

Write a commentary on a primary source document related to Ireland between 1880 – 1997.

On January 21st, 1885, Charles Stewart Parnell gave an astounding speech at Cork that was later reported in the *Cork Examiner* and *The Freeman's Journal* the following day. *The Freeman's Journal*, Ireland's top nationalist journal in the nineteenth century, was published continuously in Dublin from 1763 to 1924. And its' counterpart *The Cork Examiner*, afterwards known as *The Examiner*, is a national daily newspaper published in Ireland. It is predominantly distributed in the Munster region near Cork, though it is available nationwide. As it was noted that these two outlets were of the nationalist view, they were therefore able to give a detailed report of Parnell's speech. Publishing this speech in a newspaper, allowed for it to be distributed efficiently, with hopes of it reaching every Irish person of the Catholic nationalist view. As the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party and one of the most prominent hardliners in the Home Rule League, Parnell was an Irish nationalist politician who was dedicated to a full-scale nationalist revolution. He also served as a Member of Parliament. Under the leadership of Parnell, political organisations under the Home Rule banner were streamlined between February 1882 and the general election in 1885. History had demonstrated that maintaining the balance of power in parliament did not ensure Ireland's chances of devolution, repeal, or even independence. However, Parnell's team's ability to create a cohesive Irish party at Westminster after other Irishmen had previously failed to do so was unique in Irish politics. The key to Parnell's success as a politician was his ability to unify the many religious and secular elements that shaped Irish politics and society. As a result, twenty-one years after his passing, an Irish party he founded would win legislative approval for home rule for Ireland.

Parnell spent the years from 1882 to 1885 transforming the Irish Parliamentary Party into a cutting-edge political machine in order to push the subject of Irish Home Rule to the forefront

at Westminster. In the speech he gave at Cork in January 1885, he expressed that he has formed; as promised in the 1880 elections, an independent Irish party that will oppose any British government that refused to recognise Ireland's legitimate rights. And as time has passed, he is convinced that this is the best course of action to take in terms of parliamentary policy and, that neither one nor both of the English parties will be able to compete for an extended period of time against a determined group of Irishmen acting honestly on these principles, and are supported by the Irish people. Being that it is unclear to say whether or not the British Government will “wise up” and grant to them what was stolen; which was their rights to self-governance, they should leave it to ‘time, circumstances and the future.’¹ But in the meantime, he expressed to the Irish people of Cork that they must do everything they can to obtain Ireland’s rights. Parnell was described as radical in nature, willing to do whatever it takes to get his point across, even if that means stirring up a bit of violence if necessary. To add, grip and grit is a proverb defined in the Cambridge Learner’s dictionary as someone who is brave and has a strong determination to do something.² They were also words used to describe him as a politician.

Parnell’s speech was aimed towards the tenant farmers, labourers and as a whole, the Irish population, who were mostly Catholics working under Protestant landlords. He declared that his independent Irish party will continue to fight for the significant and vital interests of the Irish tenant farmers. And will request that rent-related restrictions on their business be lifted. He also requested in return from the farmers, that they do their part to support Ireland's struggling manufacturers, and that they not view it as too great a sacrifice to be asked to think about how they can obtain anything they need from Irish materials and manufacture, even if

¹ Freeman's Journal, 22 January 1885.

² Cambridge Learner’s Dictionary (1995)

they have to pay a little bit more for it. Giving a bit of context, the Irish land Question was the question of agricultural hardship in Ireland and the issue of land ownership under British control.³ Roman Catholics, who made up the vast majority of the Irish population, were prohibited from owning land under the Penal Laws. The purpose of the Penal laws was to prevent Catholics from ever regaining the ability to control Protestants and in essence, exact revenge. The Penal laws had more economic than religious significance. In order to prevent any large landowners from surviving, Catholics were prohibited from purchasing land, and if a Catholic landowner already owned a large plot of land, his estate had to be shared among all of his offspring when he dies. Improvements made by tenants were discouraged because this led to an increase in rent prices. Additionally problematic, were the sudden eviction notices. Consequently, the three F's, fair rent, fixity of tenure, and freedom of sale, were the demands of the Irish Tenant Right League, which was founded in 1850. The tenant's cause was aided by the ferocity of the Fenian movement, the Reform Act of 1867's expansion of the vote, the campaign for home rule, and support from the Liberal party, led by William Gladstone. Gladstone's Land Act of 1870 offered some compensation for improvements and safeguarded the tenant against whimsical evictions. To note, due to the apparent relationship between Irish landlords and the legal system, which supported the former, this rule seldom had any effect there.

In his speech, Parnell further apologised to the farmers and tenants of Ireland, for the state of the agricultural population, which has demonstrated up until that time, a lack of sense of duty. Additionally, we'll work to ensure that the labourer has some sort of recognition and legal standing in his native land. He expressed that the Irish Parliamentary Party do not care if the landlord's or the farmer's prejudices are what prevent them from succeeding, however, they believe that any class that tries to prevent labourers from exercising those fair and legitimate

³ Jackson, Alvin, *Ireland 1798 – 1998: Politics and War* (1999).

rights to which he or she is entitled should be put down, and if necessary, compelled into doing so. The land question, which also involves the labourers' and manufacturers' questions, is what Parnell and his Party returned to after considering those questions. And the discussion of the crucial issue of Ireland's national self-government, and the fact that every Irish politician must be compelled to do the same. He had no idea how this important question would be finally answered.

In comparison to Parnell's 1885 speech at Cork, William Gladstone gave an enlightening speech introducing the Home Rule Bill to Parliament on 8th April 1886. Unlike Parnell, Gladstone focused his speech solely on the implementation of the bill in Ireland. He argued that laws were discredited in Ireland because they were from a foreign country. Years have passed since the Act of Union bill, and it was time for Parliament to re-evaluate the countries' position. The act of union in 1801 is a legislative agreement between the parliament of Great Britain and the parliament of Ireland, uniting them as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.⁴ In other words, before the Act of Union there were two independent, separate, co-ordinate Parliaments; after the Act of Union, there was but one.⁵ Gladstone continues to explain that other countries have fixed their land and Government problems by resorting to Home Rule as a means of removing the foreign appearance of law and giving it a domestic or "homey" feel. And he believed it would succeed because the majority of the population of Ireland believed that it would succeed. In his parliamentary speech, Gladstone when compared to Parnell, emphasised Ireland's lack of identity and representation in Parliament. Though, some might say Parnell's speech was aimed mostly towards rallying the Irish population with hopes of winning the upcoming elections of 1885. Scotland, a country much smaller than Ireland, was recognised by England and was allowed to make her own laws

⁴ Jackson, Alvin, *Ireland 1798 – 1998: Politics and War*, (1999)

⁵ Hansard 3 (*Commons*), 3rd series, cciv, 1036-81, 8 April 1886

freely and effectively. It was as if England was allowed to be English, Scotland was allowed to be Scottish, but Ireland was not allowed to be Irish.⁶

On the other hand, they both made impressive arguments on how imperative it was for the parliament to do something to bring back to Ireland the fundamental elements of civil life, including the rule of law, everyone's freedom to exercise their legal rights, the public's confidence in the law, and their sympathy with the law. Without these elements, no nation can truly be referred to as civilised, nor can it receive the benefits that civilised society seeks to achieve. Note, both politicians in their speeches touched on the need for Ireland as a nation, to govern her people by her own rules; which she had previously done in the years prior to the Act of Union. Years Gladstone described to be in many worst conditions. Ireland and England, though separate were able to rely on each other. Those years when Ireland governed Ireland saw its Navy come to its supremacy. Those were the years when the vast, enormous manufacturing sector in Ireland which dominated the entire planet, saw its beginnings. Moreover, in a prominent sense, the years that were known as the "century of empire" were also the "century of wars." When England and Ireland had separate Parliaments, those wars continued, the Irish Empire was preserved and greatly expanded, the Irish trade was formed, and the Irish Navy was elevated to supremacy. Gladstone when compared with Parnell, who was radical in nature; which was portrayed in his speech at Cork, was more of a "peacemaker". This was shown throughout his years as a Minister of Parliament; searching endlessly for ways to suppress any violence in Ireland. Gladstone contended that even though the parliament had passed numerous "good" laws in Ireland, it was insufficient when the details of what a country and its' people have been through are observed. The notion demanded that these laws not only be good but also come from a familiar and native source. In addition to being good laws, they should also be their own

⁶ Hansard 3 (*Commons*), 3rd series, cciv, 1036-81, 8 April 1886

laws. Gladstone's use of the word "good" to describe the laws that were given to Ireland by England was ironic because earlier in his speech, he described the laws as 'repressive legislation against Ireland'⁷

Under Gladstone and Parnell's leadership, the party fought for Irish self-government while also opposing coercion laws and gave tenant farmers advice on how to take advantage of Prime Minister Gladstone's reforming Land Bill. However, that was not enough to convince the liberals and the other MPs who voted against the Home Rule Bill. Communal violence and discrimination continued throughout Ireland until the bill was finally passed. The national question and the land question were the two major issues that drove these MPs to compose these well-written speeches that undoubtedly made a difference in Irish history.

⁷ Hansard 3 (*Commons*), 3rd series, cciv, 1036-81, 8 April 1886

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