

Part 4: Ireland

Ireland Topic 2: Movements for Political and Social Reform, 1870–1914

Perspective: Politics and Administration

Who was the more effective leader of the Home Rule movement: Butt or Parnell? Argue your case, referring to both.

1. **Unlikely leaders:** Between 1870 and 1890, the Home Rule movement was led first by **Isaac Butt** (1813–1879) and then by his successor, **Charles Stewart Parnell** (1846–1891). Both men seemed **unlikely leaders** of Irish nationalism:
 - Neither spoke Irish.
 - Both were Anglican, while most of their followers were Catholic.
 - Both were conservative-minded, even though their followers demanded major economic and social reforms.
2. **Personalities:** Butt was highly sociable, whereas Parnell was a charismatic but aloof figure.
3. **Approach to politics:** Butt divided his time between his law practice and parliament, while Parnell concentrated solely on building up his political career. Unlike Butt, Parnell had the ambition, organisational ability and ruthlessness needed to dominate Irish politics by 1885.
4. **Attitudes towards the British Empire:** Butt and Parnell disagreed on the British Empire:

- Butt was pro-imperialist. For him, Home Rule was an end in itself.
 - Parnell was anti-imperialist. He implied that he saw Home Rule not as an end but as a **stepping-stone**. Whether or not an independent 32-county Ireland was Parnell's goal is still unclear.
5. **Vision of a Home Rule Ireland:** Neither Butt nor Parnell wanted to recreate the conditions that existed before the Act of Union (1801). Both men wanted a Home Rule Ireland to be a welcoming place for people of all faiths and none.
 6. **Relationship with the Fenians:** Both Butt and Parnell courted Fenian support. Though neither approved of the Fenians' violent methods, they understood them. Both men wanted to provide a peaceful way to achieve reform and so reduce the appeal of physical-force separatism. Although Parnell distanced himself from the Fenians after the Phoenix Park Murders (1882), the Fenians accepted this as a necessary tactic. Through his aggressive language and confrontational politics, Parnell retained Fenian support. They believed that they were both aiming for the same outcome: complete independence.



Unlike Butt, Parnell could use his Fenian connections to access funding for the Home Rule movement from the Irish American organisation, Clan na Gael.

7. **Disagreement on tactics:** Butt saw parliament as a 'gentleman's club' whose rules and procedures should be respected, and he was appalled by the obstructionists' tactics.

Parnell realised that obstructionism was a potent tactic. Its confrontational approach made constitutional politics more attractive to many Irish nationalists, especially those still sympathetic to the use of violence.

8. **Leadership style:** Butt and Parnell had quite different ideas about leadership:

- Butt intended the Home Government Association merely to be a pressure group, rather than a political party. He was a reluctant leader.
- In contrast, Parnell relished being a leader. He gradually centralised all power into his own hands. Once Parnell gained control over both the party's finances and its candidate selection process, he imposed a pledge on his MPs 'to sit, vote and act' as he directed.
- Whereas Butt's approach was collegial, Parnell's leadership style tended to be authoritarian. For example, he imposed Captain **William O'Shea** on the Galway constituency in 1885, despite strong local opposition.
- However, by 1886, Parnell led the most disciplined political party in any Western democracy.

9. **Attitudes towards land reform:** Butt gave little attention to the land question, but Parnell grasped its importance. To gain the mass following needed to convince the British to grant Home Rule, Parnell knew he needed to succeed on an issue close to the concerns of his electorate.

Parnell wove the causes of Home Rule and land reform together. Unlike Butt, Parnell understood that the land question would be '*the train that would pull the Home Rule carriage in its wake*'.

10. **Relationship with the Liberal Party:** Butt failed to build any effective partnership with either of the two dominant British political parties. In contrast, Parnell successfully exploited the balance of power at Westminster to play the Conservatives off against the Liberals. Having achieved the Ashbourne Land Act (1885), he formed an alliance with the Liberals

that resulted in the narrowly defeated First Home Rule Bill (1886).

11. **Personal lives:** Both men had complex personal lives that ultimately undermined their leadership:

- Butt was frequently in debt and struggled with alcoholism. Also, he had numerous extramarital affairs, though he made no secret of them.
- In contrast, Parnell concealed his relationship with a married woman, **Katherine O'Shea**. When he was named by her husband as co-respondent in their divorce case, it triggered a massive scandal that split the Home Rule movement and ended Parnell's leadership.

12. **Concluding remarks:** Butt launched the Home Rule movement. It dominated Irish nationalist politics until the general election of 1918. Though his career ended in failure, Butt laid the foundations for Parnell to build a powerful political machine.

While party leader, Parnell succeeded in establishing constitutional nationalism on firm foundations. However, his career too ended in failure. Worse, he left Irish nationalists deeply divided and the wounds inflicted by his fall took years to heal.

Parnell's admirers portrayed him as a political giant brought down by lesser men. However, his errors of judgement showed that he was as inadequate to the task of achieving Home Rule as his predecessor.

What was the importance of the general elections of 1885 and 1886?

1. **The implications of an expanded electorate:**

The Franchise Act (1884) extended the vote in parliamentary elections to all adult male householders who had paid their rates and were registered. This had the following effects:

- The Irish electorate expanded from a small, mainly well-off farmer base and trebled in size to include huge numbers of small tenant farmers and labourers.
- Ireland gained 25 extra parliamentary seats. It was now possible for the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) to end up holding the balance of power in a future House of Commons.

The Irish emigrant population across Britain was estimated at between 750,000–2 million. Some constituencies had a large block of Irish immigrant voters. Both the British Conservative and Liberal parties began to vie for the Irish vote in Britain. Parnell and the IPP hoped to use this Irish vote

to pressurise both Conservatives and Liberals to respond to the Irish demand for Home Rule.

Agrarian protest had undermined the landlords, who had traditionally dominated Irish politics. By 1885, thanks to several land acts, landlord–tenant relations were no longer a pressing issue. Other divisions, such as between farmers and labourers, and between Protestant and Catholic, became amplified.

2. **Maintaining law and order in Ireland:** Between 1880 and 1885, Gladstone's Liberal government had reacted to social unrest in Ireland with a mixture of the '*carrot*' (e.g. the Land Act 1881) and the '*stick*' (e.g. coercion measures such as detention without trial and the replacement of juries by a panel of judges). British coercion measures figured prominently in the election campaign of 1886.

3. **The Home Rule Party:** In 1880 **Charles Stewart Parnell** became leader of the IPP. Within five years, he would transform it from a loosely organised body into the most disciplined and united political organisation in any of the Western democracies. Parnell achieved this by:

- Introducing a 'party pledge' to bind all its MPs to vote as he directed.
- Taking control of the mechanism for selecting candidates for parliament.
- Controlling the finances that paid all IPP MPs a salary.
- Gaining the support of the Catholic clergy.

By 1885, all IPP candidates were united behind the drive to achieve Home Rule for Ireland.

4. **Chamberlain's plan for Ireland:** An ambitious radical Liberal MP, **Joseph Chamberlain**, wanted to make a name for himself as the man who had settled the Irish question. He opposed Home Rule as he thought it was too close to independence. Instead, Chamberlain proposed a reformed system of local government: each county would have its own democratically elected council and each council would elect a member to serve on a 'central board'. This board would deal with agriculture, education, public health, and transport for the island of Ireland. Chamberlain saw this as a permanent alternative to Home Rule.

Captain **William O'Shea** acted as an intermediary between Chamberlain and Parnell. He led Chamberlain to believe that Parnell would accept his central board scheme as a permanent solution. However, Parnell had told O'Shea that he viewed it merely as one step towards Home Rule. When

Chamberlain later learned the truth, he thought that Parnell had deceived him, and he developed a deep personal hostility towards him.

Chamberlain's scheme was rejected by the British cabinet and he resigned from the government. Parnell did not worry about alienating Chamberlain. This proved to be a costly mistake. Chamberlain would go on to lead a faction within the Liberal party that saw Home Rule as a threat to the existence of the United Kingdom and sought to prevent it.

5. **The fall of the Liberal Government:** Gladstone's Liberal government was deeply unpopular because of its failure to prevent the death of General **Charles Gordon** at Khartoum, Sudan. Finally, his administration was brought down by a combination of Conservative MPs and Irish MPs voting together while disgruntled Liberal MPs absented themselves from the Commons. A Conservative government took over. An election was postponed for some months until a review of electoral boundaries was completed.

6. **Conservative reforms:** The new Conservative Prime Minister, **Lord Salisbury**, tried to improve relations with Irish nationalists:

- He appointed a reformer, **Lord Carnarvon**, as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.
- Coercion legislation was not renewed.
- The Ashbourne Land Act 1885 provided £5 million for tenants to buy out their holdings. They could borrow the full purchase price and repay it over 49 years at 4 per cent interest. This was a success, as 25,000 tenants bought out their farms.

7. **Conservatives and Liberals keep Parnell guessing:** Private discussions at Westminster led Parnell and his supporters to believe that both the Liberals and the Conservatives were willing to offer some form of Home Rule to Ireland. However neither would discuss the level of self-government on offer.

Between June and November 1885, Parnell tried to persuade either the Liberals or the Conservatives to openly declare their support for Irish Home Rule. Neither would. Instead, both parties kept Parnell guessing. Both needed the votes of the Irish MPs to govern. However, Home Rule was an unpopular idea in Britain, so neither wanted to be the party to finally go public on the issue.

8. **The 1885 General Election:** In October 1885, the Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury,



made a speech hinting at the possibility of Home Rule for Ireland. Believing the Conservatives were willing to do a deal, Parnell called on Irish voters in Britain to vote Conservative in the upcoming election.

When the election result was announced in December 1885, the IPP had won 86 seats. As neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals had won an overall majority, the IPP now held the balance of power at Westminster.

9. **The Hawarden Kite Incident:** In early 1886, the Liberal leader, Gladstone, let it be known that he supported Home Rule for Ireland. The IPP supported him in turn as prime minister.

In April 1886, the First **Home Rule Bill** was introduced to the House of Commons. However, the Liberal Party split over it. The bill's defeat led to the Liberal government's collapse and another general election in mid-1886.

10. **Impact on Unionists:** The general election of 1886 was dominated by the issue of the future of the union between Britain and Ireland. In Ireland, the remaining pro-union Liberals joined with Conservatives, calling themselves 'Unionists'.

11. **The 1886 General Election:** The IPP won 85 seats. Outside Ulster, it won every seat, except for the two Dublin University seats. In Ulster, Unionists won seventeen seats. Most Catholic voters supported Nationalist candidates and most Protestant voters backed Unionist ones.

12. **Consequences:** The future of the union between the two islands moved to centre stage and would dominate politics on the island of Ireland for decades to come.

Both the Nationalist and Unionist parties chose to link their causes to groups such as the Catholic clergy and the Orange Order. This decision strengthened the links between their respective movements and deep religious divisions in Irish society.

The elections of 1885–1886 had a major influence on the eventual division of Ireland into two separate states in 1921–1922.

What were Parnell's strengths (successes) and weaknesses (failures) as political leader of the Home Rule movement?

1. **Introduction:** Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–1891) is one of the outstanding figures in modern Irish history. He transformed the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) into the most effective

political organisation of its day.

2. Strengths

- (a) Parnell won over the Fenians: He defended the Manchester Martyrs and joined the obstructionists. He did this to win the Fenians' support, which he needed to win the leadership of the IPP and to give him access to funds from Irish emigrants in America.
- (b) Parnell was a political realist: He got involved in the New Departure because he realised that he needed to win the support of the Irish electorate. Without it he could not become leader of the IPP. The only issue likely to deliver this was land reform.
- (c) Parnell was a great communicator: He understood the need to project a public image that would appeal to the Irish electorate. In private, he was nervous, superstitious and prone to hypochondria. In public, he radiated a self-confidence and energy that awed his opponents and won him a huge following. Parnell won over audiences with memorable soundbites (he told tenants at Ennis to send landlords and their agents into '*moral Coventry as the lepers of old.*')
(d) Parnell balanced the strands of Irish nationalism: He realised from the outset that, to lead a broad political movement, he would have to appear to be '*all things to all men*' to avoid alienating any of his supporters. He did this by:
 - Keeping moderates on-side by not publicly aligning himself with the Fenians.
 - Convincing the Fenians of his commitment to the cause of Irish freedom, though he never said how far he would go to achieve it.
 - Responding to the Liberal government's policy of coercion with angry speeches that suggested violence but never actually recommended using it.
 - By advising well-off tenants to 'test' the provisions of the Land Act of 1881, while denouncing its limitations to those who opposed it.

This is why historian **Conor Cruise O'Brien** referred to Parnell as '*the master of the pseudo-revolutionary gesture*'.

- (e) Parnell was a pragmatist: While in prison, he used Captain **William O'Shea** as an intermediary to negotiate a deal with Prime

Minister W.E. Gladstone. This '*Kilmainham Treaty*' (1882) was a personal triumph. It not only extended the terms of the 1881 Land Act to tenants in arrears but also marked the British government's de facto recognition of Parnell's leadership.

Parnell used the Phoenix Park murders (1882) as an opportunity to clearly disassociate himself from violent extremism and retain the support of the Catholic clergy and moderate nationalists. Most Fenians understood the political necessity of this move and kept their faith in him.

Parnell kept his options open in the run-up to the 1885 election. He responded to Conservative hints of a deal by calling on Irish emigrants in Britain to vote Conservative.

- (f) Parnell was ruthless: He replaced the banned Irish Land League with the Irish National League (INL) in October 1882. Its primary aim was to achieve Home Rule; land reform was secondary. This involved double-crossing **Michael Davitt**, the man who had done so much to enable Parnell's success.

Parnell would only accept candidates for the INL who had been approved by him. He imposed a party pledge to '*sit, act and vote*' on all his MPs.

3. Weaknesses

- (a) Parnell had limited room for manoeuvre: Although the IPP held the balance of power after the 1885 election, his options were narrowed when **W.E. Gladstone** suddenly converted to Home Rule. This revelation (known as '*the Hawarden Kite*') polarised British politics. The Conservatives rebranded themselves as the '*only true party of the union*' and became the die-hard opponents of Home Rule.

Though his supporters were enthusiastic about an alliance with the Liberals, Parnell was not. He could no longer play one party against the other to get the best deal.

- (b) Parnell's private life left him dangerously exposed. His affair with Katherine O'Shea made him an enemy of **Tim Healy**, an influential member of the IPP. Healy had accidentally opened private correspondence between Parnell and Mrs O'Shea. The Parnell-Healy relationship worsened when Parnell imposed Captain O'Shea as a

candidate for the Galway constituency in the 1885 election. Healy would play a key role in Parnell's downfall.

Parnell was the leading hate figure among the Conservatives. Their first attempt to ruin him via '*the Pigott forgeries*' backfired and only enhanced Parnell's reputation. However, once the Conservatives learned of Parnell's relationship with **Katherine O'Shea**, they convinced her husband to sue for divorce.

- (c) Parnell was arrogant: When the divorce case came to court in November 1890, Parnell did not contest Captain O'Shea's testimony, in the mistaken belief that it would not harm him. His private life now became a public issue. Parnell refused to face facts. He should have known that Non-Conformists among the Liberals would not continue an alliance with the IPP under his leadership. Gladstone's own leadership was at risk if Parnell did not step down.

When Irish MPs voted their confidence in Parnell as leader on 25 November 1890, they expected him to resign soon afterwards. His refusal to do this forced Gladstone to publicly declare that either Parnell stepped down or the Liberal-IPP alliance would end.

Parnell wrongly believed that he was '*the indispensable man*'. He forced his MPs to choose between him and Home Rule. His intransigence caused the movement he had built to split.

- (d) Parnell was willing to jeopardise all he had achieved: The divorce crisis provided an opportunity for pent-up tensions within the IPP to finally erupt into the open. At a meeting in Committee Room 15, Parnell's opponents denounced him for putting his own personal desires before the cause of Home Rule. Parnell lost the leadership by 45 votes to 27.

Contrary to expectations, Parnell decided to fight on. He engaged in what a contemporary *New York Times* journalist called '*public suicide*'. The Catholic hierarchy denounced him as '*morally unfit*' to lead. He lost the rural vote and Irish America turned against him. Pro-Parnellite candidates were soundly defeated in three bitter by-elections.

- 4. **Concluding remarks:** Parnell died of pneumonia in October 1891. He left behind a divided party and a disillusioned people.



Admirers portrayed him as a hero betrayed, a giant brought down by lesser men. In doing so, they absolved him of profound errors of judgement.

Parnell's achievements as leader were that he forced (a) the Liberals to accept Home Rule, and (b) the Conservatives to embrace land reform.

However, in the end, Parnell proved '*strong to the verge of weakness*' (**James Joyce**). He refused to admit that there was no way to reconcile his private life with his political career. Given the prevailing social attitudes towards adultery, Parnell should have known that it would destroy his political career.

How and why did Unionists oppose self-government for Ireland? To what extent were they successful?

KEY IDEA: Unionism is a political movement founded on the belief that it is in Ireland's best interests to maintain a constitutional link with Britain. Its members are called 'unionists'.

1. A divided Ireland: Though not a religious movement, by the late 19th century, unionism was deeply embedded in the history and culture of Irish Anglicanism (the Church of Ireland) and Protestantism (Methodists and Presbyterians).

2. Unionist opposition to Home Rule in Ulster: By the 1880s, most Anglicans and Protestants outside Ulster were aware of their numerical inferiority. They reluctantly viewed their loss of political and economic influence as inevitable. However, in Ulster, Anglicans and Protestants enjoyed a majority in four counties: Antrim, Armagh, Down and Derry.

Unionism not only united Anglicans and Protestants; it crossed the class divide. It drew landowners and tenant farmers, businessmen and industrial workers under the one banner. Together, they formed a powerful, united front against Home Rule.

3. A separate Ulster unionist identity: Economic, political, and religious developments during the 19th century reinforced the idea of a distinct identity in the minds of Ulster Anglicans and Protestants. They looked eastwards rather than southwards and cherished their ancestral links with Great Britain.

4. Economic objections to Home Rule: Unlike the rest of Ireland, the area around Belfast had benefited from the Act of Union. This region had more in common with Glasgow than Dublin. Due to booming shipbuilding and linen industries,

Belfast's population had edged ahead of Dublin's by 1890. This economic success depended on trade with Britain.

Unionists denied the nationalist claim that British rule was harmful to Ireland. They pointed to the north-east's prosperity under the union. However, unionists feared that a future Dublin government might pursue protectionist policies, which would destroy unionist livelihoods. This was one reason why unionists refused to be ruled by a nationalist-dominated Dublin parliament.

5. Religious objections to Home Rule: Unionists feared that a Home Rule parliament would deprive them of their religious liberty. These fears were rooted in the deep **sectarianism** that had been an integral part of Ulster's politics since the 17th century. Violent sectarian clashes had long been a regular occurrence in Ulster. Unionists became alarmed at the increasing political strength of the Catholic population under Parnell's leadership. This resurgent Catholicism rekindled deeply rooted fears of massacres dating back to 1641 and 1688 among unionists living in Ulster.

KEY IDEA: Sectarianism is a hostile attitude towards anyone who does not share your beliefs and/or way of life.

6. Political objections to Home Rule: At its heart, unionism was about more than the union with Britain. Its central aim was to preserve what unionists had achieved in the years since the plantations.

Ulster unionists feared that Home Rule was the first step in a Catholic conspiracy to:

- Separate Ireland from Britain.
- Dispossess unionists of their homes and businesses.
- Undo the plantations and expel the unionist community.

Unionists concluded that Home Rule had to be resisted at all costs. Its success would destroy them as a people set apart and wreck the prosperous society they had built. This doomsday-scenario mindset helped the unionist leadership to unite and control a large, cross-class and inter-denominational movement.

7. The role of the Orange Order: Unionists of all social classes felt vulnerable. The Orange Order, which grew rapidly, especially in urban areas, became a rallying point. Its network of social clubs provided places where its rank-and-file could

reinforce each other's fears about Home Rule. This strengthened their resolve to resist it by any means.

8. Gaining the Conservative Party's support:

Unionists were encouraged to resist by the British Conservative party's decision to '*play the Orange card*'. The Tory MP **Randolph Churchill** addressed huge demonstrations across Ulster, telling them that '*Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right*'.

Both the First Home Rule Bill (1886) and the Second Home Rule Bill (1893) were defeated with Conservative support at Westminster. However, few unionists trusted the Conservatives, despite their assurances. They understood the pragmatic nature of politics and continually feared the Conservatives' betrayal.

9. **The Ulster Unionist Council:** When the Conservative Chief Secretary **George Wyndham** suggested a limited form of devolution in 1904, unionists denounced it as '*Home Rule by stealth*'. Though they obtained Wyndham's resignation, the episode left Ulster unionists fearful. They were now convinced that southern unionists were no longer committed to preserving the union. They formed the Ulster Unionist Council in 1905. From this point on, the main resistance to Home Rule would come from the six north-eastern counties.

10. **Resisting the Third Home Rule Bill:** Aware that it would clear the way for Home Rule, unionists held mass demonstrations even before the Parliament Act (1911) was passed.

Unionist opposition was led by two formidable politicians: **Edward Carson** (a charismatic southern barrister) and **James Craig** (a northern businessman and Boer War veteran). They enjoyed full public support from the Conservative leader, **Andrew Bonar Law**, for any action they deemed necessary to prevent Home Rule.

Faced with resolute unionist determination to resist Home Rule, the British Prime Minister, **Herbert Asquith**, was unsure how to react. Up until 1912, he seems to have viewed unionist opposition much as Gladstone had, as a mixture of bluster and bullying that would eventually die down.

The Third Home Rule Bill was passed in 1912 and set to come into law two years later. In response, a quarter of a million unionists signed the Solemn League and Covenant, pledging to resist Home Rule. This was followed by the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in early 1913, which over 90,000 joined.

Unionist loyalty was now conditional (i.e. they

would only remain loyal if the British government supported the union). They felt fully justified because they believed they were defending not only the Act of Union, but the integrity of the whole British Empire.

11. **Achieving a separate state:** In April 1914, the UVF illegally imported 25,000 guns and 5 million rounds of ammunition. At a stroke, unionists had changed the political landscape; they had brought the gun back into Irish politics.

Unionists were encouraged to persist in their threat to resist by:

- Bonar Law's public support.
- British officers at the Curragh's statement that they would rather resign than follow orders to force the unionists into accepting Home Rule.

To nationalist outrage, Asquith took no action. Further, to their dismay, he raised the possibility of **partition**.

KEY IDEA: Partition meant the permanent exclusion of the six north-east counties from the operation of a Home Rule parliament.

For Carson and Bonar Law, partition was unacceptable. Both wanted to maintain the status quo. However, Craig was a ruthless pragmatist. He would accept partition so long as it was permanent.

12. **Concluding remarks:** After the failure of the Buckingham Palace Conference in July 1914, civil war in Ireland was averted only by the outbreak of World War I. Then the northern unionists did a deal that left the southern unionists to fend for themselves.

Craig succeeded in getting a commitment from Asquith that Ulster would not be governed by a Dublin-based Home Rule parliament after the war. Under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act (1920), Craig would become the first prime minister of the six-county, unionist-dominated state of Northern Ireland.

How successful was Edward Carson as a leader of Unionism?

1. **Early career:** **Edward Carson** (1854–1935) was one of the founders of the Irish **unionist** movement. However, unlike his contemporary, **James Craig**, Carson was a Dublin-born, *southern* unionist.
2. **Growing conservatism:** Carson began his political career as a Liberal Unionist MP for the University of Dublin. However, as time passed, he became more conservative in his political outlook.



Carson sided with the landlords during the land war. He won powerful friends in Dublin Castle during the Plan of Campaign. He relentlessly prosecuted tenants who refused to pay rents and became known as '*coercion Carson*'. He was appointed Solicitor-General for Ireland in 1892 as a reward for his efforts.

Knighted in 1900, Carson served for six years as Solicitor-General of England. He declined an offer of the chief secretaryship of Ireland in 1905 but accepted an appointment to the Privy Council.

3. **Motivation:** Carson always saw himself as an Irish patriot, though not of the nationalist variety. He wanted to preserve the union between Britain and Ireland because he believed it was in the best interests of his countrymen. He believed that direct rule from Westminster was preferable to Home Rule because it was '*aloof from racial and religious distinctions*'.
4. **Non-sectarian outlook:** Carson was not sectarian in outlook. He defended Catholic rights in education and supported the establishment of the National University in 1908. He hoped that it would serve as a unifying force between Irish people of all political hues and religious traditions.
5. **Founding unionism:** Carson helped establish the Irish Unionist Parliamentary Party in 1905. However, it was not until 1910 that he assumed its chairmanship at Westminster. The certainty of a Third Home Rule Bill being put forward after the passage of the Parliament Act (1911) led Carson to invite Carson to lead the wider unionist movement in Ireland.
Carson had credibility within the British conservative establishment and, as a southerner, he could provide an all-Ireland dimension to unionist resistance to Home Rule. He became the public voice of unionism, while Craig served as its backroom organiser.
6. **Strategy for preventing Home Rule:** Carson knew that the Ulster unionists might abandon their southern brethren and choose their own self-preservation, but he hoped to use their fierce opposition as a weapon to defeat Home Rule. He believed that a sufficiently powerful resistance in Ulster would make Home Rule unattainable. He gambled that nationalists would never accept any form of Home Rule that did not include Ulster.
7. **Campaign against Home Rule:** At a gathering of 100,000 unionists at Craigavon House in 1911, Carson declared that, should Home Rule become

law, unionists should resist it and set up their own government in Ulster. The following year, Carson led almost half a million men and women in signing the Solemn League and Covenant. Then he played a lead role in setting up the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in January 1913.

Carson urged unionists not to be '*afraid of illegalities*'. He declared that violence was justified to prevent unionists being ruled by an Irish parliament based in Dublin. He openly encouraged defiance of the law, which culminated in the Larne gun-running incident of April 1914.

8. **Searching for a settlement:** In January 1914, Carson confessed his concern to Sir **Horace Plunkett** about the forces he had helped unleash. He admitted that he wanted to reach a settlement. He understood how useful the threat of UVF violence was for applying pressure on the British government, but he realised the potentially disastrous impact paramilitary violence would have on Ireland.

REMEMBER!

Contrary to his carefully crafted public image, Carson was a political pragmatist, i.e. someone interested in practical solutions.

As early as January 1913, he reluctantly accepted that preserving the entire island of Ireland within the union was a lost cause. At first, he looked for the exclusion of all nine counties of Ulster from the Third Home Rule Act (1912). However, by the time of the Buckingham Palace Conference in July 1914, Carson was ready to accept the permanent exclusion of the six north-eastern counties.

9. **Wartime service:** Carson demonstrated his loyalty to the British crown by:
 - Calling on all UVF members to enlist following the outbreak of World War I.
 - Accepting an invitation to join a UK coalition government of national unity.

Carson's inclusion in the wartime cabinet meant that he had a voice where matters were decided, whereas the IPP's leader, **John Redmond**, who had turned down just such an offer, did not. Carson used this advantage to protect unionist interests.

Heavy casualties suffered by the Ulster division won British public sympathy for the unionists, especially when contrasted with what they perceived

as the treasonous actions of Irish nationalists during Easter 1916.

- 10. A two-State solution:** Carson secured the assurance of British prime minister, **David Lloyd George**, that the six north-east counties would be excluded from the operation of the Home Rule Act.

When Carson's Conservative allies became the dominant party in the new post-war coalition, they sought his advice on the Government of Ireland Act 1920. Ireland was partitioned. The Ulster unionists got their own form of Home Rule.

- 11. Concluding remarks:** Maintaining the union had always been Carson's aim. When that target became impossible, he tried to preserve what he could of the union through the establishment of Northern Ireland. However, this settlement held little appeal for Carson. He turned down the offer to become Northern Ireland's first prime minister.

Carson resigned from the unionist leadership and spent his last years as a Lord of Appeals in the House of Lords. Northern unionists considered his leadership a success. Carson himself does not seem to have shared this opinion.

What was the impact of the women's suffrage movement in Ireland?

- 1. The status of women in Irish society:** In 19th-century Ireland, women were not permitted to vote in elections, stand for parliament or serve on juries. Once married, a woman's property was transferred to her husband.

Between 1870 and 1914:

- The number of women in paid employment halved, while that of men remained steady.
- More Irish women (1.7 million) than men emigrated. They went in search of job opportunities denied to them in Ireland.

Upper- and middle-class women in Irish society fared better than working-class women:

- The Intermediate Education Act (1879) offered middle-class women the benefits of a formal education. However, most still accepted the social norm of marriage and family over building a career.
- The Royal University Act (1879) offered women a route into the professions, though progress in this area was slow. By 1900, there were 3,000 male students attending Irish universities and just 91 female students.

- 2. The growth of feminism:** In the late 19th century, a

small but growing number of Irish women began to question traditional male dominance and embrace feminism.

KEY IDEA: Feminism is a belief in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes.

Most of the pioneers of Irish feminism came from the middle class. They faced considerable opposition from the Catholic hierarchy who objected to women playing a leading role in Irish public life.

Anna Parnell (1852–1911) co-founded the Ladies' Land League in 1882. She was Ireland's first female social agitator. She worked closely with **Michael Davitt** during the height of the land war, resisting evictions and providing financial aid to the dispossessed.

However, she was publicly denounced by the Catholic archbishops of Dublin and Tuam for what they branded as her '*extremism*'. Her brother **Charles Stewart Parnell** shut down the Ladies' Land League, apparently agreeing with the Catholic bishops that a woman's '*proper place*' was in the home.

Among the more successful Irish feminists of the late 19th century were **Anne Jellico**, **Isabella Tod** and **Anna Haslam**. They forced British governments to:

- Overturn the Contagious Diseases Acts.
- Grant married women control over their own property and earnings.
- Offer women equal access to second and third level education.

REMEMBER!

In an attempt to combat the prevalence of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) among the military, the British government decided that any woman suspected of prostitution could be arrested and forced to undergo medical examination for STIs. Many middle-class women were appalled by this for three reasons:

- it was a blatant infringement of these women's civil liberties;
- the women's male clients did not have to undergo the same tests; and
- it brought into sharp focus the negative effect of social constraints on the lives of women.



3. **Women's suffrage:** The most difficult target for feminists to achieve was **women's suffrage**.

KEY IDEA: Women's suffrage means all adult females having the right to (a) vote in both national and local elections, and (b) stand for election to both the national parliament and local councils.

Anna Haslam founded The Irish Women's Suffrage Federation in 1876. It established branches in Belfast, Dublin and throughout the country. Its members were encouraged to persist when New Zealand became the first country in the world to give women the vote in 1893.

4. **Progress:** The first sign of progress on suffrage in Ireland came in 1896, when over 100,000 Irish women were enfranchised and made eligible to stand for election as Poor Law guardians. Eighty-five women were elected to fill these posts. This encouraged feminists to pursue further reforms. The Local Government Act (1898) gave women the right to vote in local elections. Various women's organisations merged to form the Irish Women's Franchise League in 1908. Its leading figures were **Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington** and her husband **Francis**. This organisation held public meetings, organised demonstrations and lobbied MPs. It was opposed by the Home Rule leader, **John Redmond**. He did not want women having a vote in elections to choose a future Home Rule parliament. Despite Redmond's opposition, **Mary Hayden** became the first woman elected to the senate of the National University in 1909. She would later play a key role in setting up the Irish Catholic Women's Suffrage Association in 1915.
5. **Increasing pressure:** Though the Women's Suffrage Bill was defeated in the House of Commons in 1912, feminists did not relent in their campaign to win the vote for women in parliamentary elections. Thirty-five Irish feminists were imprisoned between 1912 and 1914. Several went on hunger strike to highlight their cause.
6. **Improved opportunities:** By the early 20th century, women had begun to enter the public arena to an unprecedented extent. New organisations sprang up, including: the Women Graduates' Association (1902), the Irish Country Women's Association (1910) and Cumann na mBan (1914). Further, new opportunities were opening up for women in the workforce. For instance:
- The Post Office offered women positions as telegraph operators and counter staff.

- The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction began employing female typists from 1901.
- Guinness's Brewery opened up clerkships to women in 1906.

7. **The expansion of the movement:** Until the early 20th century, the feminist movement had been mostly confined to the middle class. However, it soon began to broaden as more working-class women became involved in trade unions. Socialists (such as **James Connolly**) demanded that women enjoy the same rights as men. Feminist activist **Louie Bennett** became secretary of the Irish Women Workers' Union, while **Delia Larkin** became its first general secretary.
8. **The achievement of suffrage:** Gratitude for the vital role played by so many women in securing Britain's victory in World War I, together with the strength of pressure exerted by reform groups, finally convinced the Westminster parliament that the time had arrived to grant women's suffrage. The Representation of the People Act (1918) gave the vote to women over the age of thirty. Under the Irish Free State Constitution (1922), the right to vote was given to all Irish citizens over the age of twenty-one.

Constance Markievicz became the first Irish woman elected to parliament. However, as an abstentionist, she did not take her seat at Westminster. Instead, she sat in the first Dáil and was appointed Minister for Labour (1919–1921).

What was the contribution of Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington to the campaign for women's suffrage in Ireland?

1. **Background:** **Hanna Sheehy** (1877–1946) was the leading Irish feminist of the first half of the 20th century. While at university, she had to attend the all-female St. Mary's University College, Merrion Square, Dublin. Although women could sit examinations and graduate, they were not yet permitted to attend lectures alongside male students. Before graduating in 1899, Sheehy was asked to sign a petition demanding women's suffrage. She dedicated herself to achieving equal status for men and women in Ireland.
2. **Partnership:** After a period studying abroad, Sheehy returned to Ireland and graduated with an MA in modern languages in 1902. She taught at the

Rathmines School of Commerce before marrying **Francis Skeffington**, a prominent journalist and committed socialist who shared her progressive ideas. Francis resigned from his post as a registrar of the National University of Ireland in protest at its treatment of women.

To signify the equality of their relationship, Hanna and Francis took each other's surnames, becoming the **Sheehy-Skeffingtons**. Although both were passionately committed to the feminist cause, neither sought political office. Instead, they organised public protests, tried to educate the public and relentlessly lobbied politicians to introduce **women's suffrage** (see **key idea** on page 37).

3. **The suffrage movement:** In 1908 Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington co-founded, with **Gretta Cousins**, the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL).

REMEMBER!

The Irish Women's Franchise League was a militant feminist organisation that campaigned to have women's suffrage included in the next Home Rule bill.

Francis Sheehy-Skeffington edited its newspaper, *The Irish Citizen*, which promoted the rights and responsibilities of citizenship for both sexes. Hanna wrote many articles on the moral justification for women's suffrage.

When it was revealed that women were being excluded from the franchise under the Third Home Rule Bill (1912), feminists were appalled. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington believed that feminists had to publicly and noisily protest if they were to get the political class to grant women's suffrage.

On 13 June 1912, she and five other members of the IWFL decided to express their anger at the IPP's refusal to grant women's suffrage. They broke windows in the GPO, the Custom House and Dublin Castle. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was arrested and given two months imprisonment under the terms of the controversial '*Cat and Mouse Act*'. She was also dismissed from her teaching post.

4. **Involvement in the Dublin Lock-out:** Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was an ally of **James Connolly**. She was a founding member of the Irish Womens Workers' Union in 1911. During the Dublin Lock-out of 1913, she worked in the soup kitchen in Liberty Hall. She was also imprisoned briefly on a charge of assaulting a policeman while trying to give a leaflet to the British Conservative Party leader, **Andrew Bonar Law**.

5. **Involvement in the Easter Rising:** The Sheehy-Skeffingtons were also ardent nationalists. They campaigned against the introduction of conscription to Ireland after the outbreak of the World War I. Francis was imprisoned briefly in 1915 for making statements intended to discourage men from enlisting.

During the Easter Rising (1916), Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington took part as a non-combatant. She acted as a messenger between the GPO and other rebel outposts.

Why did a feminist-pacifist like her take part in an armed rebellion? Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was drawn to the republican movement because, unlike the IPP, it supported women's suffrage. She wanted women to play an active role within the republican movement to prevent them being marginalised and their civil rights being ignored in a future independent Ireland.

6. **Her husband's murder:** Hanna's husband, Francis, was opposed to any attempt to overthrow British rule by force. He did not join the rebels in Easter week. However, he was arrested by crown forces while he was trying to prevent looting. He was held in Portobello Barracks and executed without trial by Captain **John Bowen-Colthurst**.

After the rising, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington campaigned for an official inquiry. She published a pamphlet entitled *British Militarism As I Have Known It*. It was banned in Ireland until after World War I. She rejected the British government's offer of £10,000 in compensation. With the help of a British officer, Major Sir **Francis Vane**, she forced the military authorities to bring Bowen-Colthurst before a court-martial on a charge of murder. He was found guilty but insane. However, after a short period at a psychiatric facility, Bowen-Colthurst was released and allowed to emigrate to Canada.

7. **Involvement in the independence struggle:** In 1917 Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was appointed to Sinn Féin's national executive. At the request of **Michael Collins**, she embarked on a fundraising tour across America. She succeeded where **Éamon de Valera** did not, meeting US President **Woodrow Wilson** and setting out to him Ireland's claim for self-determination. Upon her return to Ireland, she was arrested and imprisoned but won her freedom after going on hunger strike.

In 1918 she saw a key aspect of her life's work come to fruition:

- Women over the age of 30 living in the United



Kingdom were given the vote.

- Women were permitted to seek election and sit in the House of Commons.
- In 1922, the Free State government extended the vote to all female Irish citizens over the age of 21.

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was elected a Sinn Féin councillor on Dublin Corporation in 1920. She also acted as a judge in the republican courts and served on the executive of the White Cross Fund, caring for the families of IRA volunteers on the run.

8. Disappointment with post-independence Ireland:

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington rejected the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921). She was appointed to the first national executive of Fianna Fáil in 1926 but resigned the following year after its TDs agreed to take the oath of allegiance to enter the Dáil. She remained active in politics, protesting for the release of republican prisoners and against partition.

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington grew more and more disenchanted with the Irish Free State. She believed

that conservative elements within all parties wanted to erode the rights women had fought so hard for.

She severed her links with Fianna Fáil over the Conditions of Employment Act (1935). Its terms were hostile to women in the workplace. She rejected the 1937 Constitution because it failed to recognise full gender equity.

When none of the political parties showed any interest in women's rights, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington founded the Women's Social and Progressive League. She stood as an independent candidate in the 1943 election, demanding equality and greater opportunities for women. She failed to win a seat. She died three years later.

9. **Concluding remarks:** Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington worked simultaneously for two causes: women's rights and national independence. She was an enlightened woman of independent character and deep convictions who refused to compromise on matters of principle. She is remembered as one of the great pioneers of women's rights in Ireland.

Go to mentorbooks.ie/resources to read an additional essay on Isabella Tod, one of the leading feminist reformers in 19th-century Ireland.

Perspective: Society and Economy

What was Michael Davitt's contribution to social and political reform?

1. **Introduction: Michael Davitt** (1846–1906) was a radical nationalist and one of the most respected public figures of his day. Though best known as a leading champion of land reform, he was also a campaigning journalist, a radical MP, a supporter of women's rights, an advocate of universal, secular education, a defender of minority rights, a promoter of penal reform, a critic of imperialism, and an Irish-language revivalist.
2. **The origins of his radicalism:** Davitt was born in Straide, Co. Mayo. His family was forcibly evicted in the aftermath of the Great Famine. Memories of that traumatic event ignited his life-long commitment to the struggle for social justice. The family moved to Haslingden in East Yorkshire. There, at age 11, Davitt lost his right arm in an accident while working in a cotton mill. Due to his injury, Davitt was enrolled in a Methodist school and later took classes at the Mechanics' Institute. Davitt's experiences of poverty and injustice radicalised him. He joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and became one of its leading

figures. He was imprisoned for his part in a gun-running plot. While in jail he studied socialism. He concluded that Irish independence would be meaningless without radical economic and social change.

3. **The crisis in rural Ireland:** Upon his early release in 1878, Davitt went to Co. Mayo at the invitation of **James Daly**, editor of *The Connaught Telegraph*. The county was on the verge of another famine and the scale of the poverty he witnessed shocked him. Davitt sensed a change in people's attitudes. Irish peasants no longer seemed to believe that their suffering was unavoidable. Most had come to identify landlordism as the root cause of their suffering. Davitt wanted to harness their anger to achieve social change.
4. **Davitt's vision:** For Davitt, the land question and the national question were inextricably linked. The main function of the landlord class was to suppress the native Irish on behalf of Britain. All landlords would have to go to clear the way for Irish self-government.
5. **The New Departure:** While on a lecture tour of the USA, Davitt met **John Devoy**, leader of Clan