be settled, I hope, on Tuesday) is a generous one R. and D. dare not say no! He believes they wish the bill to pass our house, but to perish in the lords, and therefore they dread it in its present state because they think (or he does) that as it stands it has a chance of becoming law.

There I think he is wrong, but no doubt if we make the change R. and D. desire, we shall lose a good deal of the very little moderate Irish opinion we may otherwise enlist on our side. My own opinion is that if we introduce the bill as drawn, R. and D. will on Tuesday week express an adverse opinion to it, but will allow it to be referred to the Whitsuntide convention, who, in their turn will intimate that though they cannot accept it as it stands, they will do so if altered as R. and D. have suggested. What should we do then? If we were to drop the bill there will be a tremendous row in Ireland, and my position (without any crimes act) very alarming.

If we go on with the bill and Redmond in committee moves an amendment in his sense, he will obtain the support of the whole labour party on both sides of the house, and I expect a large proportion of our own radical supporters. It is quite conceivable that we might either have to give way or to see our majority so reduced as to be tantamount to a beating. I am sure that R. and D. will not help us to kill our bill, but will keep it sufficiently alive to force us to run the odious risk in Ireland of dropping it ourselves or the risk of seeing it altered against our will. I think you and I and others are of like mind in this matter, but there are one or two who I expect will be found of another way of thinking. It makes a grave situation.

1

1. Birrell to Campbell-Bannerman, 27 Apr.1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41239 f. 238).

The bill's introduction had already been fixed for May 7, but the decisive cabinet meeting was not held until the 1st. This was in order to permit a final meeting on April 30 to settle the finances of the bill, between Birrell and MacDonnell, and Asquith and his treasury advisers. Finance had been another aspect of the bill to cause disagreement, though the alignment of forces in this case was slightly different: MacDonnell, Birrell, and the nationalists were all on the same side for once. They all agreed that a generous financial provision was essential and might mean the difference between the success or the failure of the scheme. The central point of MacDonnell's plan was that, to a contract provision calculated strictly on the basis of the existing expenditure of the transferred departments, there should be added a further sum based on economies made in both transferred and non-transferred departments following the creation of the council, plus a bonus which would appear as either $\frac{\pounds 1}{2}$ million or as $\pounds 1$ million, depending on the mode of book-keeping. On this point of course, Asquith, as chancellor, was deeply involved, and it would be hard to say how far his line of action was dictated by his departmental responsibility and how far by his personal attitude towards the scheme as a whole.

1. See his letter to Crewe of 9 Mar.1907 (supra, this chapter, p.248).

The treasury viewpoint was that Ireland, though perhaps technically 'overtaxed', had since the report of the financial relations commission in 1896 been accorded such consideration in other ways that by 1905-6 she was receiving far more in additional allowances than the amount of her apparent overtaxation.¹ MacDonnell regarded this argument as 'most misleading'. It was based, he said, on treasury Statements of Revenue and Expenditure, the accuracy of which had been impeached by Hugh Childers, Lord Welby, and others: any assessment of Ireland's 'true contribution' was guesswork. Ireland's ability to pay (relative to Great Britain), assessed in 1894 as 1:20, MacDonnell now estimated at more like 1:21 or 1:22. He therefore asserted that the claim made by the Irish office in 1906 for an extra £1 million 'must be admitted as reasonable'.² Thus when the parties came together on April 30 to make a final settlement, a strong time was expected. MacDonnell reported that there was 'hard in-fighting', but he was not displeased with the result: 'we got very fair terms. Not, of course, as much as I had asked for, but still not far off. The Irish people, if the bill sees the light, ought to be well pleased'.³

-
1. 'Irish finance', a cabinet paper by R. McKenna, 20 Mar. 1907 (Cab. 37/87/32).
 2. 'Reply to the treasury paper on Irish finance' by the Irish office (MacDonnell), 4 Apr. 1907 (Cab. 37/87/40).
 3. MacDonnell to his wife, 1 May 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.220 f.55).

But more immediately important was the meeting of the full cabinet on the following day, May 1, at which the question of the size and make-up of the council was to be re-opened at the request of Birrell, following a fresh assault on that section of the bill by the Irish leaders. The latter together with 'their friends', reported MacDonnell, 'are making superhuman efforts. If they succeed it is the death-knell of the bill. Its rejection in the lords is certain. What utter fools they are; it lends great force to the belief that they do not want a settlement'¹. Although they regarded the 84-man council as an improvement on former drafts, the Irish leaders maintained that their earlier criticisms still applied. They still held out for a 'parliamentary' council - if the cabinet could not agree to create a council of the 103 Irish M.P.s, then they should at least adopt the existing 103 parliamentary constituencies as the basis for election. The existing scheme, the nationalists claimed, would involve 'redistribution', and so cause unnecessary trouble in Ireland and at Westminster. Its acceptance by the Irish party would expose them to fierce attack from the extremists, who would also benefit from the proposed re-grouping of

1. Ibid.

1
constituencies. So also would the unionists:

We are ready to conciliate unionist opposition in Ireland, and to meet fair demands from Ulster for greater representation through the nominated element, but we protest against both methods, redistribution and nomination, being used for the purpose.

2

The nationalists' other main criticism concerned the nature of the lord lieutenant's veto. The following passage Redmond marked down as 'most objectionable':

Cl.3(c) On the consideration of any resolution so reserved, the lord lieutenant may either confirm the resolution of the council, or make such order with respect to the question to which the resolution refers as he thinks fit.

-
1. This fear was probably justified. Redmond calculated (see footnote 1, p 269) that nationalists would win 45 seats on the 84-man council, against 19 unionists and 20 nominees (who would doubtless be, in the main, Dunravenites, plus a smattering of academics, clergy, and businessmen). An overall majority of 6 was but a slender safeguard against rival nationalist groups. MacDonnell, certainly, hoped to assist the political advance of 'moderates' like O'Brien and Dunraven, and though Redmond talked of 'extremists' breaking in, his real fear was probably of O'Brien. His letters (and Dillon's) at the time show more concern about the Cork 'factionists' than about sinn fein. In practice, doubtless, erosion of the party's supremacy would have taken place at both ends - loss of votes to sinn fein in Dublin city and to a lesser extent in Galway, Wexford, and Louth; and further losses to O'Brienites in Cork county, certainly, and probably in Kerry, Limerick, and Tipperary also. A handful of seats, and an alliance of convenience between O'Brien and sinn fein (such as nearly happened in 1909), might easily break the grip of the Irish party on the 'nationalist majority' which everyone, including MacDonnell, piously agreed should be created on the council.
 2. 'Memorandum submitted by Mr Redmond and others on the Irish council bill', printed for the cabinet, 29 Apr. 1907 (Cab. 37/88/57)/

It was felt that a unionist lord lieutenant might interpret this provision¹ in such a way as to render the council quite powerless.

The basis of MacDonnell's reply to these arguments was that they contained nothing new and had already been considered and rejected by the cabinet in March. Why this should have been an argument for not reconsidering them is not clear, unless MacDonnell simply intended to remind the 'more conservative members of the cabinet' of the standpoint they had previously adopted. But in one respect he had changed his approach, or perhaps even advanced his ground since his memorandum of February 28, which had been written in answer to the greater challenge of the decisions taken by the progressive cabinet committee of February 22. In the earlier memorandum he had concentrated his attack on the attempt to hand the council over to the parliamentary party, directly or indirectly, and had virtually retracted his objections to a large council per se (though he had, of course, stood out for a small council at the initial negotiations in 1906). But now, at the end of April 1907, he once more attacked any sort of increase in the size of the council: 100 councillors elected on the local government franchise, he now thought, would be no more acceptable

1. A printed draft Irish council bill, 27 April 1907, with marginal notes in Redmond's hand (Redmond papers).

than the nationalist proposals, since the register did not differ materially from the parliamentary one (in fact it included peers and women!), and the Irish party's grip was therefore unlikely to be shaken. A concession on this point, thought MacDonnell, would be inconsistent with the spirit of the scheme, and be very badly received by 'moderate men'. Not only would a larger council look like poorly disguised Gladstonian home rule, but it would be less efficient than the existing council of 84 all-told.¹

All these arguments were before the cabinet when it met on May 1, and again on the morning of May 3, to take the final decisions on the scheme. Campbell-Bannerman's report of these meetings to the king simply records the main point: a decision to increase the number of elected members from 63 to about 80, giving a full council of about 105.² John Burns' diary gives a little more information (though the usual proviso applies as to his own part in affairs). After the meeting

-
1. 'Comments on the memorandum submitted by Mr Redmond and others', a cabinet paper prepared by the Irish office (MacDonnell), 29 Apr. 1907 (Cab.37/88/54).
 2. Campbell-Bannerman to the king, 3 May 1907 (Cab.41/31/17).

on the 1st he recorded:

Took a strong line on Irish bill for a large council, wide powers, popular supremacy, as against the advisory committee rigged up by the sun-dried bureaucrat [i.e. MacDonnell]. J.M. [Orley], L.C. [Chancellor,] delighted with bold views....If the bill does not pass, the bigger the bill the better. If it does pass, the Irish problem on the way to settlement.

1

No decision was reached at the first meeting, and at the second, Burns tells us, the lord chancellor was 'punctiliously doctrinaire', and Asquith was equally so in an opposite direction. A crisis point was nearly reached, but Birrell remained 'wisely genial', and

...by recalling them back to the essentials of the subject the linchpin was just slipped back, and once more the Irish coach rolled on and over a great obstacle, as usual set up by its friends. J.M. [Orley] and J. B. [Burns] felicitated on the result, as a large council had been won.

2

Burns was pleased with the cabinet's work, and presumably expected that the Irish leaders would also be tolerably happy about it. But Dillon's two letters to his wife, written on the same day (May 3) suggest that this was not quite the case. Before the meeting, Dillon and Redmond found Birrell to be not 'wisely genial', but 'in a highly nervous

1. Burns' diary, 1 May 1907 (Burns papers, Add.Ms. 46325).

2. Ibid., 3 May 1907.

1

and somewhat depressed condition'. Later in the day Dillon wrote again:

Redmond and I have just come down from our interview with B [irrell]. We have won three-fourths of our battle. But there was a pretty hard fight in the cabinet, and we have not got all. The bill as it now stands is so much improved that it bears no resemblance to the original scheme. Nonetheless, it will not be easy for us to decide on our attitude towards it.

2

Sir Antony MacDonnell was extremely depressed by these latest developments, though not to the extent of packing his bags. He remained in close attendance at the Irish office in London, for as he explained to his wife:

...at the stage things now are, if I do not press the officers, no one will. The officers do not like the bill, they think it will be thrown out by the lords,

-
1. Dillon to his wife, morning of 3 May 1907 (Dillon papers. I am grateful to Professor F.S.L. Lyons for showing me this letter, and the subsequent one of the same date). Dillon lamented: 'It is amazing what an amount of mischief a few cranks can do in a great party. And the point on which they are fighting us, tho' vital to us - is from their point of view perfectly childish. Or to put it better - their reasons for refusing what we want are childish'. It is difficult to understand what Dillon meant by 'childish' here. Possibly he would have so described the first of two points made by Lord Crewe to Lord Ripon on May 25. Crewe did not regret having stood firm against the nationalist demands for a 'parliamentary' council, 'first because it would have been such an obvious political move, and secondly because there was no defending the composition of the body from the administrative point of view' (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43552 f.150).
 2. Dillon to his wife, 4 p.m. 3 May 1907 (Dillon papers).

and they take no interest. If it all fails, what a waste of time and trouble!

1

MacDonnell defended his position to the last. On May 4 he sent Redmond his draft schedule of the constitution of the council, in which the total of 'about 80' elected members turned out to be 70 elected members and 25 nominated, total 95.² Redmond accordingly sent a stern note to Birrell, who had retired to Eastbourne to compose his speech:

I have received the new schedule. This raises the number of elected members from 63 to 70, but does not carry out what we understood from you to be the general principle agreed to by the cabinet, namely that the number of elected members should be 80 or thereabouts, and secondly that so far as was consistent with that figure, the existing parliamentary constituencies should be adhered to. This new schedule violates both these conditions and we cannot see that it is any improvement on the schedule in the last draft of the bill, and our previously stated objections apply with practically undiminished force. Further, having analysed the numbers we can see no justification for the increase in the nominated element which is proposed in this new schedule. It is really most important that I should see you at the earliest moment on Monday.

3

It is clear that MacDonnell had once again taken an unofficial initiative of his own. Birrell's thoughts may have been interesting as he composed

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 2 May 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.16).
 2. Draft schedule of the Irish council bill constitution, n.d. (Redmond papers).
 3. Redmond to Birrell, 4 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

the following apology for his subordinate:¹

I am here working away, among other things, on the schedule. Your letter has just reached me. I quite agree -

- (i) As near 80 elected members as we can decently get.
- (ii) As little interference with existing party constituencies as possible.

I asked Sir A.M. to send you his new draft in order that you might have something to work on as well as myself. I hope you will work on one and let me have the benefit of it to compare with my own as soon as may be on Monday. We must then submit whatever is the result to the P.M. and one or two of the cabinet or as many as can be collected together in the afternoon.

2

The discussions on the Monday (May 6), resulted in the maintenance of the concession to the Irish on the question of the constitution, and as introduced by Birrell on the Tuesday, the bill provided for 82 elected and 25 nominated members, total 107. On the morning of the introduction, May 7, MacDonnell complained to his wife that Birrell had once again conceded a point to Redmond and Dillon, against his (MacDonnell's) wishes:

It is now clear that the government has abandoned any hope of passing the bill in the lords, and they think it good policy to give way to the Irish members in all things, or most things. Even in regard to the control

-
1. Earlier in the year, Birrell had written to Redmond: 'I'm looking through the latest draft, of which I gave you a copy. I see it contains one or two quite unconsidered clauses and additions. So please don't attach any particular importance to them. I had not seen them myself'. Birrell to Redmond, n.d., early 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Birrell to Redmond, n.d., 4 or 5 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

of parliament Birrell was giving way - I then told him that if he did, I should have to reconsider my position in the government [a revealing choice of words?]. He then asked me to draft the clause I wished for, which I did. On seeing it he said he thought it passable, and would show it to the P.M. If the P.M. agrees to it, the matter is just saved.

1

Controversy over details, and indeed principles, of the scheme, thus continued until the very last minute. Its career behind closed doors, from February 1906 to May 1907, had been long and chequered. The size of the proposed council had started at around 30, risen to 125, and finally settled at 107; whilst membership, originally to be two-thirds elected, by delegates from the county councils, was now to be over three-quarters elected, by the people themselves. But the demand for the conversion of the Irish parliamentary representation directly into a council had been flatly rejected, as had the follow-up demands with the same end in view: with only 82 elected seats, and a franchise based on the local government electorate (which included women and peers), and regular three-year elections, there was little chance of an untroubled take over of the council by the Irish party M.P.s. The mode by which the government would control the council was equally unpalatable to nationalists:

1. MacDonnell to his wife, 7 May 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.e. 220 f.57).

intervention by the house of lords had been written out, but to ensure imperial control it had been necessary to bury MacDonnell's idea of a non-political viceroy with a fixed term, and retain the lord lieutenant as a political appointee with a wide-ranging veto, which he would presumably exercise at the direction of the British cabinet. But MacDonnell had insisted that the simple suspensory veto of the 1893 home rule bill, which had been favoured by the cabinet committee of February 22, was only suited to a legislative body, and would be inadequate for the supervision of an administrative council which might, for instance, omit¹ to pass a resolution covering the financing of protestant schools. Thus clause 3(2) stated that the lord lieutenant might annul resolutions or remit them to the council for further consideration; but if he felt immediate action was necessary in the matter 'in order to preserve the efficiency of the service or to prevent public or private injury' (very broad limitations), he might make such order as he thought the case required, which order would have the effect of a council resolution. However ingenuous may have been MacDonnell's intention with regard to this clause, nationalists assumed that when the unionists got back into office they

1. Memorandum on the Irish council bill, prepared by the Irish office for the cabinet, 28 Feb. 1907 (Cab. 37/87/23).

would have the power to override the council and govern the country as before, by direct action through the lord lieutenant. Other alterations in the scheme had been minor ones, at least from the point of view of the Irish leaders: mode of communication between the council and the departments, about which MacDonnell had written so anxiously to Grey and to Ponsonby on March 25, was left over to be decided by the lord lieutenant 'after consultation with the council'. This was a decision against MacDonnell, who had of course wanted to channel all important business through the chief secretary's office, but was only a slight attraction for Redmond, to whom it was something of a technicality. The president was now to be elected from the council, instead of being the lord lieutenant or his nominee, and the same applied to the membership of the committees, including the finance committee (although all the chairmen were still to be nominees).

The bill as introduced by Birrell on the afternoon of May 7 bore very little resemblance to the proposals MacDonnell had sent to Bryce in February 1906. Yet it did now seem to meet Redmond's demands on

1. See supra, this chapter, p. 258.

2. See supra, this chapter, p. 258.

some of the cardinal points. In seeking for a compromise the cabinet had produced a scheme which they knew would please nobody very much but which they hoped would prevent the house of lords from winning public approval for their destruction of it. That it would not even receive a second reading in the house of commons was a contingency which, if they had considered at all, they had discounted.

In his speech, Birrell sought to present the bill as moderate (by stressing its limited powers and the continued supremacy of parliament), as respectable (by citing Disraeli and the duke of Devonshire as advocates of similar ideas), and above all as a measure of modernisation:

It does not authorise the levying of a single tax or the striking of the humblest rate. The imperial chamber....will remain majestically unaffected by the provisions of this bill.....It is not that Dublin Castle is a sink or seat of jobbery and corruption.... but the main current of Irish life as it rushes past its walls passes by almost unheeded....[the Castle operates]...like a great Roman provincial of 120 A.D.

1

The unionists greeted the measure with the expected hostility. Balfour concentrated his attack on technical aspects of the bill, and sought to show that it would make Irish administration less rather than

1. 7 May 1907, Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.174 col.78.

more efficient.¹ The other tory speeches were full-blooded orange assaults on home rule: William Moore's speech especially was directed against a far more extreme measure than was in fact being proposed, as a later liberal speaker pointed out.² Redmond Barry (solicitor - general for Ireland) found it easy to point out contradictions in the unionists' arguments.³

The most important speech was Redmond's. No one really knew what line he would take. In his Waterford speech on February 1 he had seemed to stretch out a friendly hand to the new chief secretary.⁴ But as the cabinet's attitude began to harden once more, in March, he enjoined them 'either to trust the people or to continue the present system of government'.⁵ Before the end of April his attitude had become very tough, though certainly not irreconcilable:

-
1. 7 May 1907. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.174 cols.103-111.
 2. Speech by G.P.Gooch, 7 May 1907. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.174 col.154.
 3. 7 May 1907. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.174 cols.179-183. Moore had denounced the measure as home rule, he claimed, yet Balfour had said that the measure could never evolve into home rule.
 4. See supra, this chapter, p.244.
 5. Redmond at Liverpool, 17 Mar.1907 (W.F.J., 23 Mar.1907).

Is not half a loaf better than no bread?
 Of course it is, but is half a chronometer
 better than no watch? What is the moral for
 us?....We say from the outset frankly to the
 government, that if on consideration of their
 proposals they appear not calculated to prepare
 the way, but calculated on the contrary to impede
 the way and to weaken Ireland's fight and interfere
 with the progress of the national movement, then
 without any hesitation we will tell our people that
 those proposals should be rejected.

1

But after the discussions of the last hectic days, the Irish leaders
 came 'tired and soreheaded' to the debate,² and Redmond's speech
 on the introduction was something of an anti-climax. He began
 with one of his historical rambles through the centuries of British
 misrule in Ireland, then went on to discuss the bill as an extention
 of local government. He thought the general structure of the scheme
 steered an uneasy course between ministerial and committee government,
 and expressed special fears about the implications behind the lord
 lieutenant's substantial 'reserved powers'. The finances he thought
 quite inadequate. About the size of the council, however, he said
 nothing. He would not take the responsibility of recommending the
 measure to the Irish people, but neither would he rule it out of court

1. Redmond at the London U.I.L., 22 Apr. 1907 (F.J., 23 Apr.1907).

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

entirely. It would be submitted to the judgment of his followers at the U.I.L. convention, to be held in Dublin on Tuesday, May 21. He had, he said, 'never spoken under such a heavy sense of responsibility'.¹ He had in fact reached no decision and was taking a fortnight's breathing space. As The Times enjoyed pointing out, the scheme had 'not excited fervid enthusiasm in any quarter'.² But it was now generally recognised that the fate of the bill would be decided in one of two other assemblies, and not in a house of commons dominated by a huge and apparently commanding majority.

3. The national convention and the end of the affair.

No-one in any party was in much doubt as to how the house of lords would react to the council bill, but the verdict of the U.I.L. convention, would be of even more/^{immediate} importance. Liberal opinion interpreted Redmond's speech as a cautious acceptance of the bill.³ The Times' Dublin correspondent, whilst noting widespread disappointment among nationalists, reported that 'it is confidently believed that the

1. 7 May 1907.(Parlt.Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.174 cols.112-127).

2. Times, 8 May 1907

3. 'On the whole he was favourable to the bill', reported the Westminster Gazette on 8 May 1907. Tribune on the same date referred to his 'critical, but friendly and conciliatory speech'.

approaching nationalist convention will accept Mr Birrell's Irish council bill'.¹ Even Sir Antony MacDonnell telegraphed to his wife that 'Thomas [his code-name for the nationalist party] most reasonable and friendly. Even Ulster could not bring real objection'.²

The private correspondence of the nationalist leaders immediately following the introduction of the bill does not fully bear out this confidence, but it does suggest a frame of mind very different from that displayed by Redmond two weeks later, when he proposed the rejection of the bill at the convention. Dillon wanted Birrell to omit from the print of the bill the power of the lord lieutenant to 'act off his own bat', and write in that the chairmen of committees should be appointed 'after consultation with the council'.³ He was very concerned about these points, but they were details which could have been pressed in committee. Their very discussion at this stage suggests that the Irish leaders intended to pursue a policy other than that of outright rejection: Dillon's objection to them was that 'we shall have row enough without'.⁴ At this stage Dillon, although resenting the fact that their 'moderate concessions' had not

-
1. Times, 11 May 1907.
 2. MacDonnell to his wife (telegram), 8 May 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217.f16). For a key to MacDonnell's private code, see MacDonnell papers, c.372 f.95.
 3. The full text of the bill was not released to the press until May 11.
 4. Dillon to Redmond, 9 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

been granted, saw the problem mainly as one of selling conditional acceptance of the bill to the convention. His letter to Redmond of May 9 continues:

I should like to hear from you as soon as you have time to think over it, your idea of the method of procedure at the convention. One thing I am quite clear on - it will never do to submit any official resolution approving of or accepting the bill. The convention will have to be handled very carefully. I shall see the Freeman people tonight - and shall let you know how the matter stands there.

1

After sounding out opinion in Dublin, Dillon wrote again, and more overtly advocated a policy of tentative acceptance:

I have seen the Freeman people and I think the Freeman will give fair play to the bill - more it would not be reasonable to expect from them. Nor do I think it would be useful for the Freeman to go strongly in favour of the bill.

I have had very little opportunity so far of gauging feeling here. But I fancy there is a tendency to reaction in favour of giving the bill fair consideration. The explosion of disappointment and anger in the country will have some very wholesome results. It will let Birrell and co. see how much they can rely on Sir Antony's information as to Irish feeling, and make them realise what would have been the result of producing Antony's original bill. And, I think, if we make full use of it, and of the reception of the bill by the liberal party, we may be able to secure some necessary amendments.

2

1. Ibid.

2. Dillon to Redmond, 11 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

Dillon's optimism with regard to the attitude of the Freeman's Journal was misplaced: the editorial of May 11 was, if anything, more condemnatory than that of the 8th. The London correspondent complained on the earlier date that Birrell had been 'full of reasons why no unionist should oppose the bill, but very bare of reason why any home ruler should support it'¹. Nowhere in that or in subsequent editions was any attempt made to furnish those missing reasons: the editorial of May 8 insisted that the fate of the bill be left to the convention to decide, but listed many serious criticisms of the measure, without discovering any good points at all. On the following day it was conceded that perhaps the full text of the bill would give a better impression than Birrell's speech,² but this hope was belied by the edition of May 11 (after Dillon's plea for 'fair play' had been made), which pronounced that:

The text of the Irish council bill adds little that is material to Mr Birrell's exposition of the measure..

-
1. F.J., 8 May 1907.
 2. F.J., 9 May 1907. It was generally agreed that Birrell's introduction speech had not been a success. The Freeman commented: 'Mr Birrell was not at his best in propounding this bill to the house. He damped the spirit of his own side by the strain in which he spoke, and one could not help feeling that he was himself painfully conscious that the measure fell far short, not only of what was desirable, but of what was practicable'.

There is nothing generous, courageous or trusting. Whether it can be used to any extent for the good of Ireland, without detriment to her national rights, claims and position, or her financial credit, it is for the convention to decide.

1

The undertone of all the Freeman articles was in fact that it would be extreme foolishness for the convention to take any line other than one of firm opposition to the bill. The edition of May 14 disclosed the extent of the Freeman's 'fair play': it abated none of its criticisms of the bill (and indeed denounced those nationalists who, by endorsing 'step by step' had given encouragement to 'the renegades and minimizers' in the liberal party), but it made clear that Redmond and his colleagues had no responsibility for the measure now proposed, and that the convention would be 'unfettered'.² Whatever Dillon had asked for, all the Freeman was prepared to do was to defend the men by means of (or in exchange for) denouncing the measure.

This being the attitude of the 'official' Irish party organ, it is not surprising to find that most of the nationalist press were strongly against the bill. Many of the provincial weeklies appeared on May 10 or 11, and on the 12th Dillon sent Redmond a number of cuttings.³

1. F.J., 11 May 1907.

2. F.J., 14 May 1907.

3. A batch of press cuttings enclosed by Dillon to Redmond, 12 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

His selection suggested that the downright opponents of the scheme were only in a small majority, but other sources suggest that press ¹ support for the scheme was in fact very scarce indeed: of the 26 local nationalist papers cited by the Irish Independent or by Dillon, 17 declared against the bill, mostly in abusive terms; 4 were non-committal, i.e. prepared to leave the decision to the convention, without weighting their comments one way or the other; and 5 might be classified as for the bill, in the sense that they considered it to be worth amending in committee. Nowhere did the bill as it stood receive positive support. The Echo considered that any sort of representative chamber would be worth having, whilst the Monaghan People argued that rejection would 'give a fillip to the sinn fein movement'. These two journals and the Tuam Herald were the leading advocates of acceptance, the rest taking up a position somewhere between that of the Sligo Champion and that of the Longford Leader.

The Sligo Champion was owned by P.A. McHugh M.P., a staunch supporter of the party leadership. Hampered by the fact that on this

+

-
1. Between 8 and 19 May 1907 the Irish Independent ran a 'tabloid opinions' column on the council bill, with quotes from prominent persons and from other newspapers.

occasion no-one yet knew what the policy of the leadership would be, McHugh restricted himself to an exposition of the details of the measure, and declared that the decision facing the convention was a 'momentous' one. His conclusion, though correct, was scarcely dynamic: 'the bill on the whole is regarded as an advance in the direction of responsible and popular control, but is disappointing as a large and comprehensive extension of self-government'. But in the country generally, a more popular approach than McHugh's was one of fierce denunciation of the measure accompanied by very little information about it. The Longford Leader was owned by J.P. Farrell, M.P., one of the party's agrarian extremists. It demanded, on May 11:

Was it for this miserable weakling that Ireland endured 20 years of tory coercion.a paltry, unworkable, and miserable attempt to create a glorified county council in Ireland.....The acceptance of such a preposterous and ridiculous measure as a step towards home rule would be the most fatal error our people could commit. If in this supreme crisis of our country's fate we accept this bill as an instalment of the Irish demand - then we deserve to be treated for evermore as cowards and weaklings.

Thus, even among nationalist M.P.s, there was no unity in support of an agreed policy. The bill was received by them, as by many rank-and-file liberals, 'without enthusiasm', and severe 'criticisms¹ and disappointments' were expressed in the lobby afterwards. Outside

1. F.J., 8 May 1907.

the small 'cabinet' of parliamentary leaders and their advisers, the Irish party members knew nothing about the scheme before its introduction. Redmond was, of course, bound by the same rule of secrecy which kept the bulk of liberal M.P.s in ignorance, but his speeches, and those of Dillon, had done little to prepare the ground for what was to come. They kept simply to generalised warnings that they must have a 'strong bill' and would not accept a 'weak or halting measure'. No guidance was given, even in Redmond's speech on the introduction. Consequently, M.P.s dispersed for the Whitsun recess uninstructed and in some confusion.

Many chose a cautious non-committal note, like McHugh's Sligo Champion, or attempted to adopt the attitude expressed by Redmond in the house of commons. But even Devlin found such a balancing act hard to accomplish: 'if the passage of this bill will help forward home rule', he declared, 'it ought to be accepted; if not, it ought to be rejected'.¹ Some M.P.s, like Hugh Law, were content to assure Redmond² of their loyalty to him. Others, like Joseph Nolan, M.J.Flavin, J.J.Clancy, and J.P.Hayden, thought that the bill might be amended into something worthwhile, and a small minority expressed positive approval

1. Statement to the press by Devlin (Irish Independent, 8 May 1907).

2. H. Law to Redmond, 20 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

1
of one aspect or other. J.J.O'Shee, for instance, praised the
education provisions, and dismissed the threat which many saw in the
lord lieutenant's power of veto.² J.H. McKean (in flat contradiction
to the views expressed by T.P.Gill, A.J.Kettle, and others) thought
the scheme pronounced 'the death sentence of Castle rule in Ireland'.³

But amongst those M.P.s whose views are known, the resolute
opponents of the bill predominated. Little support could be expected
from the 'factionists' of course: T.M.Healy and John O'Donnell
denounced the scheme vigorously, whilst Augustine Roche declared,
somewhat enigmatically, that William O'Brien's policy had been 'amply
vindicated'.⁴ But many members of the 'official' party, including
some who depended on the party fund, were no less critical. Laurence
Ginnell publicly announced his opposition to the scheme in the lobby
immediately after the debate,⁵ and his partner in agrarian agitation,

-
1. For the opinions of these M.P.s see J.Nolan to Redmond, 19 May 1907; D.M.Moriarty to Redmond, 17 May 1907 (both in Redmond papers); Irish Independent, 9 May 1907.
 2. Ir.Ind., 9 May 1907.
 3. F.J., 20 May 1907.
 4. Ir.Ind., 9,15, and 14 May 1907 respectively.
 5. 'I suppose your convention will pass this bill?', asked a liberal M.P. of Ginnell at the end of the debate. 'Yes', replied the member for North Westmeath, 'we will pass it to the flames' (Typed statement of Mrs.A.Ginnell to the Irish Bureau of Military History, based on Ginnell's shorthand notes. I am grateful to Professor F.S.L.Lyons for showing me a copy of this document).

J.P.Farrell, soon confirmed that the Longford Leader correctly reflected his views.¹ J.O'Mara and M.Meagher telegraphed an announcement of their opposition to their Kilkenny constituents, whilst C.J.Dolan² declared his 'disgust' in the columns of the Freeman's Journal. T.M.Kettle expressed 'strong disapproval' of the bill, as a 'contemptible and vicious measure'.³ Others who made public their opposition, including J.O'Dowd, J.Murphy, Wm O'Malley, E.Barry, Tom O'Donnell and M.Joyce, all⁴ more or less took the line that the bill was 'an insult to Ireland'.

Lacking any guidance from above, the party seemed in danger of disruption. Yet Dillon told Redmond on May 11 that he did not think 'it would be wise to have a meeting of the party before the convention. I hold that view for several reasons, which I can explain when we meet'.⁵ In view of liberal criticisms that the Irish leaders had made no effort to prepare their followers for the sort of measure

-
1. Ir.Ind., 14 May 1907.
 2. F.J., 10 and 20 May 1907 respectively.
 3. W.F.J., 18 May 1907.
 4. See Ir.Ind., 9 and 10 May 1907.
 5. Dillon to Redmond, 11 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

they might expect, this, seems strange, the more so since Dillon still thought at this stage in terms of forcing the house of lords to reject the measure, and hoped therefore to win acceptance at the convention for a policy of abstention rather than opposition to the second reading.¹ The answer, probably, is that Dillon hoped to keep a free hand to play the convention by ear, untrammelled by any prior commitments. If a meeting of the party had been held beforehand, extreme opposition would certainly have been displayed by a minority of the rank and file M.P.s, who might have extracted an assurance from Redmond that he would recommend rejection to the convention. There was bound to be opposition from this group, and Dillon probably felt that nothing was to be gained from facing it sooner rather than later. If a party meeting was not held, and the convention proved generally tractable, it might not be too difficult for a powerful public orator like Redmond, with a sympathetic audience behind him, to get the better of a few recalcitrant

1. Bryce later commented: 'The Irish leaders, if they honestly meant to pass the bill - and very likely they did - made two great mistakes. The first was in letting their people expect a large measure. The bill ought from the first to have been represented as neither home rule nor a substitute for it, nor anything like it, but merely as an administrative reform. The other mistake was to let judgment go by default against it. They ought to have gone to Ireland and explained the bill, and shown how, though it wasn't home rule, it might be worked so as to do much good'. Bryce to Grey, 6 July 1907 (Grey papers, F.O. 800 vol.99).

M.P.s. If the convention proved to be hopelessly against the bill, then Redmond would be in a position to strike the first blow, without giving the impression of having been forced by his more extreme M.P.s.

But if this was Dillon's view, it rapidly became clear that it was over-optimistic. Opposition from some of the M.P.s might have been expected in view of the unwelcome complications which a council with 82 elected seats would introduce into Ireland's 103 parliamentary constituencies, but public opinion seemed to be even more hostile to the bill. County and district councils, boards of guardians, and U.I.L. branches vied with one another to denounce the bill. J.T. Donovan told a large A.O.H. meeting at Lisnaskea, co.Fermanagh, that the bill was a 'trumpery, tin-pot ¹ measure'; North Mayo U.I.L. executive declared the bill 'incapable of useful amendment'; and Roscommon C.C. and Dublin South D.C. both instructed their delegates to vote for the rejection of the bill. ² Of the 35 local bodies whose decisions were reported in the Freeman's Journal between May 9 and May 20, 16 instructed their delegates to vote against the bill, and only 5 voted in favour of it or considered it worthwhile to make a serious effort to obtain amendments.

1. F.J., 10 May 1907.

2. F.J., 16 May 1907.

The remaining 14 instructed their delegates to vote as directed by Redmond, but in almost all these cases hostility to the measure was first expressed (it is ironic that the nationalist leaders stressed throughout the affair that they would abide by the decision of the convention, yet the local delegates who would make up the convention were as often as not instructed to stand by the decision of their leaders).

Opinion in Dublin was especially hostile to the bill. The surgeon R.F.Tobin, of St.Stephen's Green, told Redmond that the circle in which he moved 'turned up their noses' at the bill, as did 'the bulk of Waldron's constituents'¹. The extremist group on Dublin corporation, led by P.T.Daly, forced the lord mayor to accept a resolution that the bill was an 'insult to the Irish people', and its true aim was 'to set up Sir Antony MacDonnell in autocratic power in Dublin Castle'². At the North Dublin U.I.L. executive on May 11, Andrew Kettle³ denounced the bill as another betrayal, akin to 'the land conference surrender'. The executive unanimously adopted his

1. R.F. Tobin to Redmond, 12 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

2. F.J., 18 May 1907.

3. Land League veteran, and father of T.M.Kettle M.P.

resolution for the convention:

That the Irish council bill proposed by the present government is so absurdly inadequate to deal with the wants of Ireland and so insultingly hostile to the national aspirations of the Irish race...that we ...feel compelled to decline to discuss such a Grecian proposition.

1

2

Dillon thought this resolution 'an absurd one'.

Kettle may have been prompted in his attitude by his son, T.M.Kettle, one of the party's youngest M.P.s, and the chief representative of the intellectual and student wing of the national movement, which

1. Tines, 13 May 1907.

2. Dillon to Redmond, 12 May 1907 (Redmond papers). Kettle's activities seem to be the explanation for an interesting letter written to Redmond on 19 May 1907 by Joseph Nolan M.P., who was still in London: 'There can be no doubt that there will be a "hot time" at the convention on Tuesday, and your position will be a trying one. You will however, have the comfort of knowing that you will be supported by everyone who is worth anything as an Irishman, and I feel that notwithstanding all the boil and bubble they will prove to be the majority after all. What you will probably do will be to let A.K. and his friends blow off steam - then allow someone to propose the appointment of a strong committee to draft certain amendments to the government's proposals. The great A.K. himself might be one of them. I take it there should be a lay [i.e. non-parliamentary] element on the committee, the party has been so much weakened of late. If the amendments are accepted, all well and good. If not, there will be a way out of the difficulty. This seems to be so likely to be the course you will pursue that my only reason for writing is to assure you that I feel convinced you will be strongly supported in it'.

was based on University College, Dublin. This group, the Young Ireland branch of the U.I.L., was a small body, but it had some importance as the only barrier between the leaders of the rising generation and the more extreme policies of the sinn fein groups. As might be expected, this branch was less inclined to compromise than some of the older men, and passed with two dissentients a resolution that the Irish council bill was 'utterly worthless', and 'positively hurtful' to Irish interests.¹

A minority of public bodies were prepared to give the council scheme a chance. Personal outlook here seems to have been more important in determining attitudes than any sort of regional or sectarian influence. Skibbereen U.I.L. sent its delegates without instructions, though the chairman's speech made clear his own support for the measure;² the discussion at the executive meeting of the U.I.L.

1. F.J., 11 May 1907. In one account of this episode it is alleged that the 'callow statesmen' of the Y.I.B. were responsible, through Devlin, for converting Redmond to the policy of rejection (The Jesuit Fathers (ed.), A page of Irish history: the story of University College, Dublin. 1883-1909 (Dublin, 1930) p.552. Professor Gwynn (Life of Redmond, p.147) disposes of this theory by citing the correspondence of Redmond and Dillon, who were clearly thinking in terms of possible rejection before the alleged meeting with Devlin took place. The Irish leaders were notoriously disinclined to admit younger men to their councils.
2. F.J., 15 May 1907.

in East Tyrone (T.M.Kettle's constituency) was generally in favour
of acceptance;¹ Leitrim county council (C.J.Dolan's county) complained
that the bill was 'not home rule', but grudgingly accepted it as an
extention of local government - which, was, after all, what it was
offered as.² An even grosser misapprehension was disclosed at
Killulagh, co. Westmeath, U.I.L., where the chairman announced that:

....judging by the speeches of Mr Birrell for the
last couple of months, he thought that his measure
would come up to the bills brought forward by Mr
John Morley and Mr Gladstone: but it was not at
all what the nationalists had expected.

There was indeed some ignorance in Ireland,³ firstly as to
what the measure was going to be, and later as to what it would mean
in practice: certainly arguments like that quoted from the Longford
Leader were designed to railroad people into an unthinking condemnation
of the bill.⁴ A closer understanding between the party hierarchy and
the leaders of local opinion might have resulted in the tractable

1. F.J., 14 May 1907.
2. F.J., 15 May 1907. Asquith told parliament on 18 February 1907: 'Do not ask whether it will lead to home rule - ask whether it...associates the Irish people more closely with matters of purely Irish concern' (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.169 col.592).
3. F.J., 17 May 1907.
4. See supra, this chapter, p.287.

convention which Dillon had hoped for, Kerry county council was one of the few which voted for acceptance of the bill (with amendments), and a letter to Redmond from the chairman of that body gives an interesting and unusual insight into the way in which the decision was reached:

Kerry C.C. sat yesterday. They were nearly all against the bill. Flavin was for considering it and amending it, then came a series of hostile speeches...I then....explained the provisions, asked them was it an 'insult to Ireland' to give us control of the L.G.B... Plunkett's department, etc.. Bit by bit they all came round...In the end I got a resolution carried unanimously, except Murphy M.P. not voting, that the Irish party ought to vote for rejection of the 3rd reading unless it had been amended so as to.etc....I then put three or four amendments that I thought you would be in favour of.

Now the Kerry C.C. can't settle the Irish question, and the only reason I draw your attention to the matter is this - this council is a body fairly representative of public opinion and as intelligent as the other bodies now airing their oratory over the bill & they were all full of the trash we see in the papers every day, the 'insult to Ireland', the 'degradation' and all the rest of it...they never knew that the bill gave us control of all those boards.

I really think you will be able to carry the thing through at the convention - where for the first time they will hear what the bill is about. Could you not get the Freeman people to do something?

...I find a great many of the rank and file M.P.s and a great many priests against the bill. The former may be made alright if you move to reject unless there are 101 constituencies - and I believe the priests will be alright if clergymen were added to the education committee. That is all the troubles them - the bogey of the Irish Clemenceaus taking education out of their hands,

The hostility of the priests to certain aspects of the bill was noticed in other quarters also. MacDonnell wrote to Bryce on May 15 that:

The R.C. bishops seem likely to take up arms against the educational provisions. They seem to resent the admission of the council to any control over primary or secondary education. I am interested to see how the Irish laity will stand up to this. If they succumb, I abandon all hope of the bill and of the university bill: and Irishmen will have to go into the wilderness for another generation...My expectation is that, pace the bishops, the bill will be accepted subject to changes on (1) the constitution of the council, (2) the lord lieutenant's veto, and (3) the financial provisions.

1

Archbishop Walsh, who had spoken out early on against the bill's general provisions, had spared a word of praise for the educational provisions, which did away with the pernicious system of grants for intermediate schools based on examination results.² But he was a wily and cautious politician. The main source for MacDonnell's rumour of priestly hostility was a letter from the bishop of Limerick which appeared in the Freeman on May 13, denouncing the 'secularists of the liberal party'. Dr O'Dwyer thought the educational provisions:

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 15 May 1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015).
 2. Ir. Ind., 13 May 1907.

...mischievous and possibly disastrous...the first assault upon the position of religion in our schools.. A department means the hopeless relegation of all effectual control into the hands of officials....the inevitable transfer, ultimately, of all management to the local authorities.

1

Cardinal Logue also thought the bill 'ludicrously disappointing and, in some of its provisions, mischievous', and pronounced that 'any politician who will try to secure its acceptance at the forthcoming convention will incur grave suspicion^{of} endeavouring to deceive his countrymen in the interests of the ministry'.² Further evidence of the development in the clerical world of an undercurrent against the bill was furnished by the Irish Catholic, which on May 11 observed tolerantly that Birrell 'has gone as far as he could with any hope that the house of commons would send the bill to the house of lords', and a week later thundered that 'the bill is one which should be burned at every cross-roads in Ireland as a protest against the indignity it offers to the nation'.³

-
1. Letter from Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick to the Freeman's Journal,
13 May 1907.
 2. Times, 15 May 1907.
 3. Irish Catholic, 11 and 18 May 1907.

But none of this hostile clerical opinion was normally sympathetic towards Redmond's party anyway. Walsh had been sceptical about the efficacy of parliamentary politics for many years; O'Dwyer was an outspoken critic of the Irish party, and valued the national idea only in so far as it might help to create a more catholic Ireland; and Logue customarily acted in political matters in close co-operation with T.M.Healy, who regarded the bill as a 'stunted bantling'.¹ The main source of the rumour of wide-scale clerical intervention seems to have been The Times.² It seems not unlikely that many of those liberals who attributed a major share of responsibility for rejection to the priests may have all taken their information from this (very prejudiced) source.³ Birrell, for instance, who had spent the Whitsun holiday well away from Dublin, in Dieppe, told Bryce he felt sure the priests 'had a good deal' to do with the rejection of the bill. Who could have told him this? Certainly not Redmond.

1. Times, 15 May 1907.

2. See especially The Times, 16 May 1907.

3. See Crewe to Ripon, 25 May 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms.43552 f.150); Birrell to Bryce, 17 June 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19); Bryce to Grey, 6 July 1907 (Grey papers, F.O. 800 vol.99).

That the priests were in the main opposed to the council bill is undeniable, and it seems tolerably certain that for the majority of them the education provision was one of the great stumbling-blocks. But more than this is needed to substantiate a charge of priestly interference. The great weight of Irish lay opinion was also opposed to the bill, on much broader grounds, and it was, after all, very convenient for moderate liberals to pin the blame for the scheme's failure onto 'the black hand'. Both Blake and Bryce had, in their various ways, put before Redmond and Dillon the danger that the hierarchy might dislike the educational provisions, but their fears had been dismissed. Dillon told Bryce that the priests might dislike the provisions, but they 'would not venture to oppose any scheme for putting education in the hands of an Irish popular body'.¹ If a home rule bill could be framed without treading on the toes of the hierarchy, the problem of making a more limited council scheme acceptable to them could not be insurmountable.²

-
1. Bryce to Grey, 6 July 1907 (Grey papers, F.O. 800 vol.99). See also Blake to Redmond, 6 Dec.1906 and 16 May 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. At least one Ulster M.P. thought that the hierarchy need not have worried in this particular case. The Hon. R.T.O'Neill (Mid-Antrim) declared that 'the handing over of education to the new council simply means handing it over to the priests' (Ir.Ind., 9 May 1907).

Furthermore, it cannot be maintained that the convention itself was priest-packed. 107 clergy were listed to attend, but the total expected attendance was 3,000. One incident at the convention demonstrates convincingly that it was not thus packed. A priest from Tipperary, Fr D. Humphreys, had pestered Redmond with letters for days beforehand, asking how he might put a resolution condemning the bill. He was apparently ignored, but he re-appeared at the convention itself (speaking after Redmond and others had sealed the bill's fate) with a speech he had obviously prepared under the impression that Redmond would support the bill. His speech was anti-protestant as much as anti-unionist, and its reception was stormy. When he embarked on a defence of the old education boards and said that the council bill would abolish them, he was greeted with cries of 'quite right'. Finally becoming exasperated by the treatment he was receiving, he declared that the convention was 'packed with Starkie's creatures', for which he was ordered to sit down.¹ Whatever strings the 'black hand' was pulling, they were not much in evidence at the convention.

1. Report of the national convention in F.J., 22 May 1907. Dr Starkie, secretary to the board of national education, was generally expected to fill the proposed post of 'director of education', in the event of the bill becoming law. Although a catholic, he did not command the confidence of the hierarchy or the faithful.

This was the background of opinion against which Redmond, Dillon, and their colleagues formulated their attitude to the bill during the two weeks before the convention. Little is known of their private discussions, but the correspondence available suggests that Dillon was more in favour of compromise (if attainable) than was Redmond, and that Blake hovered somewhere between the two. While still in London, Redmond sent his first draft of a resolution to Dillon, who considered it to be a very strong one, implying immediate abandonment of the bill. Dillon felt that such an approach would command strong support at the convention, but was himself more inclined to take account of other considerations, if this could be done without giving the appearance of driving the convention:

I should very much like to see some form of words devised which would meet as much as yours the undoubted hostile feeling of the country in regard to the bill, and would yet avoid the actual killing of the bill by the convention, a task which I think, if at all possible, we should leave to the Irish unionists and the house of lords. It will be a great tactical misfortune if we are compelled by the force of public feeling against the bill to take such an attitude at the convention as will coerce the government to abandon the bill and so relieve the lords of the embarrassment of dealing with it.

1

The next day Dillon sent his draft. It followed the same lines as Redmond's, though, as he said, it was 'much more moderate'.

1. Dillon to Redmond, 12 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

It re-affirmed the demand for full home rule, expressed disappointment at the weakness of the liberal party, contrasting it with their policy towards the Transvaal, and listed a number of objections to the scheme even as a measure of administrative devolution. But whereas Redmond's draft implied immediate abandonment, Dillon's simply stated that unless their criticisms were met, the Irish party 'could take no responsibility or give any support'. He reported that the signs in Dublin pointed to the convention being the reverse of tractable in its attitude to the bill, and that Redmond's draft would certainly meet with the better reception. Nonetheless, Dillon was 'not clear that even at the risk of some unpopularity and of having our hands forced by the convention, we are not bound to put the common sense policy before the convention'. He was, however, 'not at all sure....that a resolution on the lines of my draft would be listened to'.¹

This was virtually Dillon's last contribution to the formulation of policy on this issue, for on the evening of May 12 his wife suddenly fell very ill, and died on the following day. Dillon was deeply affected, and took practically no part in politics for some months. This event may conceivably have altered the whole course of the Irish

1. Dillon to Redmond, 13 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

question, for Dillon, the 'grandson of an evicted tenant' and scourge of the 'black-blooded Cromwellians', commanded greater respect among the more extreme elements of the U.I.L. than did Redmond, who was perhaps handicapped in this respect by what Professor Gwynn called his 'commanding presence' and 'impressive gestures',¹ as well as T.M.Healy's mischievous allegation that he had sold his estate at 24 years' purchase. When things went badly, Redmond's gentlemanliness too obviously marked him out as 'a good loser'. Dillon (though he was on this occasion the keener advocate of compromise) was the leading opponent of William O'Brien and 'conciliation'. His reputation as a man to stand firm against compromise rested on his demonstrations of concern for the tenants and his distrust of the landlords - he was a better 'hate merchant' than Redmond, and, as 'Honest John Dillon', was better equipped to win over the convention to an unpopular course. As the Tribune correspondent reported:

Mr Dillon's bereavement is a political, as well as a personal disaster, for it will almost of necessity prevent his attendance at the convention, and at such gatherings his influence is as incontestably greater than Mr Redmond's as that of Mr Redmond is superior to Mr Dillon's in the house of commons.

2

-
1. Gwynn, Life of Redmond, pp.147-8.
 2. Tribune, 17 May 1907.

Dillon took little more part in the affair, and we must consider his absence a factor in the change of course. Redmond was deprived of his main adviser, and fell back on T.P.O'Connor, an expatriate who was too close to English radical-bohemian society for the liking of the Irish hierarchy; Joseph Devlin, a Belfast man who had been abroad for most of the previous year; and Edward Blake, who was influential¹ only as an 'academic constitutionalist'.

Blake sent his amendments on the draft resolution to Redmond on May 16. His alterations were mainly of a technical nature, since he depended on Redmond's assessment of the state of feeling in Ireland. He hoped simply that the initial disappointment was now dying down, and that what he called 'a reasoned hostility' to the bill on its merits was appearing. He then went on to handle the resolutions in the same rather pedantic way that he had earlier dealt with the various schemes for creating the council, that is, 're-ordering' the criticisms, and 'placing them in the proper sequence'. His concluding remarks, however, may have had some impact on Redmond's final decision:

It will now be infinitely harder for the government to yield to the Irish convention's public demand points which
 • they might have settled in the draft bill without serious

1. The description is George Wyndham's. Wyndham to Lansdowne, 17 Sept. 1902 (Mackail and Wyndham, George Wyndham, ii. 760).

demur. They have disgusted Ireland and large numbers of British liberals as well. The majority of them yielded to a minority under threats. The campaign was then lost and won. The government will in my opinion at best go no further than second reading. They may possibly offer more but inadequate concessions; but they are likely to stand firm on capital points, add remember, your resolution is making capital points.

You may on the whole be glad to be able to say 'Ireland rejects and we press no further our proposals', and to turn to the effort of getting out of the British legislative jungle with a mixed feeling of hopelessness, irritation, and relief.

1

Two days later Redmond informed Blake that he and Devlin had had a long talk with Dillon, and they had 'practically come to the conclusion that the best thing for the party and the movement is to reject the bill'.² Tribune's 'anonymous Irish contact' seems to have been very well-informed:

Until Wednesday of last week, all the resolutions emanating from the staunchest henchmen of the party were on the lines of acceptance, with a demand for amendments. It was only on Saturday [May 18] that the nationalists' leaders changed their minds and decided to spurn the bill. There can be no doubt about the popularity of the course they adopted.

3

-
1. Blake to Redmond, 16 May 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Redmond to Blake, 18 May 1907 (Blake papers, cited in Banks, Edward Blake. p.323).
 3. Tribune, 23 May 1907.

Reading between the lines, it seems as if the convincing of Dillon was the turning point in the Irish leaders' policy. That he gave way was doubtless partly due to a weakening of resolution after his wife's death, but even without this the case for conditional acceptance of the bill had been seriously weakened by the spontaneous outcry in the country and among the rank and file M.P.s, coupled with the opposition of the bulk of the clergy and the sniping of the Healyites.

The correspondence cited above suggests that Redmond was, throughout, less keen on acceptance than was Dillon, and there seems no reason to doubt the sincerity of the explanation he gave to the national convention:

There would be greatest possible danger that the council would constitute a sort of rival body to the Irish national party.....I have reason to know that on the vital point, the constitution of the body, no amendment is possible or would be accepted.

1

It is possible that Redmond had already decided personally in favour of rejection by the second week in May, and that Dillon's letters to him, the historian's main source of information, simply camouflaged this fact. This theory is implicit in Professor Denis Gwynn's account

1. Report of the national convention, F.J., 22 May 1907.

of the episode, in his Life of John Redmond. But if such was the case, what is to be made of Redmond's speech in the house of commons on the introduction of the bill? Given that he already favoured rejection, he might have been better advised to say so there and then. He was, of course, pledged to submit the scheme to a national convention, but that would not have precluded him from making plain his personal view. That he did not do this suggested to many - including such diverse critics as The Times and Sinn Fein - that he had hoped to sway¹ the convention in favour of a policy of conditional acceptance.

On May 21 the convention assembled at the Mansion House in Dublin. It was a very large affair, with around 3,000 delegates from various representative bodies in Ireland, as well as envoys from Australia and the U.S.A. (early estimates in the British press had hinted at an attendance of around 800).² After the ceremonial opening, Redmond stood up and confidently proposed that the Irish council bill be rejected. The tone of his speech precluded any discussion on the merits of the bill, and speaker followed speaker in denunciation. None now dared say a word in its favour. T.P.O'Connor, who had taken part in private discussions on the bill for six months, announced that 'no man calling himself a nationalist could consider³ the bill for five minutes'.

1. Times, 22 May 1907; Sinn Fein, 22 May 1907.

2. Tribune, 9 May 1907.

3. Report of the national convention, F.J., 22 May 1907. A few minutes later Devlin vied with him in brazenness: having been put up to smooth over the discord introduced by Fr Humphreys, he piously deprecated 'the introduction of that sectarian spirit which has been the curse of our country'.

By his decision to reject the bill, and the sweeping manner in which it was executed, Redmond had plumped for the unity of his party above all things. He secured this, and although his personal standing suffered less than it would have done had he advocated even conditional acceptance, it still sustained a severe, if temporary, blow. This was in part unavoidable, for he had failed to deliver the goods. But it was also the result of a widespread impression that the party leaders had been in favour of the modest scheme - whereas in fact their dithering was simply over parliamentary tactics. They knew the bill would never have seen the light of day anyway, since its rejection by the house of lords would have been certain. The political issue at stake was therefore not quite what it seemed to the man in the street. The real question to ask was not 'Is this measure a worthwhile instalment of the home rule demand?', but 'Would it be in the Irish interest to give enough support to this bill to get it through the commons and into the lords, where it will be rejected and take its place in the "cup"?' . Dillon would have answered yes to the last question, and Redmond and Blake would have at least hesitated. But it was not the sort of question that could be made readily comprehensible to the public, and it would have introduced a note of what seemed like cringing opportunism into a party whose high moralistic appeal to national sentiment was already becoming dangerously diluted by sectional, class, and private interests, and by 'machine' politics. Redmond's control over nationalist opinion at grass-roots level was not sufficient to enable him to force through an intrinsically unpopular measure.

British reaction to the decision of the convention was mixed. The unionists of course were elated, for there was no doubt that it meant the end of the bill's parliamentary prospects. Since the appointment of MacDonnell to Ireland, and more especially since the emergence of the Irish Reform Association in 1904, moderate unionism, or the policy of devolution, had been presenting a great threat to traditional unionists. Had it taken a stronger hold on the tory party it might have become a force as divisive as tariff reform, but it was defeated with the exposure of Wyndham and MacDonnell in March 1905, and the appointment of Walter Long to Dublin meant that what was called the 'new unionism' (which was in fact the old landlord unionism, strengthened by an increased emphasis on popular orange unionism in the north-east of Ireland) had secured its grip on the party. 'The union in danger' was as important a rallying-cry to them as was maintenance of free trade to the liberals, but the 1906 election seemed to suggest that the home rule bogey was losing its effect on English electors. 'Devolution' seemed to hold no fears for voters in Britain - which worried Irish unionists because they knew that a policy along these lines was being prepared by the liberal government, and they believed, as T.P.O'Connor had once done, that devolution was 'the latin for home rule'. Thus the unionists were greatly relieved when the council scheme appeared in so stilted a form and was rejected by the nationalist party.

But the liberal press was somewhat bitter. The Westminster Gazette had warned on the day of the convention, when rumours of rejection were in the air, that the 'all or nothing' policy had brought Ireland nothing in the past, and would^{not} be helped by rejection of the present offer.¹ When these fears were confirmed, the first feeling was one of betrayal and disgust:

There are considerable differences - differences even more of tone and spirit than of actual phraseology - between Mr Redmond's speech on the 1st Reading and his speech yesterday at the convention....They can hardly suppose that the rejection of the half-measure will encourage the liberal party to proceed with the whole measure.

2

Other sections of the liberal press were equally angry. The 'Daily News' regarded it as a 'hard blow' to the 'prestige and confidence of the giver', and the Daily Chronicle considered that Ireland had been sacrificed to the 'tactics of the politicians'.³ The more radical papers sympathised with the nationalists' predicament, but thought their decision 'a great mistake in tactics' which would not make things easy for the liberals in the future.⁴ But by May 24, the anger had cooled

-
1. Westminster Gazette, 21 May 1907.
 2. W.G., 22 May 1907.
 3. Daily News and Daily Chronicle, 22 May 1907.
 4. Manchester Guardian, 22 May 1907. Tribune's attitude was similar.

off somewhat, and the Westminster Gazette reflected that 'it was most perplexing that the nationalist leaders should have been so ill-informed as to the trend of opinion in Ireland'¹. When the Irish members returned to Westminster a few days later, it was simply reported that: 'their attitude is one of friendly independence, and their relations with the government have not been altered by the rejection of the Irish council bill by the convention'².

Opinion amongst liberal politicians was more mixed. Most accepted that the hostility with which Redmond had been faced in Ireland was real, but nonetheless felt that he was culpable - either because he had failed to stand up to his more extreme supporters, or because he had been 'got at' by the priests, or because he should have taken steps to 'educate' or at least gauge the state of Irish opinion earlier. As one liberal M.P. on the radical side of the party complained:

It is a pity that the Irish leader did not earlier gauge the views of his countrymen....The liberal party has not sprung this policy on Ireland. The plan of the government in its essential features was, before this parliament was created, something more than an open secret - it was a declared policy.

1. W.G., 24 May 1907.

2. W.G., 27 May 1907.

At the convention, he said, Redmond had swept away the 'instalment'¹ policy which he had tacitly encouraged for eighteen months. These criticisms of Redmond cut right across the liberal party, regardless of normal outlook on home rule matters. The Irish M.P.s received 'a cold reception in the lobbies' on their return to Westminster, and even a strong nationalist-sympathiser like W.P. Byles told them they were² fools. John Burns took a similar view:

General feeling against Irish and particularly against Redmond, who here did so well, and at the convention quailed before those whom he should have led and beaten for Ireland's sake. A leader is no good unless he trounces his followers occasionally, especially the wilder spirits in front. The priests have proved too strong for him.

3

As a member of a cabinet which had devoted so much time to the scheme, it was not surprising that Burns felt annoyed, but in fact the anger spread even among the radicals in the party, who might have been expected to take up the attitude that the bill was weak or insulting. The reason for this is evident in the above extract from Burns' diary - it was generally believed that Redmond had bowed to clerical influence, which would hardly endear him to the radical and nonconformist groups

1. Letter from L.A. Atherley-Jones M.P. to The Times, 27 May 1907.
2. Birrell to Bryce, 17 June 1906 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).
3. Burns' diary, 23 May 1907 (Burns papers, Add.Ms. 46325).

at any time, especially not after a session in which they felt they had gone out of their way to conciliate catholic feeling over the English education bill. Dillon, still playing no part in public affairs, was sufficiently concerned to write to Redmond:

You and T.P. and the members of the party ought to be able to do a good deal to remove the ridiculous impression that the council bill was killed by the priests - If that impression gets fixed in the minds of the radicals it will do a great deal of harm.

1

The cabinet met on May 29 and decided, as expected, that the bill could be taken no further.² It thus disappeared from the parliamentary scene, and despite the work that had gone into it and the protestations of Sir Antony MacDonnell, there is no evidence to suggest that it was ever again seriously reconsidered. Lord Ripon told MacDonnell that there was no chance of an autumn session in 1907, and that the bill could not be carried over. Ripon found the summary rejection of the measure 'a surprise and a disappointment', but nonetheless concluded that: 'If Mr Redmond found that the acceptance of the bill would have broken up his nationalist party, I do not blame him for refusing to have anything to do with it'.³ Neither does the moderate, Asquithian

-
1. Dillon to Redmond, 29 May 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Campbell-Bannerman to the king, 29 May 1907 (Cab. 41/31/19).
 3. Ripon to MacDonnell, 25 May 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43542 f.187).

wing of the liberal party seem to have shown any interest in MacDonnell's pleas for the re-introduction of a smaller measure of administrative reform. Probably they regarded the convention's action with some relief (as letting the government off the hook), and as a good reason for shelving the Irish government question until such time in the future as it might be forced on them by parliamentary conditions, or rendered easier to solve by the reduction of the power of the house of lords meanwhile. Lord Crewe is the only representative of this group to have left his view on record, and was quite against any attempt to introduce a 'stronger' council bill in 1908, tailored to the requirements of the Irish leaders. He wrote to Ripon on 25 May 1907:

I think it is evident that Redmond and co. entirely miscalculated the force of the varied opposition to the bill - by their extreme supporters on the one hand, and I suppose by the hierarchy on the education proposals.

Birrell therefore seems to have been rather scurvily treated. Apparently nothing less would have been accepted than the appointment of the Irish members as the council. I cannot regret that we did not do this, first because it would have been such an obvious political move, and secondly because there was not defending the composition of the body from an administrative point of view. And this was professedly an administrative bill.

1

1. Crewe to Ripon, 25 May 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43552 f.150).

Others, on the home rule side of the liberal party, did not share these views, and neither did they share the anger (partly rooted in anti-clerical feeling) which was manifested by men like Burns. Morley felt that it was 'a sorrowful business' and was 'heartily sorry for Birrell'. But he could not understand how the Irish leaders 'could ever pretend to accept such a trifling bill', adding cautiously that of course 'he did not tell them so'.¹ Ripon said that 'the Irish people were perfectly free to take it or leave it, if they did not like it. Liberals were 'the last individuals who would think of forcing it upon them'.² Birrell, the central figure in the drama, took the killing of the bill with the same resilience with which he faced all his Irish setbacks and which he was to draw on to the full nine years later. His view was explained fully in a letter to Campbell-Bannerman on May 24, written, as so many of his were, from a French watering-place.

In the mournful circumstances I have thought it best and pleasantest to stay where I am rather than to obtrude my melancholy visage upon the sight of our faithful but embarrassed commons. However, I have braced myself to the inevitable, and propose to come on Sunday.... From all that I hear, the failure of the bill to secure the support of the convention is attributable mainly to two causes:

-
1. Morley to Campbell-Bannerman, 23 May 1907 (C.B. papers, 41223 f.247).
 2. Ripon at the Eighty Club, 6 June 1907 (Times, 7 June 1907).

- (i) The opposition of the bishops and priests to the education department - jealousy of the teachers, etc.
- (ii) The disaffection of a number of Irish M.P.s who resent (and I think justly) having been kept in ignorance of the contents of the bill by Redmond and Dillon.

Our poor dear Sir Antony still thinks that if the bill had been much less it would have got through!

Our mistake was to have touched devolution at all.

Home rule we could not give, and we should have contented ourselves with land reform and the university question; and in both we should have taken our own line and left Sir Antony in the lurch. As it is....I feel I am somewhat of a Jonah, certainly not a mascotte, and can only say that I am perfectly ready to sacrifice myself at a moment's notice and that if you think I might go I will do so without any sense whatever of injustice.

As to Redmond and Dillon we have no case against them, they misjudged the situation, that is all. Had we given them what they wanted - I doubt very much what the result would have been.

1

So far as the government were concerned then, the game was over. It had been a failure, and a depressing one, but it had at least served some tactical purpose in gaining them time at Westminster to devote to other matters. But for Sir Antony MacDonnell and his small group of followers, the 'middle policy' had an intrinsic value of its own, unrelated to its use in the games played by politicians

1. Birrell to Campbell-Bannerman, 24 May 1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41239 f.250).

at Westminster. MacDonnell considered devolution, or 'administrative home rule' as it was now felt more politic to call it, to be valuable in itself, perhaps even an end in itself.¹ Its ultimate triumph would be, whilst improving Irish conditions and Irish government, to pull down the Irish nationalist party, and with it possibly the whole demand for home rule in so far as that demand was based on an appeals to class war and to emotional nationalism. Men like Dunraven and MacDonnell, since they regarded the council scheme as something more than a stop-gap for a liberal problem, were consequently less willing than the liberals to permit it to slip away.

We have seen that the government rapidly decided to cut their losses and abandon the bill. But MacDonnell meanwhile had marshalled his forces, and Lord Aberdeen dutifully wrote to the prime minister on May 23:

1. MacDonnell has sometimes been regarded as being a Gladstonian home ruler at heart, and his failure to speak out for this cause has been explained by political factors: Balfour could never have appointed him had he done so; the liberals never asked him to prepare a home rule scheme; etc. But this does not take into account the vigour with which he opposed any attempt to extend his very limited council scheme, even when the political considerations in regard to the house of lords were explained to him by Birrell and others.

The procedure adopted at the Irish convention certainly came as a surprise to most people. Probably it was decided upon only at the last moment; in any case it had been kept to the knowledge of very few. Even on the day before the convention, the impression on the part of persons of nationalist views, or in close touch with the nationalists, was that the 'official' resolution would express the opinion that the bill as it stood did not fulfil the object which the government had in view - and that unless it was considerably altered the Irish members should vote against the second reading. Of course this would have been an entirely different thing from the course actually adopted.

Furthermore, we received from different quarters and classes in a spontaneous way information showing that in the country generally there was widespread expectation that the bill would be fully discussed at the convention and many amendments proposed. We heard, e.g. from Mr and Mrs W.P. Byles, who as you know are in full sympathy with the nationalists, and who were in the west of Ireland a few days ago, that this was the expectation, and that 'the opposition of the clergy would not amount to much'. But it now seems that the opposition of the clergy (based of course on the education portion of the bill) had been very carefully organised.

I am now told that there are signs already of regret on the part of some of those who joined in condemning the bill; and if it becomes increasingly recognised that the clerical influence galvanised a hasty condemnation, such regret is likely to be increased in certain quarters.

Anyway, it seems clear that in the main the general body of more or less moderate opinion (for of course this exists, though sadly inarticulate) wished the bill to be accepted. Under these circumstances a hope has been expressed that perhaps after all you might be disposed to consider whether, on the grounds that the real character and purpose of the measure had in some important aspects been misapprehended, it might be suspended but not actually dropped...as there has been for a considerable period a state of some expectation, the removal of that condition may result in some outbreaks of unrest. I must indicate this, though as I hope you know, I am not an alarmist or of nervous disposition.

1

1. Aberdeen to Campbell-Bannerman, 23 May 1907 (C.B. papers, Add.Ms. 41210 f.101).

Aberdeen had also complained that there had been no propaganda or platform exposition of the bill except for Birrell's speech in the house of commons (which was considered by many to have been a poor one), and asserted that many of the delegates at the convention would have supported a second reading. He thought that Redmond and Dillon had judged public feeling according to loudness and emphasis only, and were afraid to risk a fight.¹ He also laid a charge of dilatoriness in prosecuting the measure against his own government:

Apart from what the leading Irish members might have done, I think it would have made a great difference if some speeches had been made in Ireland by one or more members of the cabinet, expounding the measure.

2

MacDonnell was, at first, not without hope that the scheme might be saved. On May 23 he wrote to Lord Ripon, his usual cabinet confident (though he must by this time have realised that Ripon's sympathies were all on the side of the Gladstonian home rulers), and, ever an optimist, sought to maintain that the decision of the convention had been a momentary aberration merely, and that the wise policy would be to persevere with the scheme:

Already reaction and remorse have set in after the foolish and hasty rejection of the Irish council bill. The convention's decision is now recognised by a rapidly growing number of

-
1. Aberdeen to Bryce, 29 May 1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11015).
 2. Aberdeen to Bryce, 19 Oct. 1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms. 11015).

people as having been too hasty and based on a great misconception of the scope and advantage of the bill. The trouble is that Mr Redmond's action was precipitated by the threatened defection of the Irish parliamentary party. I hear that seven members notified him that they would resign their seats if the bill were not rejected. The party leaders decided that the maintenance of the solidarity of the party came above all other considerations. If the convention had been postponed and if the advantages of the bill had been made clear, the decision would I believe have been very different.

1

In view of this, MacDonnell wanted the government to keep the bill 'on ice' until the autumn or next session, on the grounds that in the interval the bill would become understood and accepted in the country:

My expectation is that meanwhile conferences would be held in Ireland and possibly such an agreement come to as on the land question. The divergences of opinion might be reconciled on a measure of purely administrative improvement.....If we had kept to our original idea of a council of small size, elected by county councils, there would be in the country less opposition...Mr Bryce..... would not have yielded further than the election of the small council by the local government electors.

2

The suggestion of 'conferences' is perhaps the clue to MacDonnell's intentions here. Since the end of 1903 it had been made very clear by the Irish party leaders that they would have no more of the conference policy, and this had been underlined by their total

1. MacDonnell to Ripon, 23 May 1907 (Ripon papers, Add.Ms. 43542 f.183).

2. Ibid.

opposition to the reconvened land conference of 1906, which O'Brien and Dunraven had assembled to discuss the evicted tenants' issue. So far as the Irish party were concerned, any such suggestion was mischievous: they were the elected representatives of the people, negotiating with a supposedly friendly government, and they saw no need to invite compromise solutions by sitting down with non-representative men, who would thereby have a kind of official status conferred upon them. MacDonnell was not unaware of this situation, and really he cannot seriously have expected Redmond's position, already weakened in Ireland by his apparent reluctance to reject the council bill, to survive yet another political about-turn.

The Irish government had spent eighteen months of time and energy on the production of a measure about which most liberals were half-hearted and which the nationalists summarily rejected. Although one would not normally regard Walter Long as the most unprejudiced of commentators on Irish politics, there was a strong element of truth in the comments he made at Preston a few days after the introduction of the scheme into the house of commons:

It has been said that Ireland has been, unhappily for her, too much the battleground of British political parties and too much the shuttlecock between those parties. That measure was, in his judgment, the greatest instance of

treating Ireland as a shuttlecock that had ever been known: not a shuttlecock of parties, but a shuttlecock of two sections of the same party.....in order to try and produce a middle policy which might keep two divergent sections of the liberal party working together for a little longer.

1

The whole development of the council scheme reeked of compromise - its immediate parent, Campbell-Bannerman's 'step-by-step' declaration at Stirling, was a compromise to keep Asquith and Morley under the same banner, and make it possible for the nationalists to remain in the ranks also; it was a compromise between the party's received policy of Gladstonian home rule and the electorate of England, Scotland and Wales; and almost every step in the evolution of the measure, from the 32-man council originally suggested by MacDonnell, to the large assembly proposed in parliament fifteen months later, was the result of a further political compromise. Once it became clear, as it must have done before the end of 1906, that the lords would reject any Irish government scheme sent up to them, the measure was no more than a small and rather malodorous pawn in the struggle between the government and the upper house, so far as most members of the cabinet were concerned. Only Sir Antony MacDonnell (and perhaps James Bryce) among those

1. Long at Preston, 11 May 1907 (Times, 13 May 1907).

immediately concerned with the bill regarded it as something intrinsically valuable. For MacDonnell, it was in many ways better than Gladstonian home rule, for through it he hoped to rid Ireland of the domination of those whom he regarded as 'extremists' - the Irish nationalist party and the Ulster unionist party - and replace them by moderate and more 'responsible' men of business, who would be independent of both landlords and tenants, as well as clerical pressures of all denominations.

Since their outlooks were so fundamentally different, it was always likely that a breach would occur between MacDonnell and his government. While Bryce occupied the office of chief secretary, this did not happen: Bryce was not the most capable of administrators, and he found the problems of Ireland and the demands of her leaders beyond his grasp in matters both large and small. In these circumstances it is not surprise to find MacDonnell, a vigorous and most capable, as well as an extremely opinionated, civil servant, taking most of the decisions.¹ Birrell, however, was a different proposition:

1. When Bryce resigned the chief secretaryship, MacDonnell told him that he had never before enjoyed so harmonious an official relationship. MacDonnell to Bryce, n.d. (1907), (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015). It would be only slightly unkind to comment that there can be no more perfect agreement than that obtained from a rubber stamp.

a man whose previous achievements lay mainly in the literary field, his political talents were most apparent in cabinet or in the lobbies¹ at Westminster, and little in evidence at the departmental level. He was an adept reconciler of conflicts, relying on affableness and flexibility (where Lloyd George, for instance, would use a more dramatic and high-pressure charm, coupled sometimes with ambiguity or deception) and to this purpose had developed an independence of outlook which included the ability to evaluate or reject the advice of his officials in a way which had eluded his predecessor. This resulted in a change of policy, news of which MacDonnell soon conveyed, somewhat sorrowfully, to Bryce who (perhaps sensing trouble) replied in a conciliatory tone:

It had filtered somehow in upon me that my successor was much more thick with the nationalist leaders than I had been - not that I venture to criticise this. He may be right. It was always present to me as an alternative policy: and it has great immediate tactical advantages, as against the 'long game' which on the whole, agreeing therein to some extent with your views, I thought I was playing...However, my present object is to beg you to think many times before you retire.....

2

-
1. After Birrell had been at the Irish office for four months, MacDonnell complained that 'I have yet to see a single order in his own handwriting on a file'. MacDonnell to Bryce, 15 May 1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015). This has also been the present writer's experience.
 2. Bryce to MacDonnell, 22 Mar. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.35).

But relations between MacDonnell and his new political chief did not improve. MacDonnell fought tooth and nail for his own point of view at every stage of the negotiations, both in the cabinet and with the Irishmen, even to the extent of attending a cabinet committee meeting, and of lobbying ministers quite independently, and in opposition to the wishes of his own chief. His continual pressure was certainly an important aid to those in the cabinet who were opposed to a forward policy, and if his own account, the only one available, is to be accepted, his intervention was crucial in reversing¹ the radical decision taken by the cabinet committee of 22 February 1907. His activities in canvassing Grey, Ripon and others were the actions of a political colleague rather than a public official, and this illusion of cabinet status was heightened by his frequent offers of resignation. He was well-known to the public, and this gave weight to such threats. It was not so much the loss of his services as an official which worried the cabinet (though his experience was very valuable) as much as the political effects which his resignation would have had on public opinion.

1. I would, therefore, disagree with Professor Lyons when he writes that Birrell attributed the failure of the Irish council bill, 'somewhat mistakenly one feels', to the lack of co-operation from Sir Antony MacDonnell (F.S.L. Lyons, The Irish parliamentary party, 1890-1910 (London, 1951), p.114). Manuscript sources made available more recently indicate clearly the extent of MacDonnell's political involvement in the affair.

Much has been said of MacDonnell's opinion of Birrell.

An extract from a long account by Birrell of his first six months in Ireland may serve to redress the balance. Birrell explained to Bryce:

My life has been one long controversy - and perhaps my main antagonist has been our excellent friend and 'colleague' (woe's me!) Sir A.M., late of Bengal. We looked at the same problem from opposite ends. I may have attached too much importance to the house of commons. He ignored it entirely, and with the obstinacy of 10,000 mules could only be drawn back with oaths and violence from each position that he assumed. He is such a good fellow that we never quarrelled, but anything more irritating and exhausting I could never have imagined - I daresay he still believes that if we had brought in a snug little advisory Anglo-Indian parlour council of 50 members nominated by the county councils, it would now be very nearly the law of the land. Whereas every member of the house of commons knows that such a bill would have been received with shouts of derision and would never have been read a first time. Sir A.M. still believes that the moderates in Ireland who drink tea in the Phoenix Park are capable of compelling the nationalists in the house to accept 'moderate' measures. No bigger delusion has ever got hold of a man, not even an Anglo-Indian. However, that is over now. As to the national convention, I have had various accounts of it. Our good friend Barry O'Brien was in the back of the crowd - He thinks highly of it and thinks a wave of national sentiment, displacing money and educational control and the little baser things, passed over it, and compelled the rejection of the bill. Others think that if a chance of deliberation had been given and the measure explained - two-thirds of the delegates would have

-
1. Though as Aberdeen told Bryce later in the year, 'entre-nous, I don't think he quite does Birrell justice'. Aberdeen to Bryce, 19 Oct.1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015).

recommended amendments in committee. Some see the priests in the rejection. Others deny that they had much to do with it - I feel sure they had a good deal, but how much who can say? Our present relations with the Irish party are a little strained. They have had a cold reaction in the lobbies, even Byles telling them they were fools. They did not like it at all, and are sulky.

1

A fitting postscript to the council bill episode is provided by a letter written by T.P.Gill to Lord Dudley, dated 31 May 1907. A former nationalist M.P. who had resigned to become permanent head of the D.A.T.I., Gill was in an excellent position to see at least two sides of a many-sided issue, and his judgments reveal a political astuteness which might perhaps have been put to more use. The affair, he wrote:

2

...has been ineffectively handled at both ends - by the government in being so influenced by the liberal imperialists and Antony MacDonnell to bring in a bill against their own better judgment, which it was almost impossible, if not quite impossible, to persuade the Irish people to accept; and by John Redmond, through the double accident that he was not a Parnell and that in the crisis of the convention he was deprived of the assistance of Dillon. I have said that the bill was one 'almost' impossible for the Irish people to accept. A Parnell might have persuaded the Irish people to accept the bill on condition of its being amended and to support him loyally in his attempt to get it carried. If Dillon

-
1. Birrell to Bryce, 17 June 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms. 19).
 2. Another letter from Gill to Dudley, on 5 June 1907, suggests that Gill perhaps aspired to the post MacDonnell was rumoured to be vacating (Gill papers).

were there - who is supposed to be less ready for compromise than Redmond, and who therefore commands more support from the extremer sections of the party - they between them might have carried the convention.... [but Dillon].....was not able to assist, even in council. In the circumstances, had Redmond tried to get the bill accepted there would have been several resignations from members of his own party handed up there and then on the platform. A split would have ensued, and there would have been a very bad state of affairs indeed in Ireland. He had a choice of evils, and he certainly chose the lesser of the two.

1

All in all, we may endorse the verdict of The Times - Sir Antony MacDonnell had 'posed for too long as the connecting link between British liberalism and the Irish parliamentary party' - adding simply by way of qualification that ultimate responsibility must rest with a liberal government which exploited MacDonnell's sincere and tireless efforts in the interests of an indecisive policy which was a confused mixture of ill-conceived compromise and aimless procrastination.

-
1. T.P.Gill to Lord Dudley, 31 May (Gill papers).
 2. Reluctantly, for The Times was always outspoken in its attacks on MacDonnell. Lansdowne told Austen Chamberlain on 15 Oct.1906, that 'on their staff must be an ex-Indian official who suffered under MacDonnell's rule in Bengal or the N.W.Province. M. was a hard master, and would not tolerate shirkers' (Austen Chamberlain papers, cited in R.Fanning, 'The unionist party and Ireland, 1906-10' (I.H.S., XV. 58, Sept. 1966) p.154).
 3. Times, 27 May 1907.

CHAPTER IV. THE IRISH UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT 1906-8.

Outside orange Ulster it was only the university question which kept religious rivalries in the forefront of Irish politics at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Church of Ireland could be disestablished, the landlords could be bought out, but Trinity College, with its long traditions and high academic reputation, its large income and strong protestant unionist atmosphere, remained. The best university in Ireland was in the hands of a minority because the majority and their church found its atmosphere unacceptable. The roman catholic hierarchy were unwilling to risk the casualties to the faith which would be involved in any attempt to take over the college by infiltration. The catholic-nationalist demand was thus not for possession of the college but for equality with it.¹

But equality with a protestant institution implied state endowment of a catholic institution, and on this rock all attempts at settlement had failed. The old Queen's University was denounced

1. T.M.Kettle's suggestion that the cattle-drivers be brought in to conduct Trinity's professors to the Holyhead ferry was probably not a serious one (speech at Carndonagh, co.Donegal, 6 Oct.1907 W.F.J., 12 Oct.1907).

as 'godless' by the hierarchy, and had been replaced in 1879 by the Royal University, which was an examining board merely. This arrangement was patently unsatisfactory from the educational point of view: of the 3,500 students who took the Royal's examinations each year, the majority were private pupils, unattached to any of the five colleges affiliated with the university. Furthermore, the most flourishing of these five colleges was not one of the old Queen's colleges (Belfast, Cork or Galway) or Magee College, Londonderry, but a private institution - the Jesuit college in Dublin which had been founded by Cardinal Newman, known popularly as 'the catholic university of St Stephen's Green'. The existence of this college had in fact been the main raison d'etre behind the creation of the Royal, for through the Royal's curious scheme for endowing fellowships, fifteen of the twenty-nine fellows were teachers at the Jesuit college. In effect that college received £7,000 a year of public money by indirect means.¹ Throughout the history of the Irish education question, British governments had felt it necessary to conceal the fact that they were endowing catholics.

1. 'University education in Ireland', a cabinet paper by Birrell, 19 Nov. 1907 (P.R.O., Cab.37/90/99).

From the 1890s on, as university education began to expand in Britain, attempts were made to find a more permanent settlement in Ireland. Arthur Balfour advocated a settlement and for a while seemed to have gained the support of Lord Salisbury's government, at least to the extent that R.B.Haldane, a private person, was sent on a secret mission to talk with Archbishop Walsh and Cardinal Logue.¹ But although confident of the support of all liberals except for 'an extreme nonconformist wing', Haldane had to report to Walsh in the spring of 1899 that general opinion in Britain had frightened the government off: 'the angry tide is rising here, and it will take a² strong man to breast it'.

Two years later, when a royal commission was set up under Lord Robertson to report on university education in Ireland, it was felt necessary to exclude Trinity College and the University of Dublin from its terms of reference, even though Oxford and Cambridge, for example, had undergone a number of such commissions since Trinity

-
1. For copies of Haldane's correspondence with Cardinal Logue and Archbishop Walsh during the autumn of 1898 see the A.J.Balfour papers (B.M. Add.Ms. 49724 ff.39-64).
 2. Haldane to Walsh, 2 Feb.1899 (P.J.Walsh, Life of Archbishop William Walsh, (Dublin, 1928) pp.551-2).

was last subjected to public scrutiny. Robertson's main recommendation, published in 1903, was that the Royal should be converted into a teaching university on federal lines, incorporating the old Queen's colleges at Belfast, Cork and Galway, with the addition of a new college, to be set up in Dublin. No action was taken on this recommendation however, although the hierarchy had given their blessing, and on 1 January 1904 Lord Dunraven came forward with a rival plan. In a letter to the press he proposed that the Queen's colleges at Belfast and Cork, plus a new 'King's College, Dublin', be joined with Trinity in the University of Dublin, thereby abolishing the Royal altogether. ¹ Wyndham and, predictably, MacDonnell favoured Dunraven's plan, opinion in Ireland was sounded, and a bill drafted. Archbishop Walsh told Wyndham that in the opinion of the bishops 'the university question could be settled on this basis', but before practical steps could be taken ² Wyndham had been discredited in unionist circles and forced to resign.

This was the position when Campbell-Bannerman's government took office. Trinity College, which had existed since the seventeenth

-
1. Queen's College, Galway, would have been reduced to the status of a technical institute.
 2. P.J. Walsh, Life of Walsh, p.556.

century as the sole college in the University of Dublin, remained the only teaching university in Ireland. It was under ban by the roman catholic hierarchy, and most catholic students consequently took the degree offered by the Royal University. Almost all Irish opinion outside T.C.D. (and some within it) wanted a change: the college, it was felt, while holding a virtual monopoly of academic prestige and wealth, did not cater for the requirements of the great majority of the people. Three main schemes for reform had been mooted:

- (1) Reforms in the government of T.C.D. so as to make it acceptable to catholic students (the Royal University thus remaining in existence only to administer the provincial colleges). The catholic church was publicly opposed to this scheme, which was known as 'the Trinity College solution'.
- (2) The expansion of the Royal into a federal teaching university by adding a new, publicly endowed college in Dublin to the existing Queen's colleges (the more idealistic advocates of this scheme would have included Queen's College, Belfast in the otherwise catholic university; pessimists would have granted it

independence.)¹ This was known as the 'Robertson scheme' or the 'Royal scheme'.

- (3) The creation of a new constituent college (acceptable to catholics) in the University of Dublin, on a par with Trinity (the provincial colleges would either be included, thus bringing all higher education in Ireland under one university, or else remain federated within the Royal). This was known as the 'Dunraven scheme', or the 'second college scheme', or the 'Dublin University² scheme'.

The basic catholic demand was for a college in Dublin which would be 'as catholic as Trinity is protestant':³ either scheme (2) or scheme (3) would meet this demand, though some catholics favoured one of these plans to the exclusion of the other.

1. Queen's College, and Belfast opinion generally, had no enthusiasm for a separate university. They regarded the suggestion, rightly, as a bribe to gain the tolerance of presbyterian educationists for the endowment of a roman catholic college or university in Dublin. But neither did Belfast have any desire to join in a university dominated by Trinity College, or one dominated by catholic colleges. Thus, when the university question was re-opened at the turn of the century, Belfast opinion was on the side of the status quo. It was only when the unionist government (in 1903), and later the liberals (in 1906), made it clear that grants of public money were in abeyance pending a settlement, that Q.C.B. opinion became ready for change. Ulster unionists generally, as will be seen, remained hostile to the government's plans to the bitter end (see J.C.Beckett and T.W.Moody, Queen's Belfast, 1845-1949 - The history of a university (London,1959), especially i.381-91).
2. Birrell's cabinet paper of 19 Nov.1907, 'University education in Ireland' (Cab.37/90/99), contains a brief history of the Irish university question.
3. Ibid.

For the newly elected liberal government of 1906 the issue posed special problems. While it might feel less trammelled than the tories in handling the devolution proposals, in the matter of education the party was very much under the influence of its nonconformist, unsectarian educationists, who could be counted on to oppose any attempt to create a 'roman catholic university'. On the other hand, radical nonconformity had little sympathy with the tory presbyterians of Ulster or the episcopalian 'monopolists' of Trinity College. Thus when one of the liberal party's nonconformist stalwarts, R.W.Perks, announced that after a talk with Sir Antony MacDonnell he was 'by no means certain that upon the critical and long-vexed dispute of university education, a basis of common agreement [between himself and Redmond]¹ could not be discovered', fresh hopes for a settlement were aroused.

Immediately the general election was over the standing committee of the Irish hierarchy urged Redmond to broach with the government the subject of 'the anomalous position of Trinity College',

1. R.W. Perks, M.P., at Louth, Lincs., 4 Jan. 1906 (Liverpool Catholic Herald, 12 Jan.1906).

which, they thought, needed no further elucidation by royal commissions. They suggested to Redmond a line of approach which might conceal the sectarian issue beneath the democratic steamroller:

We ask you and the Irish members to put it strongly to the new government that the liberal principles enunciated at the election in regard to Ireland, if not the general maxim of government by consent of the governed, at least must imply in the domain of education such a system as will accord with the wishes and convictions which the great bulk of the Irish people entertain in common with their bishops and clergy.

1

Redmond therefore approached Bryce, urging that the time was ripe for a settlement, and that the Irish party and the hierarchy would be found 'in no way stiff-necked' in the matter:

There is indication of public opinion in England, including a remarkable speech made recently by Mr Perks, which seems to me to show that it is possible that a compromise may be arrived at whereby we can get the kind of university we want without in any way offending nonconformist susceptibilities.

2

They met to discuss the matter on the following day, and Bryce expressed his willingness to attempt a settlement if the government could come to

1. Secretary of the standing committee of the Irish roman catholic hierarchy to Redmond, 25 Jan.1906 (Copy in Bryce papers, N.L.I.Ms. 11012).
2. Redmond to Bryce, 29 Jan.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

1

some agreement with the Irish party and the bishops. Within a few days discussion had begun to revolve round the appointment of a royal commission to enquire into the position of Trinity College in the Irish educational system.

Despite the proviso of the hierarchy that no further commissions were necessary, the Irish leaders found it possible to accede to the suggestion on the grounds that there was no hope of parliament having time to legislate during the 1906 session, and that the commission would have the effect of rendering powerless the opposition to reform. An unsigned draft memorandum amongst Redmond's papers, probably written by Redmond or Dillon, dated February 6, expressed the view that such an enquiry into Trinity College would compel 'the monopolists' to make a choice between a reformed Trinity and a second college in Dublin University, after which the catholic side would be in a much stronger bargaining position:

Whichever of the alterations be proposed under existing circumstances by the government they [Trinity] will opposeFor the purpose of lessening opposition to the university reform which it is hoped the government may undertake next session, it is of vital importance to drive the monopolists into a corner by compelling them to choose now between the two methods.

2

-
1. Note in Redmond's hand of an interview with Bryce, 30 Jan.1906 (Redmond papers).
 2. Unsigned memorandum (typewritten), dated 6 Feb.1906, on the subject of the proposed university commission (Redmond papers).

Although a reformed Trinity would not be acceptable to the hierarchy, this did not detract from the argument, for if Trinity could be forced into accepting any plan as the lesser of two evils, then they could no longer block a settlement altogether. The Irish party could then either accept Trinity's choice or else revert to a demand for a scheme along the lines suggested by the Robertson commission, which would be equally acceptable to catholics and which in the circumstances would be a gentle let down for Trinity.

MacDonnell was not initially involved in these moves. When consulted, he expressed the opinion that an enquiry into Trinity might be useful on its merits, but was at first somewhat anxious lest the whole university question be opened up before his devolution scheme had been brought home. On reflection however, he considered that such an enquiry might be used in support of a scheme along the lines of Dunraven's proposals, which he strongly favoured.¹ Three days later, on arch 4, he told Bryce that the commission, 'while it should not be mixed up with the general university question, should not altogether exclude the consideration of the creation of other colleges² within the University of Dublin.

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 1 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 4 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

Bryce's replies to these letters are not available, but he probably frowned at this pre-judgment of the issue which did not coincide with his own. For although he was later to associate himself publicly with the MacDonnell - Dunraven solution, his initial impulse was to tackle the question differently, as he explained to Birrell sometime later: 'the Dublin University plan is not the one which I personally prefer - one was driven to it because the really best plan, a drastic handling of T.C.D. so as to expand it into a thoroughly large, cheap, modern unsectarian university, seemed impossible.'

On March 7 however, the senate of the Royal University passed by fifteen votes to two a resolution by the bishop of Limerick that the Royal should be turned into a teaching university, totally separate from Dublin University, but including Queen's College Belfast. This event produced reactions from Bryce's two chief advisers in Dublin Castle which illustrate well the two main attitudes towards a settlement. MacDonnell of course disapproved. He wrote on March 8:

The senate of the Royal University have at the suggestion of Dr O'Dwyer, bishop of Limerick, and Father Delany the Jesuit adopted a resolution to turn the university into a teaching university. The immediate effect of this would be

1. Bryce to Birrell, 27 May 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian Lib., Ms.19).

to endow directly and more largely the Jesuit college in St Stephen's Green - an arrangement to which Irish laymen would object. Dr O'Dwyer has not been in harmony with the bench of hishops on the question.

1

But the assistant under secretary, Sir James Dougherty, whilst approving the idea of a commission so long as it was constituted in such a way as to avoid alarming Trinity, took a different view of the meeting at the Royal:

The motion means the adequate endowment of the college known as the Catholic University, St Stephen's Green. If the bishops are prepared to accept this solution as a temporary settlement at least, there can be no doubt that the line of least resistance lies this way. This may be a less statesmanlike and less attractive proposition than the project of associating protestant and catholic colleges in a national university which should inherit the prestige of Trinity College. But it is infinitely more practicable, and the catholic college in St Stephen's Green should satisfy Dr MacDermott's conditions, as even at present no tests are imposed on either professors or students. There are protestant professors and protestant students.

2

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 8 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).
 2. Sir J.B.Dougherty to Bryce, "5 Feb." (in fact 5 Mar.) 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012). Dr MacDermott was the chief Ulster presbyterian spokesman on education.

He enclosed a cutting from the Tuam Herald which attributed any past support for the rival Dunraven scheme to a small group of Trinity-educated lay catholics, and judged that 'the plan failed and it will never be resuscitated'¹.

On March 20 the whole matter was brought into the open when the Irish party raised a debate in the commons on the revenues of Trinity College. Bryce replied that he had decided to appoint a commission to investigate the internal affairs of the college, adding that 'of course one would not exclude from the purview of such an enquiry the general consideration of the place which Trinity College occupied in Ireland in the higher education of the country'². Redmond accordingly withdrew his motion, but made it clear that he could take no responsibility until he knew the names of the commissioners and their terms of reference.³

MacDonnell had meanwhile been sounding out opinion in Trinity itself. The provost, Dr Traill, admitted to him that the Trinity system of learning might benefit from modernisation, and agreed that any enquiry into Trinity could not exclude 'consideration of the catholic

1. Ibid.

2. Parlt. Deb., H.C. 4 series, vol.154, col.339.

3. Ibid., col.340.

demands for facilities of university calibre'. He added however that Trinity could entirely satisfy this demand by internal reform, and deprecated the idea of a second college within the university. In the circumstances MacDonnell had not taken the discussion any further, but had assured the provost that the personnel of the commission would be constituted with reference to academic rather than political considerations.¹ Thus a breach was avoided, but harmony clearly would last only so long as Trinity was kept in ignorance of the government's (or MacDonnell's) real intentions. In the debate on March 20, Sir Edward Carson stated that it was not yet possible for him to give an opinion on Bryce's plans, but warned that if the intention was 'to turn Trinity College into a different kind of university for the purpose of satisfying sectarian ambition in Ireland, he feared that.....the scheme would not be acceptable to Trinity College'.² It was thus the government's policy at this time to proceed with the utmost caution. As Dougherty warned:

Nothing should be said or done which would give the smallest grounds for the suspicion that the enquiry was nominally for the purpose of reform but really for predatory ends. The protestant mind generally

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 8 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
 2. Parlt.Deb., H.C. 4 series, vol.154, col.341.

and the T.C.D. mind in particular is in a highly nervous and suspicious condition.

1

But it was not only the protestant mind which was in a highly nervous condition. Anything which served to reassure T.C.D. was liable to have an opposite effect on the nationalists, for neither the liberal party by its educational policy and election pledges, nor acDonnell by his past mode of procedure, had done anything to win their confidence. At the end of February Dillon had sent Redmond a cutting from the liberal Daily Chronicle, whose parliamentary correspondent 'understood' that in response to Irish pressure Bryce was working with the intention of setting up a catholic university in Cork and a presbyterian one in Belfast. Dillon thought this suggestion 'most mischievous', and feared that there was 'some foundation' for the rumour.² In fact Bryce's correspondence, very full for this period, contains nothing to substantiate Dillon's fear. Stephen Gwynn did make a suggestion along these lines to Bryce on March 30, but it gained no mention in the almost daily correspondence³ between Bryce and MacDonnell.

-
1. Dougherty to Bryce, 5 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 28 Feb.1906 (Redmond papers).
 3. S.Gwynn to Bryce, 30 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.Ms.11012). 'Cork is in many ways the proper place for a university for catholics, and if that existed, I think the bottom would gradually drop out of opposition to Trinity'.

Towards the end of March Bryce invited the opinions of the Irish leaders on the subject of the personnel of the commission, intimating that the members would in the main be 'academical experts' from England and Scotland. But he did not at the same time show his hand on the question of terms of reference, and Dillon's anxieties were redoubled. He feared an attempt to solve the question within the framework of Trinity College. As we have seen, this was indeed Bryce's hope, though it is surprising to find that Dillon thought MacDonnell also favoured that solution. Dillon seems to have laboured for some weeks under the delusion that MacDonnell's aim in widening the scope of the T.C.D. enquiry was to enable the commissioners to recommend the 'Trinity College solution', whereas in fact MacDonnell¹ hoped they would recommend the 'Dublin University (Dunraven) solution'. Dillon however, was a long-standing advocate of the 'Robertson scheme', and his obtuseness may perhaps have been studied. He wrote to Redmond

1. 'From the outset my wish has been that it should be open to the commission to consider the foundation of a new college within the university of Dublin. In that direction lies, in my judgment, the true solution of the university question. I should therefore view with the utmost regret the employment of any language which would have the appearance of deprecating the consideration'. MacDonnell to Bryce, 28 Apr. 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

on March 25:

The more I think over this business the more I am convinced that there has been some agreement behind our backs behind Sir Antony and T.C.D. - and if the commission is not properly manned and the terms of reference not properly drawn the results will be disastrous....I am very strongly of opinion that we ought on no account to consent to any widening of the terms of reference so as to leave it open to the commissioners to make recommendations and suggest remedies. If the terms of reference left this open to the commissioners - then we should be bound to fight hard for a totally different commission - with a strong representation of the national and catholic view.

1

The following day a letter in the Irish Times from E.P. Culverwell Trinity's professor of education, listed a number of internal reforms which the writer thought ought to make T.C.D. acceptable to catholics. The editorial of the same issue urged a 'compromise' along such lines, referring to 'the undoubted growth of public opinion in favour of the Trinity College solution, and the increasing desire of many of the best of the roman catholic youth of Ireland to secure the degrees of Dublin University. We do not believe that the bishops can afford to ignore these tendencies, or

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

that they have not taken note of the development of lay roman catholic opinion'¹. Dillon considered that this article was 'evidently inspired' and was 'fresh evidence of what is going on behind the scenes'. He urged Redmond that if Bryce:

insists on drawing the reference so as to play up to the game indicated in the enclosed article - to warn him that we shall feel obliged to repudiate the commission and denounce it as a scheme to strengthen the position of T.C.D. in resisting the catholic claims.

2

Redmond accordingly wrote to Bryce on the same day, March 26, asking for the inclusion on the commission of Dr Douglas Hyde and Dr Dennis Coffey, (of U.C.D. medical school), saying that otherwise the commission would be a 'mere whitewashing enquiry'. As to the terms of reference, he urged that they should 'not be of so wide a character as to ask for any general recommendations as to a solution of the university question'³.

MacDonnell however was, as always, looking for settlement by agreement between experts rather than by bargaining between the politicians. He considered Coffey 'not of the standard academic or otherwise for the work' and saw nothing to recommend him 'except his

1. Irish Times, 26 Mar.1906.
2. Dillon to Redmond, 26 Mar.1906 (Redmond papers).
3. Redmond to Bryce, 26 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012).

catholic and nationalist sympathies'. He was also sceptical of Hyde's views on education, and preferred Stephen Gwynn, who, he said, was persona grata with the nationalists (though Gwynn was at this time not an M.P., and was in fact an advocate of the Trinity College solution, which neither MacDonnell nor the nationalists favoured) and chief baron Palles, a catholic unionist - on the ground that 'we cannot disregard the conservative element in the Irish situation'¹.

Dillon viewed this situation with considerable, and as it later turned out, unnecessary alarm. He wrote to Redmond on April 4:

Bryce has behaved exceedingly badly....the fact is that MacDonnell and the Aberdeens are eating in the hand of the enemy....[and]...Bryce ...is being stuffed [?] with the idea that the proper policy is to conciliate the landlords, T.C.D. etc.....The whole situation is most critical.

The appointment of Sir Edward Fry as chairman he considered 'outrageous', and felt that unless Coffey or someone of like views was appointed in addition to Hyde (whom MacDonnell had meanwhile conceded) the commission should be denounced.²

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 31 Mar.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11012).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 4 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).

The disagreement was in fact largely rooted in lack of trust and a misunderstanding. The nationalist claim was for a well-endowed college in Dublin which, starting from scratch, would naturally become catholic in atmosphere. Some Irishmen, like Dillon, Bishop O'Dwyer, and probably most of the hierarchy, would have preferred this college to stand as a university on its own, or to be attached to the Royal; others, like Archbishop Walsh, and probably Redmond, would have preferred it to be attached to Dublin University, as a sister college to Trinity. But this issue was secondary to most nationalists compared with the question of getting some sort of institution of university rank endowed properly in Dublin. The Robertson commission's recommendation of a new college in the Royal, made in 1903, met this demand, and was the current official position on the matter. If, on the other hand, a new commission was appointed to suggest reforms in connection with Trinity College and the University of Dublin it would, pace MacDonnell, be in a position to recommend reforms in Trinity College and to dismiss the idea of a new college altogether. This was a solution totally unacceptable to the Irish hierarchy, and accounts for the fears of the Irish leaders.

Bryce, however, was totally perplexed by their stand, and the row over the commission marks the beginning of a series of ¹ clashes with Redmond and Dillon which culminated in his resignation. His sympathies really lay with the non-sectarian educationists, but he was gradually being convinced by MacDonnell that the Trinity College ² solution was impossible. To the extent that the proposed enquiry had a political motive, it was to gain support for the second college or Dunraven scheme, but it was virtually impossible to make this explicit while retaining the compliance of T.C.D. in the holding of the enquiry. Bryce's reply to Redmond on April 13 hinted that this

1. Though the terms of reference appeared to evince a more favourable reaction in other quarters, this was so only to the extent that MacDonnell had papered over the cracks. On the one hand Dr Traill wrote to say that the board of Trinity College had no objection to the proposed terms: 'It opens up a larger question than might have been thought necessary for our own reform, but we will welcome any solution which, while solving the larger question, will preserve our individuality as "the University of Trinity College, Dublin"' (Dr Traill to MacDonnell, 24 Apr. 1906, Bryce papers, N.L.L., Ms. 11012). Chief Baron Palles, on the other hand, accepted his commission on an exactly opposite assumption: 'I assume, from the terms of reference to the intended royal commission in which Trinity College is rightly differentiated from the University of Dublin, that it is intended to leave open to the commissioners to consider whether the foundation of a second college within the University of Dublin would not afford a remedy for the existing grievance in relation to higher education in Ireland. Upon this assumption I accept with pleasure' (C. Palles to Bryce, 27 Apr. 1906, Bryce papers, N.L.L., Ms. 11012). MacDonnell advised Bryce simply to concur in Palles' assumption (MacDonnell to Bryce, 29 Apr. 1906, Bryce papers, N.L.L., Ms. 11012).
2. See Bryce to MacDonnell, 12 Aug. 1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c. 550 F. 23).

was the real intention, though his explanation was so circumspect that it came near to contradiction:

Perhaps the terms of reference have not conveyed to you what they were meant to convey. My aim was - and so I said at the time when the matter first came up - not to open up the whole university question, since that would involve delay, yet not to prevent this new commission from throwing out, if they saw fit, ideas which might tend to advance the solution of the general question. Without some such words as those in the last three lines the commission would be debarred not only from recommending reforms in Trinity, but also from contributing ideas for the settlement of the larger problem.

They can't settle it: it is a matter for political forces.

But they might help.....

I hope.....your difficulty....will be further removed by an alteration I am willing to make in the proposed terms, emphasising the distinction between Trinity College and the University of Dublin.....

So far as I know we both desire the same things - viz. (1) improved efficiency if Trinity College (2) Any help we can get toward the settlement of the general question by any hint....which can be thrown out by a commission capable of influencing English opinion in a favourable sense.

1

Dillon was 'amazed' at Bryce's letter and felt that the terms of reference represented a complete volte-face on his part since his initial talks with the Irish leaders. The proposed first paragraph,

1. Bryce to Redmond, 13 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).

Dillon insisted, did constitute an invitation to the commissioners to propose a solution of the university question. He wrote strongly to Bryce:

And the restrictions on that invitation - pointed out in your letter - in my personal judgment only make the case worse; for you not only invite the commissioners to report on a plan - but you confine them to two alternative plans. In your letter you say "that the wider problem is not referred to them". I say it is referred to them by the last paragraph - with a strong indication that they are to report on lines laid down in the reference.

1

On April 26 Bryce was still insisting on a seven-man commission, including Hyde but excluding Coffey, and on keeping the terms of reference broad, though he had agreed to reduce the length of the offending passage. To exclude it altogether he thought would be to 'declare that T.C.D. and the University of Dublin were to remain mere episcopalian seminaries'. Redmond was still not prepared to concede. He told Bryce that since the Irish demands had been met neither as to terms of reference nor as to personnel 'I will feel bound at the earliest

-
1. Dillon to Bryce, 15 Apr.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I Ms.11012).
 2. Bryce to Redmond, 26 Apr.1906 (Redmond papers).

possible moment to dissociate myself and my colleagues from any responsibility whatever for this commission'.¹ Bryce however refused to allow the matter to rest there but called Redmond and Dillon for further talks on the grounds that he could not understand their objections.² The meeting did in fact reveal that despite an interchange of opinions and letters for nigh on six weeks, the ground had not yet been fully covered. For Bryce wrote again after their meeting on May 5:

Nothing is further from my wishes than to put you in a difficulty or expose you to such misconstruction as you referred to (its nature had not previously been presented to me) so I have been considering whether I could do anything to meet the case you have put.

Two days later Coffey was appointed, an invitation went out to³ Trinity to nominate a man, and the terms of reference were modified slightly further. This did not transpire without MacDonnell making a final plea for his own view. He wrote to Redmond on May 6:

I believe that if Dr Coffey, the head of the rival medical school, be appointed to the commission, Trinity College will certainly and with reason claim to be

-
1. Redmond to Bryce, 3 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. Bryce to Redmond, 3 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 3. Bryce to Redmond, 5 May 1906 (Redmond papers).

represented. If the claim be allowed Trinity will, if they are wise, nominate Lord Justice Fitzgibbon. How would you like that? Between your view as to the true solution of the university question and mine, there is no difference: and I believe that that solution would not be unacceptable to Mr Dillon. The commission as constituted now is far better calculated to promote the solution we desire than if Dr Coffey and Lord Justice Fitzgibbon or other Trinity College nominees be added.

1

But MacDonnell's plea was ignored, and he commented bitterly to Bryce a few days later: 'I wish Dillon and Redmond joy as a result of their "statesman-ship"²'. The concessions served their purpose however, in that they gained the tacit acceptance of the Irish leaders, and a public condemnation was avoided.

-
1. MacDonnell to Redmond, 6 May 1906 (Redmond papers). Much to the (initial) surprise of all parties, Trinity College nominated not Lord Justice Fitzgibbon but its most junior fellow, Kelleher, who happened to be a catholic. MacDonnell soon realised the intention behind this move. He wrote to Bryce: 'If the other catholics on the commission claim a second college in the university in the interests of catholics, Mr Kelleher, also a catholic, will claim, also in the interests of catholics, to retain one widened college. Thus there will be created apparent division in the catholic claim.....Astute Dr Traill!' (MacDonnell to Bryce, 15 May 1906, Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 15 May 1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

During the summer of the 1906 year the commission, under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Fry, collected a number of documents and statements, which clarified various points of view. On July 25 the catholic hierarchy re-iterated their position. T.C.D. was as closed against catholics as it ever was, they said, and repeated Cardinal Logue's statement of 1903 that 'under no circumstances will the catholics of Ireland accept a system of mixed education in Trinity College as a solution of their claims.....You may have a catholic college or a protestant college, but you cannot have a college which will be at the same time positively both catholic and protestant'. Any solution which offered a college instead of a full catholic university fell short of what catholics had the right to claim, the bishops asserted, but they would, nontheless, accept willingly a new college in Dublin, attached to either Dublin University or¹ the Royal University.

-
1. Statement by the standing committee of the Irish roman catholic hierarchy, 25 July 1906 (Report of the royal commission of enquiry into Trinity College and the University of Dublin, appendix to the first report, 1906 [Cd.3176] lvi.601, pp.30-2). This document will hereinafter be cited as the Fry commission report.

The issuing of this statement boded ill for the reception of another which the commissioners received about the same time, signed by nineteen junior fellows and professors to T.C.D., outlining a scheme for modifying the constitution of T.C.D. 'so that it may become the national university of Ireland'. Their plan proposed an advisory committee of six to look after catholic interests in T.C.D.; second chairs in history and moral science, with a veto on appointments; and provision would be made to ensure 'artificially' that, for the first twenty-five years, catholics would have at least a quarter of the places on the governing body, by which time they would have entrenched themselves in the college at all levels.¹

The publication of this plan provoked an interesting series of responses. During the last week of July, after the formulations of the above scheme but before its publication, N.J.Synnott and George Fottrell, secretaries of the "Catholic Laymen's Committee", a body which had supported the Dunraven proposal in 1904, obtained the signatures of 500 middle-class Dublin catholics to a declaration that 'no solution of the university difficulty in Ireland based upon Trinity College being constituted as the sole college of a national university can be accepted so long as it fails to provide for....a substantial and expanding

1. 'Statement submitted by 10 junior fellows, one retired junior fellow, and eight professors'. 24 July 1906 (Fry Commission, appendix to first report [Cd.3176] pp.23-25).

representation of roman catholics on the governing body', dual chairs in certain subjects, and a body to secure 'practical efficiency' in the matter of safeguards for catholic faith and morals.¹ Despite the negative form of this declaration, its appearance was not unconnected with the Trinity fellows' scheme. Indeed, some half dozen of the 500 lay catholic signatories later wrote to the secretary of the royal commission to withdraw their signatures because, in the words of one of them, 'no communication was then made to me indicating that it had any relation to, or was to be the precursor of, any other document in esse or in posse'.² Dr Traill later revealed that the two schemes had in fact been worked out by the junior fellows in co-operation with the Catholic Laymen's Committee, and that he was himself in favour of the main provisions.³

Despite this attempt to present the new plan as a bi-partisan suggestion, reaction to it was far from favourable. Dillon's view was comment typical of the shrewder catholic viewpoint: the production of such a scheme, he thought, 'shows that the commission has had an

-
1. Statement of certain roman catholic laymen, 25 July 1906 (Fry commission, appendix to first report [Cd. 3176], p.110).
 2. R.F.Carroll to the secretary of the Fry commission, 4 Aug.1906 (Fry commission, appendix to first report [Cd.3176],p.116).
 3. Verbal evidence of Dr A.Traill, 16 Oct.1906 (Fry commission, appendix to final report, 1907 [Cd. 3312] xli.1, pp.1-21).

excellent effect i.e. in frightening the "monopolists" . Nevertheless, it only strengthens my belief that a separate university is the most practical solution.⁴ Archbishop Walsh, in an interview with the Freeman's Journal, called the scheme 'a very mischievous proposal. It cannot do any real good, and it may do real harm'.¹ Indeed, there is no doubt that one of the effects of the announcement of the scheme was to make Trinity appear as eager for a settlement and the catholic side has held back by sectarian bigotry. In his evidence before the commission, Traill certainly interpreted the hierarchy's reaction in this light.² But another effect was to rally catholics to a centre course: catholics outside the Dublin professional circle gave no support to the Trinity plan, whilst Fr Delany, president of the Jesuit college, who was one of the strongest advocate of the Robertson solution, declared publicly that he would support the Dublin University solution if it was brought forward by the government.³

Not unnaturally, Bryce showed some interest in the Trinity scheme, for it embodies his own personal predilection, but MacDonnell discouraged him: 'on the most sanguine forecast it would not help

-
1. W.F.J., 4 Aug.1906.
 2. Verbal evidence of Dr A.Traill, 16 Oct.1906 (Fry commission, appendix to final report [Cd.3312], p.2).
 3. Letter to the Irish Independent from Fr W.Delany, 4 Aug.1906.
 4. Dillon to Redmond, 25 July 1906 (Redmond papers).

catholics for a long time to come'.¹ Bryce reluctantly agreed that 'whatever Fottrell and Synnott may say, the bulk of the catholic laity will follow the bishops. The Irish members certainly will. In this world we must often accept second best'.² After a talk with Synnott, MacDonnell reported that 'I don't think he and his few friends have any clear idea of what they want. My own impression is that they fear the bishops will prevail if the solution is apart from Trinity College'. He explained to Synnott that it would be disastrous if he allowed his committee to go back on their previous support for a second college scheme, and elicited an assurance that 'he would get his friends to be quiescent'.³

To complete the rout of the scheme came opposition from within T.C.D. itself. Traill later expressed tacit support for the plan, but this was after it had been rejected by the other side. As soon as the scheme appeared at the end of July two of the seven senior fellows submitted personal statements denouncing it. The Rev.T.T.Gray called it a 'direct violation' of the college charter, which while professing to modify would in fact destroy the constitution of T.C.D.; it sought

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 13 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 2. Bryce to MacDonnell, 12 Aug.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.23).
 3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 13 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

to introduce into the college that 'great curse' of Ireland, the balancing of religions; no subject would be free from the scrutiny of the 'invigilators', euphemistically called an advisory committee. The only real obstacle to the increased usefulness of T.C.D., declared Gray, was the ban of the hierarchy.¹

But if this reveals Trinity at its most uncompromising and protestant, vice-provost Barlow's statement revealed a class-barrier amongst the religious undergrowth -

I am very far from agreeing with some who hold that inasmuch as the ratio of catholics to protestants is at least three to one, we should have three times as many catholics as protestants at Trinity College. These persons quite ignore the fact that the great catholic majority consists of poor peasants; and I think that to facilitate the education of a poor and perhaps stupid youth by paying his college fees...is but a cruel kindness. I would gladly see a clever boy helped through his course...but a stupid or even mediocre youth, turned by charitable assistance into a profession would very likely starve, and if he did not emigrate might become a discontented and possibly dangerous member of society, instead of remaining a useful agriculturalist, as, but for misplaced charity, he might have been. This plan of turning universities into charity schools, as has been done by Mr Carnegie, may be successful in Scotland, but certainly would not suit the atmosphere of Ireland.

2

-
1. Written evidence of Rev. T.T.Gray (Fry commission, appendix to first report, [Cd.3176,] pp.48-9).
 2. Written evidence of vice-provost Barlow (Fry commission, appendix to first report [Cd.3176] p.38).

Barlow objected equally to the setting up of a 'medieval college' side by side with T.C.D. in the University of Dublin. A second college would be disastrous he said, even if governed by nineteen laymen and one bishop: 'we all know that in a society consisting of nineteen sheep and one collie dog the minority would do what he pleased - and so would the bishop. The new college would be bound¹ hand and foot under clerical control'.

So far as MacDonnell was concerned, the whole affair threatened to encourage that polarisation of attitudes which would mean the end of his hopes for a Dublin University solution. Accordingly he decided that the time had come for action, and on August 9 he sent Bryce a draft plan of his own:

You will observe that the bishops will accept either of these solutions (a) A catholic university (b) The Dublin University scheme (c) The Royal University scheme. It may be assumed that (a) is out of the question (b) is the best scheme: and the one which Archbishop Walsh favours as I do. (c) is a pis aller. The draft I sent you advocates (b). I will send you a similar draft for (c). I quite agree that if the royal commission agree on a scheme which is likely to be acceptable in Ireland, it would be well to embody it in a bill, but it would I think be a fatal thing to give priority to such a bill over the [Council] scheme.

2

1. Ibid.

2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 9 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11013).

MacDonnell's proposal was basically the Dunraven plan of 1904, which provided for the Cork and Belfast colleges, plus a new 'King's College, Dublin' to join with T.C.D. in an enlarged Dublin University.¹ The Royal would be dissolved.

Bryce grudgingly conceded that MacDonnell's plan offered the most hopeful basis for a solution, but he was beginning to adopt the same pessimistic attitude that he had adopted over the council scheme, and feared that the hierarchy would probably insist on a denominational board of visitors for the second college, which would kill all chance of the English nonconformists agreeing to the plan:

It seems to me very doubtful whether the commission can propose, or the government introduce into parliament any scheme which will satisfy both the bishops and the English dissenters. Unless it does there is no use in making any proposals. The sooner the bishops recognise that the present moment gives the best chance they have of getting a virtually tho' not legally catholic college from parliament, the better it will be. Hard enough will it be to advocate even such a scheme as is here adumbrated; and it is justifiable from the British unsectarian position only on the ground that T.C.D. tho' not legally protestant is virtually protestant, and that Oxford and Cambridge are virtually tho' not legally episcopalian. Anything recognising sectarianism legally in a college or university would be very distasteful, probably impossible, in the eyes of British liberals.

2

-
1. Draft of an Irish university bill, 9 Aug.1906. (MacDonnell papers, Ms.c.367 f.70). Under this scheme, Queen's College, Galway would be able to request admittance at any time during the first three years.
 2. Bryce to MacDonnell, 13 Aug.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.27).

Bryce now admitted that the July statement of the episcopal standing committee, though 'based on principles with which liberals as liberals must disagree', left no doubt but that the realistic solution must lie either along Robertson's or along Dunraven's lines. The Dunraven-MacDonnell approach he thought 'infinitely preferable'. He thought also that under this scheme T.C.D. would have to give some money to the university, either by way of allowing some of its professorships¹ to become university chairs or by also having a sum of money deducted.

MacDonnell was now confident that his scheme held the field. Bryce had been convinced, and the Trinity scheme had got nowhere - indeed it had caused a number of (catholic) advocates of the Robertson scheme to re-iterate their willingness to adhere to the Dublin University scheme if necessary. 'You may safely count on the other² bishops sticking to what Archbishop Walsh says', MacDonnell told Bryce. The attitude of the Irish party leaders also boded well he thought: 'Redmond told me that he has always thought the second college within³ the Dublin University plan to be the true solution'. MacDonnell was now so confident that he felt the time was ripe to consider putting the scheme before the Fry commissioners: 'whether they should see it as

-
1. Bryce to MacDonnell, 14 Aug.1906 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.29).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 22 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).
 3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 17 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11013).

emanating from us, or without authorship, you will judge'.¹ He even suggested a return to the technique used in 1904 for both the university and the devolution questions - that is that the scheme should be broached by Lord Dunraven and the Irish Reform Association.² Nothing appears to have come of this: possibly it was felt that the precedent was not a happy one.

Throughout the autumn the commission continued to collect evidence, and it was made clear that the Bryce-MacDonnell scheme (as yet undeclared) would still have many opponents. Stephen Gwynn thought the dual college scheme 'generally and justly condemned', and since the T.C.D. staff had 'set catholic opinion hopelessly against them' considered a new national university the only plan worth considering.³ Dr. Traill in his evidence scorned the idea of a denominational college in a non-denominational university, and indeed declared opposition to the creation of any college in Dublin on similar lines to T.C.D. Anything other than a strictly sectarian college would, in view of the cheaper fees it would be able to offer, be unfair competition to Trinity, he said.⁴ Other Trinity witnesses played the clerical bogey

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 16 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11013).
 2. MacDonnell to Bryce, 21 Aug.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11014).
 3. S.Gwynn to Bryce, 22 Oct.1906 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11014).
 4. Verbal evidence of Dr A.Traill, 16 Oct.1906 (Fry commission, appendix to final report [Cd.3312]p.2).

assiduously, but opposition to the Dublin University plan came also from the opposite direction. Notwithstanding his August assurances that the two-college scheme was one which catholics could accept, Father Delany now moved a resolution in the Royal University senate, seconded by Archbishop Healy, that 'it would be disastrous to the interests of education in Ireland, and gravely injurious to the welfare of the country, to concentrate the control of higher education in one university.'¹ The resolution was unanimously passed, the signatories including the chancellor, Lord Castletown; the vice-chancellor, Sir Christopher Nixon; and the presidents of the three Queen's colleges. All three presidents, Windle, Hamilton, and Anderson, argued before the commission strongly against any linking of their colleges with Dublin University. Close-knit permanent federation, they said, was a system which had failed wherever it had been tried. A loose-knit Royal University on the other hand, with plenty of local autonomy and separate examinations, would be a good prelude to separate universities.²

-
1. Resolution passed by the senate of the Royal University, 25 Oct.1906 (Fry commission, appendix to final report [Cd.3312], p.447).
 2. Verbal evidence of messrs. Anderson, Hamilton, and Windle, presidents of the three Queen's colleges, 9 Nov.1906 (Fry commission, appendix to final report [Cd.3312] pp.224-236).

Archbishop Walsh, on the other hand, was striving for the acceptance of the MacDonnell plan. To meet Trinity's apprehensions of priestly interference, he allowed a letter written by him to MacDonnell to be submitted as evidence to the commission. In it he pointed out that the hierarchy had long since declared formally 'that the catholic claim in the matter of university education can be adequately met without the setting up of any system of religious tests'. The cry of a college 'under the control of the bishops', he said, was a complete misrepresentation of the catholic claim.¹ In an interview with the Freeman Walsh sought to answer critics on his own side also. The catholic camp was still united in practice, whatever resolutions might be passed in the Royal University senate:

Some bishops would prefer one of the three solutions mentioned in our statement, some would prefer another. I really do not know how many of us would regard the establishment of a new college of Dublin University as the best.... But the only one of the three solutions with which the present commission is competent to deal is that of the establishment of a new college of the University of Dublin. So that as far as the enquiry entrusted to the present commission is concerned, the choice lies between that and nothing at all: everything that is said or done with a view of leading them not to recommend that goes directly on the line of leading them to recommend nothing at all, so far as the removal of the catholic grievance is concerned.

2

-
1. Walsh to MacDonnell, 20 Oct.1906 (Fry commission, appendix to final report [Cd.3312], p.421).
 2. W.F.J., 17 Nov.1906.

This forthright statement seemed to silence the critics, and educational problems of a different nature occupied the time of both English and Irish parties for the remainder of the year.

At the beginning of January 1907, Sir Edward Fry's commission submitted its report. It agreed that, generally speaking, Trinity College was a satisfactory institution for the higher education of episcopalian protestants, but considered that the college 'has never been, and is not now, to an extent adequate to the reasonable requirements of the country, a satisfactory organ for the higher education of the roman catholic population in Ireland'. Only 35 of the 266 new students in 1905 had been catholics, and since only 18 had been presbyterians, Trinity could not be regarded as meeting the needs of that denomination either.¹ The commission also accepted the verdict of the earlier Robertson enquiry, that the Royal University did not provide a satisfactory alternative.

Five schemes of reform had been suggested to the commissioners:
(1) a reformed Trinity College; (2) a second college in Dublin University;
(3) a federated Dublin University of four or five colleges (Dunraven's plan);

1. Fry commission, final report [Cd.3311], p.6.

(4) a new university which would be acceptable to roman catholics, with or without a new university in Belfast as well; (5) a new (Dublin) college in the Royal University, as recommended in the Robertson report. The Fry commissioners found themselves unanimously of the opinion that scheme (1) could not be drawn in such a way as to satisfy the hierarchy and that, in the existing political climate, scheme (4) was not feasible. But this was the limit of their agreement. Four of the nine commissioners (chief baron Palles, Douglas Hyde, Dr Coffey, and Professor Raleigh) advocated the adoption of scheme (3). Professor Jackson agreed that (3) was the only satisfactory solution, but 'in view of the hostility of the colleges concerned', did not recommend 'an immediate attempt to realise the scheme'.¹ Sir Edward Fry, Sir Arthur Rucker, and Professor Butcher considered scheme (5) to be the best solution, and so recommended no structural changes in the University of Dublin. Kelleher, the Trinity representative, considered that no new college was necessary.

The supporters of the Dunraven plan took their stand primarily on basic educational and social-religious objections to a federation of the rest of Ireland against Trinity and the establishment of a second teaching university in Dublin.² The three supporters of the

1. Ibid., p.8.

2. Ibid., pp.37-41.

Robertson scheme placed their arguments more on the level of political expediency. whatever the legal position, they said (Palles had argued that T.C.D. and the University of Dublin could be differentiated in law), Trinity had in fact always been the University of Dublin: the addition of a second college would lead to resentment and friction, as well as the likelihood that religion would become the basis for appointments. Trinity College they found to be 'all but unanimous in its hostility to the plan', whilst the presidents of the Queen's colleges and of the university college in Dublin were also opposed to it.¹ Jackson thought the Robertson scheme inadmissible, because he expected it would lead to a disastrous fragmentation of the Royal University (and was supported by the provincial colleges for that reason), but considered that the Dunraven plan was too unpopular to implement for the time being. 'Practically', he wrote to Bryce, 'my answer is to reform Trinity first, and then return to the larger question'.²

Undeterred by all this controversy, and encouraged by MacDonnell, Bryce decided to push ahead with his scheme. Before Christmas he had circulated a paper to the cabinet, advocating the

1. Ibid., pp.32-4.

2. H. Jackson to Bryce, 16 Dec.1906 (Bryce papers, I.L.I., s.11014).

Dunraven plan as being both educationally desirable and politically feasible (with assent from the liberal nonconformists and from the Irish hierarchy, it could be forced through against the opposition of T.C.D. and the ultra-orange faction), and had obtained the consent of his colleagues, conditional on a favourable report from the royal
 1
 commission.

MacDonnell was meanwhile attempting to smooth the way on the catholic side, through the medium of Archbishop Walsh. In early January 1907 he consulted that prelate about the possibility of eliciting from the committee of Irish bishops a new declaration in favour of a second college or Dunraven plan. Walsh advised against such a move, in a letter which nonetheless revealed his own committance to such a solution:

As to consulting the committee, I should prefer not to do so. Of course nothing that has been said would be withdrawn. But there might be some addition made - for instance a strong expression of opinion in favour of the Robertson scheme as preferable that would practically neutralise the effect of the document as it stands.....

But without venturing on any such critical ground you can, I am satisfied, get all you aim at by the making of a statement, distinct and categorical, that on the appearance of Lord Dunraven's letter ...in January 1904, the bishops were consulted as to the feasibility from their point of view of the scheme that had been set forth, and that after

1. 'University education in Ireland', cabinet paper by Bryce, 17 Dec. 1906 (Cab.37/85/99).

giving the matter due consideration, they informed the chief secretary that in their opinion a satisfactory settlement of the question could be arrived at on the lines indicated. I would further suggest that there might be an expression of surprise that there could be any doubt entertained as to the attitude of the bishops on the matter, as since their communication with the government on the subject more than one of their body has publicly stated that the bishops had expressed themselves satisfied with the principles embodied in Lord Dunraven's scheme.

1

MacDonnell readily assented to Walsh's suggestion: 'You will not suppose that I at all desire to suggest that the matter should now be mentioned to your colleagues'.

2

The ground, if not exactly cleared, was at least prepared for a battle in favourable conditions for the enactment of the Dublin University scheme. The one snag was that Bryce, disillusioned by his lack of success in general policy, had already resigned, and was to depart at the end of January 1907. But having drawn all the strings together he felt loath to let them fall. Accordingly, he secured the approval of his successor and of the prime minister to make a public statement on the university question before his departure. He wrote to Campbell-Bannerman from Dublin on 23 January 1907:

-
1. Walsh to MacDonnell, 10 Jan.1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).
 2. MacDonnell to Walsh, 11 Jan.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.354.f162).

Those here who wish to block our course have been shewing that their one hope is that the R.C. bishops may be induced to withdraw from the consent they gave to the plan which approved itself to us: and the chief tory organ accordingly deprecates any declaration of policy. This makes it all the more desirable that our view should be declared before the bishops are tempted to withdraw, so the policy I suggested to you of priming the bishops at once becomes all the more necessary; and the view which the cabinet took and which the majority of the commission adopt is really the only one we could act upon, having regard to English N.C.F. opinion. So I propose to state our policy to a deputation from the presbyterians which had long ago asked to come, and which is now coming on Friday. I explained all this to Birrell some days ago, and he approves.

1

On January 25 Bryce made his statement. The Fry report, he said, provided sufficient evidence that something needed to be done, but it was the condition of any scheme that it should both meet Irish grievances in a manner acceptable to Irish catholic opinion, and be acceptable in principle to a liberal government (i.e. it should provide for non-sectarian education, no tests, and perfect equality between all religious bodies). Bryce regretted very much that it was not possible to make T.C.D. acceptable to all, but in the circumstances declared for a new college in the University of Dublin, which would give opportunities of bringing the youth together in the hours of study and

1. Bryce to Campbell-Bannerman, 23 Jan.1907 (C.B. papers, B.M.Add.Ms. 41211 f.366).

sport', in preference to a Royal University scheme, which might mean¹
the different religions would be 'doomed to perpetual isolation'.

He warned:

I believe it to be the only scheme that is politically possible under the conditions that you have already stated, and I can hold out no hope that any other scheme will be proposed by the present government.

2

This announcement, Bryce reported to C.B. was 'very favourably received' by the representatives of the R.C. laymen present, and 'not unfavourably' by the presbyterians. He explained that:

With a view to our English nonconformist friends, I emphasised its non-sectarian character as far as was possible without actually frightening the R.C. bishops who, though they had previously committed themselves to accept a new college in Dublin University scheme, might be alarmed by our dwelling on the fact that we don't intend to confine the governing body of the new college to R.C.s, and that we mean the university governing body to be entirely academical in its constitution.

3

First reactions in Ireland to Bryce's plan were somewhat cautious. 'The newspapers are holding off until the R.C. bishops and⁴ the Irish party declare themselves' reported MacDonnell on January 28.

1. Since they were 'not ripe' for independence, the Queen's colleges at Belfast and Cork would be federated with Dublin University.
2. Bryce's reply to a presbyterian delegation in Dublin, 25 Jan.1907 (W.F.J., 2 Feb.1907).
3. Bryce to Campbell-Bannerman, 25 Jan.1907 (C.B.papers, Add.Ms.41211 f.368).
4. MacDonnell to Bryce, 28 Jan.1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012. This letter is filed erroneously under Jan.1906).

But Dougherty three days later detected 'outside of T.C.D.' a general disposition to 'make the best' of Bryce's scheme: President Hamilton of Belfast still thought a Royal scheme better, whilst Windle of Cork wanted a Munster university and was opposed to federalism altogether, but Dougherty thought they would both accept Bryce's plan. Archbishop Healy and Dr O'Dwyer had expressed no opposition and 'their attitude no doubt represents that of the bishops generally'. Dougherty's conclusion was that:

Of course the pinch will come when the formula which has gathered into the fold bishop and presbyterian for the present has to be translated into fact, and those who are now neutral or inclined to be favourable may take the field in very active opposition. But at present it looks as if all the fighting in the earlier stages will be left to Trinity College. Sir Antony thinks there may be some support from the junior members of the university. I doubt this, and believe that Trinity will be practically unanimous and will make a tremendous fight against your scheme.

1

Bryce's secretary reported on January 28 that the Cork papers were 'somewhat strongly hostile in tone', especially the Cork Examiner.² But a few days later he reported after a talk with MacDonnell that 'he has now no reason to think that Mr O'Brien and President Windle will

-
1. Dougherty to Bryce, 31 Jan.1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).
 2. W.R. Davies to Bryce, 28 Jan.1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11012. Filed erroneously under Jan.1906).

now press the idea of a Munster university'.¹ Another known supporter of a solution independent of the University of Dublin, Archbishop Healy, very rapidly moved into the field to protest against the proposed winding up of Queen's College, Galway. He held a big protest meeting on February 8 along with Stephen Gwynn and J.P. Boland I.P.s, and read out messages of support from Dillon and T.P. O'Connor, but was careful to stress the specific nature of his protest and the fact that he was not concerned with the more general question.²

The Irish party leaders soon declared their approval of Bryce's scheme. Redmond at Waterford on February 1 interpreted the ex-chief secretary's speech to mean that the government definitely intended to legislate on the question during the coming session of parliament and qualified his support only with a proviso that the other colleges should be made equal with T.C.D. in finance and equipment.³ Dillon preferred to emulate the Church by giving a somewhat hedged approval, but nonetheless made it clear that the scheme would have his support. He moved at the national directory

-
1. W.R. Davies to Bryce, 2 Feb. 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms. 19).
 2. W.F.J., 16 Feb. 1907.
 3. Redmond at Waterford, 1 Feb. 1907 (W.F.J., 9 Feb. 1907).

of the U.I.L. on February 5:

That without committing ourselves to any particular scheme of settling the Irish university question we welcome the support of the royal commission and the recent pronouncement of Mr Bryce...and that so long as the principle of equality in all matters of endowment and privilege is observed, we are prepared to give favourable consideration to any plan brought forward by the government.

1

The most delicate diplomacy on the catholic side was that required to secure the support of the hierarchy. It was known that the archbishop of Tuam and the bishop of Limerick, and perhaps the majority of the bishops, would have preferred a Royal University scheme, and it was therefore fortunate for the government that they had the advocacy of Archbishop Walsh for their own scheme. Walsh was at first extremely cautious, and no more inclined to rush ahead now that the scheme was out of the bag than he had been a month earlier. On February 4 he told MacDonnell that a meeting of the bishops would for the time being be 'most injudicious':

There are points in the scheme (for instance the inclusion of the three provincial colleges, the inter-collegiate arrangements in Dublin) to which many would object, and it is at least possible that the objectors might be in the majority, and might insist on the publication of the objections. In a word the whole thing, if it was to be dealt with now

1. Dillon at the U.I.L. directory meeting, 5 Feb.1907 (W.F.J., 9 Feb.1907).

(when the scheme as to details is more or less in a state of fluidity) would have to be dealt with on its merits. The bishops if considering it could not deal with it otherwise. Later on things will have developed a little, and then the question to be considered will be quite a different one. It will be: is there anything in this that cannot be put up with, or acceded to by way of concession. At that stage, the upholders of the Robertson scheme will be practically powerless. They are by no means powerless now, and they would on many grounds wish to show their dislike of any University of Dublin scheme.....I wish the outside colleges could be got rid of. It is their inclusion that gives the handle to Trinity object. A protest of theirs against the admission of a second college would have no weight. Every monopolist naturally protests against anything that threatens the loss of his monopoly. But now they have a good educational ground, and they are taking up a strong position on it. Even Mahaffy has gone in with them, protesting against the setting up of a "sprawling university".

1

Meanwhile the faculty of the U.C.D. medical school had passed a resolution in favour of the scheme and sent it up to the college board of governors (of which Walsh was a member), who had passed it unanimously. This was an especially valuable gesture of support, in view of the hostile attitude manifested by the other institutions attached to the Royal University. Related by this and by a general

2

1. Walsh to MacDonnell, 4 Feb. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms.c.351 f.154).

2. Ibid.

swing in favour of the scheme, Walsh soon advised MacDonnell that a more confident approach might be adopted:

The P.M.'s short statement about the "interests and prejudices" ... has put the case on what every sensible man must see is the right line. The T.C.D. people may now storm to their heart's content. By degrees they will begin to realise that there is such a fact in modern history as the general election of last year..... You may take it from me that there never was so clear a case of unanimity in Ireland (at the side of the people who have the grievance, i.e. Ireland outside T.C.D.) coupled with an outspoken determination to suppress all individual divergencies or personal views as to details, for the sake of co-operation in support of the splendid scheme now before us.

1

But in fact the tide began to turn quietly against the Bryce scheme almost at once. The king's speech stated categorically that proposals would be submitted for reforming university education in Ireland, but a letter from Birrell to the prime minister's secretary reveals that a qualifying phrase, 'should time permit', had only been omitted at the request of Redmond and Dillon.² Lord Castletown, the first speaker for the government in the debate on the address in the house of lords, expressed a wish that the government would deal with

-
1. Walsh to MacDonnell, 13 Feb. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c. 351 f. 158).
 2. "Should time permit" means to the parliamentary ear "time will not permit". Redmond and Dillon particularly desired that the phrase should not be used, and I am sure the catholic hierarchy, who have been screwed up to agree to Bryce's scheme, on being told that it is all off for a year, will begin to fall away and develop their own individual opinions'. Birrell to Arthur Ponsonby, n.d. but must be late Jan. or early Feb. 1907 (Asquith papers, Bodleian, Ms. 84 f. 94).

the university question along the lines of least resistance.¹ The opposition, Balfour in particular, protested against the abrupt manner in which the government's scheme, 'if it was the government's scheme', had been announced. Bryce, Balfour said, had 'put a gun at the head of all interested in the Irish university question'.² Even Birrell, whilst allowing that Bryce had spoken with his authority, expressed the opinion that the statement had been 'a little too rigid in detail'.³

Meanwhile a 'Hands Off Trinity' campaign had been started in England. On February 11 a T.C.D. deputation, received by Birrell,⁴ passed off 'prosaically enough', but the Church of Ireland bishops soon published an 'emphatic protest' against the scheme,⁵ and in English academic circles response to Trinity's appeal for support was almost unanimous. MacDonnell complained to his wife on February 19 that:

1. 12 February 1907. Parlt. Deb. H.L. 4 series, vol.169 col.11.
2. Ibid., col.71.
3. Ibid., col.201.
4. Birrell to Bryce, 11 Feb. 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms. 19).
5. W.F.J., 9 Feb. 1907.

Trinity College is making gigantic efforts to stir up opposition to England, and it is striving to influence all the newspapers. It is an uphill business, to attack every 'garrison' interest in Ireland. I don't expect Balfour will look at the question otherwise than as a means of making party capital.

1

Professor Butcher, a member of the Fry commission, said at Cambridge that whilst he advocated the creation in Dublin of a catholic college that might one day become a university, it should for the time being be attached not to Trinity but to the Royal. He berated the government 'not to ruin the greatest institution in Ireland'. The master of Trinity (Cambridge), who appeared on the same platform, concentrated less on an alternative solution than on the threat to academic freedom from priestly interference which he saw in the government's scheme.²

Thus within a few weeks of Bryce announcing his scheme (with 'no hope' that the government could consider any other), second thoughts commenced. In mid-March an Irish friend observed to Bryce that in view of the fierce opposition from T.C.D. and silence, 'meaning discontent', on the part of the hierarchy, some modification of his scheme would be required.³ MacDonnell meanwhile had sensed that

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 19 Feb.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.1).
 2. Meeting at Cambridge, 3 Mar.1907 (W.F.J., 9 Mar.1907).
 3. W.F.Barrett to Bryce, 14 Mar.1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).

Birrell 'did not see eye to eye' with Bryce on the subject.¹ By the beginning of April, the Dublin correspondent of The Times felt in a position to announce that 'the government has definitely abandoned the idea of introducing an Irish university bill during the present session of parliament', giving as their reason 'the fear that both in the cabinet and in the rank-and-file of the liberal party in the house of commons there is a strong element of opposition to Mr Bryce's scheme'.²

This rumour provoked a quick response from Birrell, who denied entirely any suggestion that the government 'had abandoned the projected legislation for the university question'.³ The standing committee of the Irish hierarchy expressed their unanimous approval of this rebuttal: they thought it 'quite possible within the general outline of that [i.e. Bryce's] plan' to meet the catholic claim and denied entirely the construction put by some people on their statement of 25 July 1906, that they would use the concession as a starting point for further demands. On the contrary, they said, they were prepared

-
1. MacDonnell to Bryce, 12 Mar.1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11015).
 2. Times, 5 Apr.1907.
 3. W.F.J., 13 Apr.1907.

to accept Bryce's scheme as 'quite final'. Among the signatories¹ were Archbishop Healy and Bishop O'Dwyer. But this move on the part of the bishops must be regarded in the same light as the Trinity fellows' scheme of 1906. The first sought to present Trinity to the British public as being conciliatory in the face of clerical bigotry; now the bishops, by coming out for the government in its moment of adversity, sought to give the impression that any breakdown was the result of opposition from the Trinity side. The Freeman was able to assert that 'if there is any failure of the government's policy of university reform, it will not be for lack of encouragement on the part of the Irish bishops'.² Catholic policy was to make it impossible for the government to use Trinity's objections as an excuse for shelving reforms altogether.

But in fact work on the scheme had come to a halt. 'Birrell has not spoken about the university bill for many months', MacDonnell told Bryce on May 15.³ Bryce, now ambassador in Washington, took up this hint, and wrote to Birrell in defence of his plan. He warned that 'the Royal University plan, which T.C.D. advocates, and which

1. N.F.J., 20 Apr. 1907.

2. Ibid.

3. MacDonnell to Bryce, 15 May 1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015).

the R.C. bishops would prefer, would, to my way of thinking, be worse than the existing position, because it would postpone indefinitely the chance of emancipating the R.C. laity and higher education from clerical control'.¹

The Irish leaders too had detected a lack of enthusiasm for the subject on the part of the new chief secretary, and when they decided to reject the Irish council bill they grew concerned about other measures which might restore their prestige. Dillon felt that the priests would be very disappointed if the national convention did not call on the government for early action on the university question.² Yet it was already mid-May, and it was known that the government were determined to avoid another autumn session. They were already deeply committed to the controversial English and Scottish land bills, and it was evident that a measure such as an Irish university bill was unlikely to get the sort of priority treatment necessary to push it through parliament in less than three months. But in Ireland, even those catholics who had no preference at all for Bryce's plan would resent any action (or inaction) by the government which suggested that they were withdrawing their offer at the first crack of the ascendancy

1. Bryce to irrell, 27 May 1907 (Bryce papers, Bodleian, Ms.19).

2. Dillon to Redmond, 12 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

whip. The Irish leaders realised this, and even simply as a question of tactics, felt that the government should act at once, as Redmond explained to Birrell in a very interesting letter, on May 28:

I quite understand all the difficulties surrounding this subject, and I fully realised that it is practically impossible to attempt to pass a Bill into law this session. But I attach the very greatest importance to the introduction of a bill in accordance with Mr Bryce's speech during the present session. This will be the greatest lever you can possibly obtain for the removal of the difficulties in the way of the passage of the bill next year. Trinity College is now in a blue funk,¹ and if you introduce your bill, the autumn and winter can be spent in the discussion of the subject and in negotiations with, as it seems to me, the certain result that Trinity College will offer terms to you, and will undertake next year to allow a bill based on the Royal University scheme to pass as an agreed measure, Balfour and the opposition entering into this agreement. On the other hand, if you do not introduce a bill this year on the lines of Mr Bryce's speech Trinity College will give a sigh of relief and will come to the conclusion that the danger is passed and will offer you no terms, but will render the passage of any bill next year difficult or impossible. I am quite clear in my mind therefore that the best policy is to introduce your bill, explaining plainly

1. In his statement to the Fry commission, the protestant dean of St. Patrick's cathedral had called for the creation of a roman catholic university, and for T.C.D. to be left alone (Fry commission, appendix to first report [Cd.3176]p.30).

that it is only introduced for the purpose of discussion, and that you do not expect to be able to pass it into law this session. Another strong reason for taking this course is the effect it will have on the popular mind in Ireland. If no university bill is introduced, the strongest feelings will undoubtedly be aroused, and it will be represented as a breach of an undertaking on the part of the government.

1

Dillon was still hors de combat following his wife's death. But he still observed affairs from Mayo, and had heard from T. J. O'Connor that no university bill would be introduced. His view of the situation was similar to the one Redmond had already put before Birrell, though it was more tersely, and perhaps more candidly, expressed. 'That will be a great mistake', he said, 'it will set all the bishops and priests wild, and will greatly increase Birrell's difficulties!'.² He might have added that it would also increase the Irish leaders' own difficulties.

-
1. Redmond to Birrell, 28 May 1907 (Redmond papers). Curiously enough, Redmond's view as to tactics was shared by Horace Plunkett, who wrote to Bryce on 20 Apr. 1907: 'I personally regard the action you took as being chiefly valuable in committing the government to use its all - powerful majority in favour of a solution'. (Bryce papers, J.I., s.11015).
 2. Dillon to Redmond, 29 May 1907 (Redmond papers).

Birrell invited Redmond to discuss the points raised in his letter, but would not, or could not, accept the alternatives put forward at the interview.¹ For on June 3, the prime minister made a general statement in the house of commons concerning the government's Irish policies: the Irish council bill would be withdrawn, and no university bill would be brought in during 1907.² Redmond was very disappointed. All nationalist Ireland had rallied to Bryce's plan, he said, although it had not been their idea. Now it seemed that the government did not intend to introduce a bill at all, but were reverting to the old tory ruse of holding up a settlement until there was complete consensus.³ The freeman was equally annoyed, denouncing the prime minister's statement as 'distinctly retrograde' and a breaking of the government's pledge:

Mr Birrell may be a charmer, but he is not likely to secure any larger measure of agreement than Mr Bryce has secured. If he thinks that by deferring to the Trinity College monopolists they will be any less active in opposition to any genuine scheme of higher education than they were to Mr Bryce's scheme, he is certain to be disappointed. The performance looks as if the promise of a university bill was given merely to secure a lenient eye for the defects of the council bill.

4

-
1. Birrell to Redmond, 29 May 1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. Parlt. Deb., H.C. 4 series, vol.174, col.323.
 3. Ibid., cols. 336-341.
 4. W.F.J., 8 June 1907.

This last accusation was probably unjust. But as events turned out, the promise (made in the king's speech), did prove to have been a miscalculation on Birrell's part, for it laid him open to the charge of breaking an agreement. The apparent volte-face certainly annoyed the Irish hierarchy. Bishop O'Donnell complained to Redmond that 'Trinity College has been playing dog in the manger. But when reduced to mortal terror, the government relaxed its grip on that interesting animal. Even if they contemplated a different scheme, no policy could be worse than this'¹.

In fact, by their lack of co-operation in the matter the government were not embarrassing themselves nearly as much as they were embarrassing the nationalist leadership. Birrell did not need to accept Redmond's advice of May 28, because the aim mentioned by Redmond had already been secured: Trinity College had been given a severe fright, and would not breathe easily again until either a scheme (such as Robertson's) which did not trespass on its interests,² had been enacted, or until a unionist government was back in office.

--

-
1. Bishop O'Donnell of Raphoe to Redmond, 24 Sept.1907 (Redmond papers).
 2. That T.C.D. was already sufficiently alarmed was confirmed by Carson in a commons' debate on July 4. An Irish university settlement must be made, he said, because doubt about the future was beginning to cause harm to Trinity College (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.176 cols.913-9).

So if Birrell, pace the liberal nonconformists, intended to proceed along the lines of the Robertson scheme in 1908, the introduction by him of a Dublin University bill in 1907 was superfluous. Furthermore, it would take up precious parliamentary time, and make the government look rather foolish, or at least weak, when they introduced a different scheme a year later. The only point in favour of introducing a bill for discussion purposes in 1907 was that it would make life easier for the Irish leaders. But following their treatment of the council bill, Redmond and his colleagues found less sympathy with their difficulties than was usual in liberal circles.

Nonetheless, after keeping the Irish leaders on tenterhooks for a month, Birrell made a more positive statement of his intentions. Bryce, he said, had been quite justified in making his speech, since it was compatible with the Fry report, but it had aroused great antagonism in T.C.D. When he discussed Bryce's plan with the heads of the various colleges, Birrell continued, he found none of them willing to sacrifice their desire for a large measure of autonomy - a sacrifice which would be necessary if they were to join the University of Dublin. In detail he had found that 'there were such great differences of opinion among them as led him to believe that at closer quarters this asset [one university] would be found to be a delusive asset'. Birrell revealed

that in the process of discussing alternative possibilities with those who had consented to Bryce's scheme, though he could not for the moment divulge their nature. He hoped to arrive at a 'modification' of Bryce's scheme which would very much reduce opposition, and which he would introduce as a bill in 1908.¹

The Freeman welcomed Birrell's declaration, though fearing that it was motivated by a desire to 'conciliate the selfish opposition of Trinity College, and might fail to command the support of the Irish presbyterians:

The catholic policy is the policy of the open door and of educational equality. If Mr Birrell can frame a scheme that will give the same equality as Mr Bryce's, and secure a stronger support and excite a less vehement opposition, well and good. Many catholics would regret on grounds both national and educational, grounds not unfriendly to either Trinity College or the University of Dublin, were those institutions to be cut off permanently from the national life. But many others would rejoice. These latter suppressed their preference when the Bryce scheme was propounded; the former will suppress their preferences if any other scheme is found. What both demand, however, is that the mere veto of a minority in Ireland or in England shall not be allowed to delay reform for a single day.

2

-
1. Speech By Birrell, 4 July 1907 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.176, col.956-968).
 2. W.F.J., 13 July 1907.

The Times, on the other hand, felt that the new development could only be an improvement, though it could not resist the hope that possibly the new arrangement might not be without hitches for the government: 'He [irrell] has learnt something from the failure of his predecessor and from the negotiations which he has described, but the worst difficulties, we imagine, may be found in the end amongst those of his own household, on the radical back-benches.¹'

This comment may have struck home to a large number of liberal hearts. It was not too difficult for the government to get support from their nonconformist followers for the creation of a second, albeit mainly catholic, college in Dublin University - on the grounds that the exercise was basically an assault on the tory episcopalian monopoly. A scheme based on the Royal University lacked this attraction in radical nonconformist eyes, and would be disliked by Ulster presbyterians for the same reason - yet if elfast were dealt with separately, then the government would be in the embarrassing position of appearing to create a separate university especially for catholics. Doubtless with the religious difficulty in mind, the westminster Gazette hinted that the government's path would be made somewhat easier if the nationalists would come out with a scheme, rather than leaving themselves free to dissent from any scheme which the government brought forward: a crypto-

1. Times, 8 July 1907.

sectarian university might be easier for liberal conformists to swallow if it could be presented as a concession to united nationalist demands. At all events, the Westminster warned, 'however forgiving Mr Birrell may be, the government cannot risk a repetition of the disaster which overtook their Irish council bill'.¹

During the rest of the summer at Westminster, in between stages of the evicted tenants bill, Birrell continued to take opinions on the question, but by the end of the session had reached no encouraging conclusions. Immediately the evicted tenants bill was through he retired to St Moritz, from where he wrote to MacDonnell on August 29:

I'm afraid the university bill is impossible. Your assies² are impenetrable, and will be infuriated with the R.C.s. As for the presbyterians, I have had two private letters from their leaders, casting Bryce's scheme to the wolves - All they want is money for themselves. If they get that, even their insane and.... [word illegible] hatred of T.C.D. will go to the wall. Castletown also tells me (with huge solemnity and great vows to secrecy) that Walsh is of the same way of thinking and never cared for Bryce's scheme - Good heavens, what a country! I'm off to the Rising Glacier.

3

-
1. Westminster Gazette, 5 July 1907.
 2. Dr John Assie, a prominent liberal nonconformist M.P.
 3. Birrell to MacDonnell, 29 Aug. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. c.350 f.15).

Despite Walsh's known predilection for political intrigue, Lord Castletown's rumour may be dismissed as false, on the basis of what we have already seen of Walsh's views, and also from Birrell's own late account, in his autobiography.¹ MacDonnell would certainly have known the rumour to be false, and it is surprising that Birrell seems to have accepted it: that he should have passed it on to MacDonnell in this way illustrates either his own ignorance of Irish affairs, or an over-estimation of his under secretary's credulity. The rest of Birrell's letter may be taken more seriously however, and it indicates how far Birrell had already moved away from the Bryce scheme. MacDonnell, nonetheless, held to Bryce's view, and in late September sent his chief a long letter urging policies opposite to Birrell's on almost every aspect of Irish affairs. Both by 'academical and political tests', MacDonnell argued, Bryce's scheme was best, and was supported by all Ireland 'outside Trinity College and its clientele'. Schemes separate from T.C.D. would, he said, be a fatal blow to the future of Irish higher education and to the future of friendly co-operation between protestants and catholics:

Trinity College can make a great noise, but it is only noise. Bryce, I am convinced, could have carried his scheme; if you come to recognise its

1. A. Birrell, Things Past Redress (London 1937) p.203.

great advantages, you can carry it no less than he. I am confident that you are not correctly informed as to the attitude of the presbyterians and the R.C. bishops on the subject. The presbyterians remain true to Bryce's scheme by a two to one majority; and if the temper of the R.C. hierarchy is reflected by the bishop of Raphoe, one of the most powerful of them, it has not altered. What effect, if any, will be produced by the Pope's recent encyclical, remains to be seen.

1

But other interested parties had sensed the trend more correctly than MacDonnell, and were more willing to move with it. Lord Kelvin, a prominent Ulster academic, had spoken out for a separate university in Belfast, but when Sir Christopher Nixon, vice-chancellor of the Royal, spoke in that city on 20 September 1907, he urged that the establishment of a federal Royal University for the time being might be the best way of achieving that end. 'A very large body of educated opinion' favoured such a plan, he said. Referring to the Bryce scheme, he admitted that it had its supporters, but described it as:

.....a certain ideal type which was perfectly impracticable as a solution, and only afforded to those who were desirous of no scheme being adopted a means of making their hostility effectual....it is not too much to say that this unhappy scheme, so delayed in its incubation, died before its birth.

2

-
1. MacDonnell to Birrell, "September 1907" (MacDonnell papers, Ms.c354 f.7). A papal encyclical was issued in September 1907 against 'modernism', calling for the teaching of philosophy, history, and like subjects in strict accordance with roman catholic doctrines.
 2. Sir C.Nixon at Queen's College, Belfast, 20 Sept.1907 (W.F.J., 28 Sept. 1907).

Redmond, as a representative politician who had accepted the Bryce plan, was in a more awkward position (which was greatly aggravated by the general political situation in Ireland)¹ and was virtually obliged to be critical of any change at this stage: 'Nothing was more extraordinary and more indefensible than the action of the present government with reference to this question', he declared at Wicklow on September 29.² But it was clear that he, as much as Dixon, knew that Birrell was working for agreement on a new plan. He stressed that:

We are not wedded to any scheme. All we ask for is equality of treatment, and we care not by what particular scheme that equality is granted....but I don't want to discourage Mr Birrell.....One effect of Mr Bryce's scheme is that Trinity College is today more friendly disposed towards a settlement than ever it was before.

3

There was thus a note of cautious optimism in the speeches of those in Ireland concerned with the university question, which suggested that Birrell had by early autumn advanced some way along new lines,

1. See *infra*, chs. 5 and 6.

2. Redmond at Wicklow, 29 Sept.1907 (W.F.J., 5 Oct.1907).

3. *Ibid.*

and was more hopeful than he had admitted to MacDonnell at the end of August. It is possible, in fact, that he was not really prepared to reveal his hand completely to MacDonnell, having realised from the council bill episode that the under secretary was likely to fight for his own point of view to the bitter end. MacDonnell took his long-delayed leave in the autumn of 1907, spending some weeks visiting ryce and others in the U.S.A., and did not return until the last week in November, by which time the new plans were almost cut and dried.¹ By October 30 Birrell was able to advise Campbell-Bannerman that he could achieve a university settlement, with the support of Balfour and Carson, if only the treasury was willing.²

The cabinet re-assembled in early November, after the summer recess, and their second meeting, on the 6th, was almost completely taken up with Irish affairs. Some time was spent discussing the question of disturbances and a land bill to ease the situation, but the main topic so far as projected legislation was concerned was the university question. Birrell announced that he saw his way clear to tackling the matter in a way acceptable to all parties, C.B. told the king. His plan would:

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 24 Nov. 1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217. f.50).
 2. Birrell to Campbell-Bannerman, 30 Oct. 1907 (C.B. papers, Add. Ms. 41240 f.127).

....create a separate university for Ulster; would leave Trinity College untouched; and would create a new university in Dublin, absorbing the present Royal University, and having colleges at Cork and Galway; safeguards being provided against ecclesiastical control. This scheme was approved as the basis of a bill for next session.

1

Thus, within nine months of assuming office, and in complete opposition to his under secretary, Birrell had won agreement for a plan totally different from the one Bryce had expounded in January as 'the best', the one with most consensus, and the only one which a liberal government was likely to adopt. Unfortunately, there is little information available as to the negotiations conducted by Birrell during this period. Certainly he talked with many leading educationalists and churchmen in Ireland, and to his advisers. But his chief adviser, MacDonnell, had no influence on this thinking at all, and seems to have been virtually excluded from negotiations. When MacDonnell returned from the U.S.A. at the end of November, he reported to his wife that:

In the university matter....[Birrell].....has finally given himself over to Bryce's and my opponents....That plan stereotypes for all time the division of Ireland into catholic, protestant, and presbyterian teaching,

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

and admits the principle against which Bryce and I fought. It is the triumph of Father Delany, Sir Clifton, and his friends.

1

Many would have agreed with Horace Plunkett that the new scheme was the work of Birrell and John Dillon: 'Birrell has agreed on a university and a land bill with Dillon', Plunkett wrote to Bryce in December 1907.²

Another influence on Birrell at this time was R.B.Haldane, the secretary of state for war. Haldane had become involved in university matters in 1898, through his campaign for London University. He had been sent to Ireland as a private negotiator by Arthur Balfour in October of that year, where he had contacted most of the leading men and drawn up a scheme based on the establishment of two new universities, in Belfast and Dublin. Balfour had approved of the plan, but failed to carry it in Lord Salisbury's cabinet, and the idea was shelved. In 1906 Bryce and MacDonnell ignored this earlier spadework (Haldane was not sure whether they knew of it), and pressed ahead with their own plan.

-
1. MacDonnell to his wife, 24 Nov.1907 (MacDonnell papers, Ms. e.217 f.50).
 2. Plunkett to Bryce, 21 Dec.1907 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11015); See also Birrell, Things Past Redress, p.202. Dr Thomas Dillon of Donnybrook Dublin, shares this view. Plunkett's letter continued: 'The nationalists don't want any such university scheme, but they will not be particular about higher education if they are satisfied about the land'. How Plunkett reconciled 'the nationalists' being opposed to a plan which, he claimed, was half Dillon's creation, is difficult to understand. He may have meant simply that a number of M.P.s, notable T.M.Kettle, and probably Redmond, would have preferred Bryce's plan.

But when Birrell reported to the cabinet that the question was in a 'hopeless condition', contrary to the opinions of Bryce and MacDonnell, Haldane told him of the 1898 plan, which Birrell subsequently found ¹ little difficulty in carrying with the hierarchy and the presbyterians. This account is based on Haldane's autobiography, and probably presents the author's advice as being more crucial than perhaps it was, but the old memorandum Haldane had prepared for Balfour ten years before it was indeed circulated to the cabinet in January 1908. In it, Haldane suggested that 'T.C.D. was like the Ark of the Covenant: for a politician ² to put his hand on it was to perish'.

This explanation - that the Bryce plan went the way of so many of its predecessors because of the strength of Trinity's opposition - is the traditional view of the 1907 negotiations. Certainly it indicates an important factor in the government's change of course. But Birrell's own arguments in favour of a new scheme, as stated in a cabinet paper of 19 November 1907 and in his letter to Bryce of 30 January 1908, place the emphasis elsewhere. Birrell told the cabinet that Bryce had been wrong

1. R.B.Haldane, Autobiography, pp.129-134.

2. 'The Irish university question', a cabinet paper by Haldane, November 1898, circulated to cabinet, Jan.1908 (Cab.37/91/9).

in his estimate of public opinion: the roman catholics and p̄esbyterians in Cork, Galway and Belfast did not support his scheme, nor were the hierarchy enthusiastic. In fact, Birrell alleged, 'nobody of any importance whatsoever in Ireland outside the Castle has, or ever had, any feeling in favour of the scheme'. Every university in Britain had been prevailed on by T.C.D. to write to the chief secretary protesting against a great federal university. Personally Birrell felt it would be unfair to put an as yet uncreated (and mainly roman catholic) senate over T.C.D. He concluded 'as a settlement of the Irish university question it seems to me hopeless.....I am certain it would be rejected by the house of lords'. His own scheme, on the other hand, he knew would have the support of the Irish party, provided the finances were sufficient. As for the 'old men' of T.C.D., they would accept his plan, though 'secretly they will dislike any new university in Dublin unless it is p̄r̄est-ridden. They fear a rival, and a catholic seminary would be no rival'¹. To Bryce, softening his tone but a little, Birrell wrote:

With the exception of Sir Antony (with whom it is my hard fate never to agree, though greatly liking the man), the chief baron, and one or two dour presbyterian parsons

1. 'University education in Ireland', a cabinet paper by Birrell, 19 Nov. 1907 (Cab.37/90/99).

in the north, I could find nobody who backed your proposals, tho' no doubt many were willing to accept them - Hamilton and Windle simply chucked [?] them to the winds - the catholic archbishops, Dublin and Tuam, and the cardinal, tho' mightily shy at first of any alterations, soon made it plain that they preferred two new universities. This perhaps is not surprising. But Dillon, who is very anti-clerical, is equally clear in his preference....whether we can fight Perks and co., and John Massie and that illiberal breed, remains to be seen. They are against endowment. The pope's encyclical letter is infelix.

1

In one particular at least Birrell exaggerated here, possibly because he was anxious to avoid giving the impression that T.C.D. had killed the other plan. Archbishop Walsh had written to him on January 6, three weeks before Birrell wrote the above letter to Bryce, to say that he thought the new scheme quite a good one, but not as good as a second college in Dublin University and, 'in point of university status, not as good as Bryce's scheme, though that was open to the charge of being a sprawling university'. Walsh's letter made it plain however, that he would give his approval to the scheme so long as the new colleges had equality with T.C.D. on the vital point of finance.

2

-
1. Birrell to Bryce, 30 Jan.1908 (Bryce papers, N.L.I.,Ms.11016).
 2. Walsh to Birrell, 6 Jan.1908 (cited in P.J.Walsh, Life of Archbishop Walsh, p.561).

Other nationalists were equally accommodating. T.M. Kettle who, like Balfour, had previously been a prominent supporter of the Dublin University scheme, said that he hoped to see Birrell's scheme go through parliament as an agreed measure, 'although he himself, and other supporters of the Bryce plan, would be compelled and they were prepared, to sacrifice their special predilections'.¹ The national directory of the U.I.L. approved the plan, demanding only that the scheme should be on a sound financial basis.²

Meanwhile the opposition were making great play with the government's reversal of policy. Bryce was somewhat distressed about this, for the implication was that he had spoken out without authority. Birrell explained to him on 30 January 1908:

I can assure you that I have been greatly annoyed by the references Balfour is fond of making to your outgoing speech in Dublin on the university question.....The difficulty is in our cabinet system. You made known your scheme and proposals to your colleagues in memoranda which none of us seem to have read. Personally I have no doubt that if I had read them I should have agreed.When you asked my leave to receive and address the presbyterian deputation - of course I did not have any idea what you were going to say, as I had not any idea of what your scheme was.....if I had known your scheme I should have offered no objection.....I should have perhaps been a little frightened at some of the detail of it, and might have suggested a little vagueness, but that is all.

-
1. T.M.Kettle at Aughnacloy, co.Tyrone, 5 Jan.1908 (W.F.J., 11 Jan.1908).
 2. Meeting of the U.I.L. national directory, 22 Jan.1908 (W.F.J., 25 Jan. 1908).

It is quite a mistake to suppose that either I or the cabinet abandoned your scheme rashly, as Balfour suggests. Far from it - for a considerable time I assumed I should go on with it - and it was only after many interviews and consultations I came most reluctantly to the conclusion that it was impossible for me to undertake the passage through the house of commons of any such scheme.

....We have changed our minds - I don't see that we can well say less - though it is not strictly true - for nobody seems ever to have made up his mind on the subject - but the mysteries of cabinet memoranda cannot be rudely disclosed to a mocking world....I will certainly do my best to make it clear that you did not "play off your own bat"!

1

During February and March 1908 the cabinet discussed the measure on a number of occasions and the details were finalised. Birrell was hopeful - 'up to the present time everything moves smoothly' - though he was anxious to show that he was not creating a sectarian institution: 'It will not be catholic-religious dominated' he told his colleagues.² Every effort was made to make the new universities appear on paper as no different from those created at Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. T.C.D. was presented as being inadequate for Irish needs, because it was too expensive, too exclusive, and did not offer many of the courses

1. Birrell to Bryce, 30 Jan.1908 (Bryce papers, N.L.I., Ms.11016).

2. 'The Irish university question', a cabinet paper by Birrell, 13 Feb. 1908 (Cab.37/91/15).

required of a modern university ('The great want of Ireland is a cheap popular university'). Only tacked on at the bottom of Birrell's list was the argument that T.C.D. was too protestant. Redmond in his speeches did all he could to help Birrell, declaring at Manchester on March 15:

I believe that this session of parliament will witness the creation of a national university for Ireland. I don't say a catholic university. The university that we want will only be catholic in atmosphere because the Irish nation are catholics.

1

By and large these assurances, and the emphasis on the democratic rather than the religious nature of the catholic demand, served their purpose in Britain. But the bill was not brought home without some hard pleading on Birrell's part. He complained to Walsh that, 'unhappily, nobody in England really cares a straw about the university question in Ireland except a fanatic crowd, who, stirred by the neo-catholicism of the Church of England, see popery writ large over the whole subject'.² Even on the eve of the introduction of the bill Burns noted in his diary that in cabinet, Lloyd George was 'fractious'³ when the measure was discussed.

-
1. Redmond at Manchester, 15 Mar.1908 (Times, 16 Mar.1908).
 2. Birrell to Walsh, 31 Dec.1907 (Quoted in P.J.walsh, Life of Archbishop Walsh, p.560).
 3. John Burns' diary, 27 Mar.1908 (Burns papers, B.M.Add.Ms.46326).

Nonetheless Birrell was able to introduce the bill on 31 March 1908. He began with an historical account of the problem, explaining that there had been a significant slump in the number of internal degree students in Ireland outside T.C.D. since the replacement of the Queen's University by the Royal in 1879. He added that although U.C.D. and its medical school were 'frankly roman catholic institutions with a Jesuit at the head' and therefore 'it is not to be supposed that they can have a penny of public money', in fact they had been indirectly endowed since 1879 to the extent of £7,000 a year. Thus the step he proposed was not revolutionary in principle. He had rejected the big federal (Dunraven) scheme because he found that even outside T.C.D. it was 'very unpopular'. Its variant, the two-college Dublin University solution, Birrell admitted to be a very attractive idea to the sentimentalist, but T.C.D. had opposed the idea, 'and this to me, I frankly admit, robs the proposal of all its attractiveness. The two colleges, the old and the new, would begin by hating each other'. Thus the government scheme provided for two new universities at Dublin and Belfast, with Cork and Galway federated initially with Dublin. After the first appointments, the senates would be academically elected: to start with there would be 1 catholic out of 36 at Belfast, and 7 protestants out of 36 at Dublin. Father Delany would not be the first

president of the Dublin college.¹ His advanced age, 76, helped to avoid embarrassment on this point.

These proposals found a very large measure of support at Westminster, even amongst the Tories. Alfour could not resist a jibe at the mysterious disappearance of the Bryce plan, but concluded that although Birrell had dealt with a most contentious subject, 'no single word has fallen from him which can offend any susceptibilities'.² Dillon thought Birrell had found a compromise acceptable to all, and even complimented the provost of Trinity who, he said, had 'set a high example of fair play and courage in this matter'. He admitted that personally he had always favoured the approach which Birrell had now adopted.³ The only objections came from a section of the Ulster party, Campbell, the junior member for Dublin university, asking 'is it possible that these people are going to rivet the chains of clericalism... on the rising manhood of Ireland?'⁴ But his senior colleague, Carson, declared that 'I have always supported these proposals, because I believe they are the only possible proposals for Ireland'.⁵ The first reading passed by 307 votes to 24.

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.187, cols.331-352.

2. Ibid., col.354.

3. Ibid., cols.360-371.

4. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series vol.1 8 col.802.

5. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series vol.187 col.399.

Public reaction to the bill was equally cordial. The Freeman thought that Bryce's plan had perhaps come rather nearer to meeting the will of the majority, and regretted that the cry 'hands off Trinity' had prevailed. But in the circumstances it approved of taking the line of least resistance, since 'the nation cannot wait upon the conversion of Trinity'¹. Cork corporation expressed 'great disappointment' that the city had not been given a separate university, but in the absence of support from their leaders they were unable to develop a campaign.²

William O'Brien said that a separate university for Cork was for the time being 'hopelessly impracticable', and Windle, though pledging never to rest until Cork college was granted its independence, conceded that no sane person could attempt to block the bill.³

Apart from the Ulster party die-hards, nonconformist opposition did not amount to very much. Two liberals did in fact move the rejection of the bill on second reading, but one of them, Dr Hazel, confessed to a certain misgiving in finding himself acting with William Moore and his little hand, and there was no mass revolt in the liberal ranks.⁴ Dr Massie and the chairman of the nonconformist M.P.s, Sir George White, abstained. Most nonconformists seemed content to accept the Westminster

1. W.F.J., 4 Apr.1908.
2. Resolution of Cork corporation, 10 Apr.1908 (W.F.J., 13 Apr.1908).
3. Speeches by O'Brien and Windle in Cork, 25 Apr.1908 (W.F.J., 2 May 1908).
4. 11 May 1908 (Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series, vol.188 col.770).

Gazette's argument, that the creation of different universities for different religions 'may not be ideally desirable, but here we have to recognise facts and sentiments which will not yield to English manipulation'. If the new institutions did divide into catholic and presbyterian, that journal continued:

...nothing more will have happened to them than has not already happened to T.C.D. or to the English universities, where the atmosphere is predominantly Anglican. This is not, as some people imagine, a mere craft and dudge to avoid the denominational issue. It is applying not merely Irish ideas but the democratic idea to the question of Irish education....we cannot limit democracy by the condition that it shall always be protestant.

1

Redmond welcomed the bill, though it was not the scheme he would have chosen. He objected to the lack of provision for a hall of residence in Dublin, but this was a point of finance only. He poured scorn on Hazel's views - by such standards even the new University of Khartoum was 'denominational'.² Carson for once agreed with him: 'I do not see how I could consistently say that Trinity College is undenominational, and at the same time deny the description to the bill now before the house'.³

1. Westminster Gazette, 1 Apr.1908.

2. Parl. Deb. H.C. 4 series vol.188 cols.784-791.

3. Ibid., cols. 845-7.

A certain amount of embarrassment was caused at the last minute however, by the question of the affiliation of Maynooth and Magee Colleges to the new universities. Professor Butcher moved an amendment in committee which would have excluded future Maynooth students from degrees unless they resided for at least two years in Dublin, which the ecclesiastical authorities would not permit.¹ Birrell made it clear that he would stand firm against this, but many liberal nonconformists, such as A. Hutton, who had ultimately been reconciled to the bill as a whole after second reading opposition, were more inclined to take a stand in committee against what they regarded as a further concession to sectarianism.² The Times, not without relish, opined that 'on this rock the bill may split and flounder'.³ On the following day, Dr Massie joined in the fray. If Maynooth were affiliated, he thought:

Extern students, resident and taught in ecclesiastical seminaries and entirely out of touch with the university life, may have the power of swamping in convocation the electoral power of graduates who genuinely belong to the university...[and]what is to prevent similar ecclesiastical institutions, in which Ireland abounds,

-
1. House of commons' grand committee on the Irish universities bill (report in W.F.J., 23 May 1908).
 2. Ibid.
 3. Times, 28 May 1908.

from being affiliated by an accommodating statutory commission? By such means the undenominational guarantees of the proposed universities would be reduced to the paper on which they are written....The objections to this new departure are not merely nonconformist and unsectarian: they are educational and academic. The academic government of a university should be in the hands of those who share in and understand its life....May I hope that those who are alive to the danger of the concession will not leave the fighting to be done by two or three?

1

This threat provided an opportunity for the critics of the Irish party at home to re-appear. Bishop O'Dwyer's familiar attacks on the 'liberal alliance' began to appear in the Freeman once again. On June 14 he drew attention to the 'systematic and almost scientific exclusion of the priesthood' from the new university: 'It was a great loss to Mr Birrell and Mr T.P.O'Connor that they could not settle the council bill over the heads of the Irish people, as they are now settling the far graver question of our higher education'.² At Cork on June 15, Cardinal Logue joined the battle also: Maynooth was about to be destroyed by nonconformist bigotry, he said, 'Englishmen were providing this university cut and dry, and he believed the result would be that it would prove a greater fiasco than the previous attempts to settle the university question'.³ The Freeman commented on June 20:

-
1. Letter to The Times from Dr John Massie, 29 May 1908.
 2. Letter to the F.J. from the bishop of Limerick, 14 June 1908.
 3. Cardinal Logue in Cork, 15 June 1908 (Times, 16 June 1908).

The questions pending are of such a character as to make the smooth passage of the measure much more doubtful than the practically unanimous endorsement of the principle of the measure at one time encouraged us to hope. It is evident that the question of the affiliation of Maynooth has aroused slumbering prejudices, which it will tax Mr. Irrell's skill and resource to overcome.

1

The Irish party leaders were therefore forced onto the defensive. Redmond, at Leeds, warned that although the bill was not a perfect measure, politics was 'the science of compromise...and with all its defects, if this measure failed, it was his deliberate judgment that they might have to wait 30 or 35 years before as good an opportunity arose again'.² At Manchester a fortnight later Dillon said that 'whatever critics might say about the bill he was convinced that if they got it as it stood now, with some small increase in the financial provision, they would make a great catholic national university in Ireland'.³ Archbishop Walsh complained more strongly about the finances, and said that if there was to be no residential college in Dublin, then at least Maynooth should be affiliated. But he, too, was determined that the bill should not be lost: 'Mr. Irrell deserves well of the country'.⁴

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

2. Redmond at Leeds, 7 June 1908 (Times, 8 June 1908).

3. Dillon at Manchester, 21 June 1908 (Times, 22 June 1908).

4. Archbishop Walsh at Greystones, co. Wicklow, 12 July 1908 (V.F.J., 18 July 1908).

His faith was rewarded, for Birrell held firm, and Butcher's amendment was rejected by the grand committee. For a while it had looked as if a fierce battle might develop within the liberal party, but this was avoided, perhaps because the anti-laynooth case, shorn of its nonconformist prejudice, was a very weak one. Once again the democratic principle could be brought into use, for no English university had been refused the right to affiliate such institutions as it pleased. Furthermore, as Fr Delany pointed out, it would be difficult for laynooth to 'swamp' the convocation of the new university when its average annual output of graduates was in the region of only 30 or 40.¹ During July, the nonconformist P.s held a number of meetings at which they raised objections to specific points and sent a resolution to Asquith to the effect that the bill had become more sectarian during its passage through committee. But their amendments were not accepted, and their opposition finally crumbled. Only four liberals eventually voted against the third reading,² and a number of leading nonconformists, including Dr Massie, Sir George White, and G. Hay Morgan, voted for the bill. Their 'hypocrisy' was roundly denounced by the Ulstermen. Liberal

1. Letter to The Times from Fr W. Delany, 1 June 1908.

2. J. Lloyd Morgan, J.H. Seaverns, Cameron Corbett, and Harold Cox. The last two named were virtually unionist free traders in matters of policy.

nonconformists, said Charles Craig, had not simply put aside 'a great many of their predilections' (as Redmond had alleged), but they had in his opinion 'swallowed one of the most nauseating draughts it was possible to conceive'¹.

The bill nonetheless was passed through the commons and the lords with tory support, and became law on 1 August 1908. Antony MacDonnell, now ennobled and free of the chains of office, admitted in the lords that, in view of Trinity's attitude the government's scheme was as good as any, but he regretted that Trinity had not seen fit to place itself at the head of the 'great renaissance of Irish learning' and the movement which was working to reconcile contending parties in the country. He did, however, reply in some detail to Birrell's assertion that there was no large measure of support in Ireland for Bryce's scheme outside Trinity College.²

Thus the government successfully carried a major measure, and an Irish one at that, through the house of lords unaltered in

1. Parlt. Deb. H.C. 4 series vol.193 col.653.
2. Parlt. Deb., H.L. 4 series vol.193 col.1570-1575. In private, the new Baron MacDonnell was a little more caustic. When Archbishop Walsh was elected chancellor of the new National University MacDonnell wrote to Bryce, 28 Dec.1908, that: 'That sets a seal on its character. Now there is agitation for "Gaelic" as a sine qua non for matriculation - what can be done with such people!' (Bryce papers, N.L.I.Ms.11016).

essentials. For the Irish party leaders also, it was something of a relief: at last an important grievance had been settled along lines which they could accept as something more than a half-hearted compromise. But the impact of the settlement on the general situation was not great. It may be said that the catholic church was mollified, but in fact those clerics who had been prominent in their opposition to the Irish leadership beforehand remained so afterwards: the controversy over the A.O.H., and the position of T.M.Healy, kept the breach open, especially so far as Cardinal Logue was concerned; and the liberals' policy on the schools question continued to embarrass the Irish party in Great Britain. The conciliatory attitude displayed by Carson and Balfour on this occasion was not extended to Irish affairs in general. The unionists still kept up their campaign of protest against Birrell's administration at Westminster, and the government's genuine troubles in the west of Ireland continued. Devlin complained to a Belfast audience at the beginning of 1909 that 'the work done by the Irish party in connection with the universities act has not received the recognition which was its due'.¹ The new national university played an important part in feeding the nationalist spirit in Ireland during the next few years, but it neither fed the western peasants nor transferred the grasslands to them. The immediate impact of its foundation on the general situation was therefore negligible.

1. Devlin in Belfast, 29 Jan.1909 (W.F.J., 6 Feb.1909).

