

What were Parnell's strengths and weaknesses as a political leader?

"The uncrowned King of Ireland" is a suitable title for Parnell as a leader. He was 'king' of many political talents. A tactician, a manipulator, an idol, Parnell attracted attention through the use of parliamentary obstructionism in the British Parliament. As an MP for Meath, his charisma, intelligence and ambition made him a highly regarded politician. At the death of Isaac Butt in 1879, Parnell was the obvious candidate to lead the Home Rule Party. At its helm, Parnell made crucial decisions which led to great success. Yet, it was his personal weaknesses that led to the ultimate downfall of the 'Chief'.

As a political leader, Parnell strived for Home Rule for Ireland, yet the early years of his political career were focused on the increasing demand for a solution to the Land Question. He showed skill in organisation when he together with Davitt, moved to implement the New Departure, which required the co-operation of the Physical Force Nationalists and the Constitutional Nationalists. In 1879 Parnell established the Irish National Land League and again his excellent rhetorical and organisational skills brought the Land Question to the forefront of Irish politics. His charismatic speech-making proved vital in securing the support of the diverse strands of Irish nationalism and in securing his position as a nationalist icon. "Keep a firm grip on your homesteads and lands. You must allow yourselves to be dispossessed as you were dispossessed in 1847". These words stimulated resilience and pride among the tenant farmers and were printed in newspapers which furthered his appeal and increased his support base in an increasingly literate Ireland, England and America. He also embarked on a successful fundraising tour of America in 1880 during which he collected £70,000 for famine relief and for the Land League. Parnell expertly utilised the Land League as a medium for increasing his popularity, and by 1880 he was widely recognised as the leader of Irish nationalism.

One of Parnell's most significant strengths as a political leader was his talent for strategy and tactics. These were of enormous benefit during the Land War. He did not want to alienate his moderate supporters but he also wanted to maintain the support of the significant Fenian presence in Ireland. One of his most successful strategies was his proposal of Boycotting as an alternative to agrarian violence. This tactical expertise was further in evidence in his response to Gladstone's Second Land Act in 1880. It represented the 'Conciliation' in the Liberal Government's response to the Land War, 'Coercion and Conciliation', and introduced a form of dual ownership. While the Act was broadly welcomed by Parnell's moderate supporters, there were many critics of the Act among the Land League and the Fenians in Ireland particularly because it excluded tenants who had no written agreements with their landlords and it did not extend to tenants in arrears. It did not concede the Land League's basic demand: the abolition of Landlordism. Parnell's skill as a strategist was in evidence when he found a solution to satisfy both sides. He instructed the Home Rule Party to abstain on voting for the Bill and called Convention of the Land League in Dublin which decided to

wait and test individual cases in the Land Court. Parnell appealed to his more extreme supporters by orchestrating his arrest. After his arrest he displayed great leadership skills when he issued the No Rent Manifesto, and forcing Gladstone to consider a compromise to prevent an escalation of agrarian violence: Captain Moonlight. Parnell's tactical skill culminated in the Kilmainham Treaty in 1882 which extended the benefits of the Land Act to include tenants in arrears and leaseholders. This effectively brought the land War to an end. It was a turning point in the Land Question and in Parnell's career; he could now focus on his main political ambition: Home Rule.

After the murder of the new Irish Viceroy, Lord Cavendish by the Invincibles in an incident that became known as the Phoenix Park murders, Parnell was able to cut ties with the Fenians and commit himself entirely to legitimate constitutional politics. Perhaps Parnell's greatest strength was his effective organisational skills which he employed to consolidate the Home Rule Party. Under the leadership of Isaac Butt the party was in disarray, lacked leadership, discipline and focus. Under Parnell the Irish National League was formed to take the place of the Land League, and was controlled from the centre by Parnell and proved an important vehicle for consolidating support and fundraising. Parnell also gained the support of the powerful Catholic Church. His leadership and control of the party was strengthened when he imposed strict rules regarding discipline. Each candidate for election had to take the Party Pledge. He renamed the Party, the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) and the new title encapsulated the political drive and authority he wanted to achieve. In the years before the 1885 general election Parnell was instrumental in the passing of several reform acts to benefit the Irish people including the "Labourers' Dwelling Act" and the Tramways Act. The Third Reform Act in 1884 was also significant in that it broadened the franchise to include more Irish voters who would vote for the IPP. This, together with the consolidation of his party and the concentrated electioneering campaign in Ireland in 1885, gave Parnell a significant advantage in the general election of that year. He would hold the balance of power Parliament.

Parnell strengths as a political leader were highlighted during the elections of 1885 and 1886. He excelled in the manipulative game of chess by pitting the Liberals and Conservatives against one another in an attempt to gain IPP support. He influenced the Tories in introducing the Ashbourne Land Act, dropping coercion and appointing a new Viceroy to Ireland, Lord Carnarvon, who was believed to be sympathetic to Home Rule.

Parnell was savvy and understood that Conservative support would mean that Rule would have a better chance of proceeding though the House of Lords. Because he thought that the Liberals would win more seats than the Conservatives, he set out to redress the balance and in his "Manifesto to the Irish Electors in Great Britain" he advised the Irish people living in Britain to vote for the Conservatives. Parnell's constant display of charisma and leadership resulted in the Home Rule Party winning 85 seats. The Conservatives 249 seats and the Liberals 335 seats meant that The IPP would be of little benefit to the Conservatives. The

liberals, on the other hand, could form a stable government by allying with the IPP. But after the Liberal's coercive policies in Ireland, Parnell made it known that support would come at a high price: nothing short of Home Rule. When Parnell entered into the Liberal Alliance, Gladstone proposed the First Home Rule Bill in 1886. Home Rule was for the first time a feasible reality. This is perhaps Parnell's greatest achievement.

After the rejection of the First Home Rule Bill and the success of the Conservatives in the 1886 general election, Parnell was not disheartened. His optimism was based on the hopeful prospect that Gladstone, whom he had now converted to Home Rule, would be re-elected. Due to Parnell's excellent leadership qualities, determination and strategic excellence, the Home Rule Party was in its strongest position yet.

Despite his long list of strengths, Parnell also had weaknesses as a political leader, namely his pride. In November 1890 he was found to be the guilty party in the divorce case of Katherine and Captain William O'Shea. Enemies of Parnell launched a smear campaign and portrayed him as a marriage-wrecker. His once powerful allies, Gladstone and the Catholic Church called for Parnell's resignation. The meeting of the IPP in Committee Room 15 in December 1890 resulted in a walkout of 54 Anti-Parnellites including Michael Davitt and William O'Brien. He was left with only 31 Parnellite followers. His refusal to put his leadership to the vote and his inability to put the needs of his party above his personal pride was perhaps his greatest weakness.

During 1891 Parnell fought many by-elections against Anti-Parnellites. The stress and pressure of the divisions within a once strong, unified, disciplined party proved too much for Parnell. On October 6th 1891, Parnell died of exhaustion and illness. It was just four months after his marriage to Kitty O'Shea and he was only 45 years of age.

Parnell's strengths as a leader cemented the Irish Home Rule question in British politics. The tragic demise of a much admired leader, who left behind a deeply divided party, disillusioned many young Irish people who lost faith in the parliamentary process. He did however provide a focus for the various disparate strands of Irish nationalism many of whom continued to strive for what John Daly once identified as "The Land of Ireland for the people of Ireland."

You are the corrector: Read the essay written by Claire Joyce and correct it according to the Marking Scheme below: When you arrive at a mark write **a detailed examiners comment** explaining exactly why you awarded this mark.

Essay = 100 marks

(CM) = 60 marks for Historical Content (accurate and relevant to the question asked)

(OE) = 40 marks for Overall Evaluation (the quality of the answer in the context of the set

Step 1: Divide the answer into paragraphs or paragraph equivalents

- A relevant introduction - background and/or defining the question and explaining the approach;
- An episode, phase or stage in a sequence of events;
- An aspect of a topic/issue, with supporting factual references;
- A point in an argument or discussion, with supporting factual references;
- An explanation of a concept or term, with supporting factual references;
- A good concluding paragraph or summation, which is not mere repetition

Step 2: Award marks to each paragraph or paragraph equivalent as follows

MARKS	IMPRESSION	EXPLANATION
11 - 12 marks	Excellent	Outstanding piece of analysis, exposition or commentary. Clearly expressed, accurate and substantial information.
8 - 10 marks	Very good	Very good material, accurately and clearly expressed.
6-7 marks	Good:	Worthwhile information, reasonably well expressed.
3-5 marks	Fair	Limited information/barely stated.
0 - 2 marks	Poor	Trivial/irrelevant/grave errors.

Step 3: Award an Overall Evaluation (OE) (Maximum = 40 marks) based on:

MARKS	IMPRESSION	EXPLANATION
34-40 marks	Excellent:	Excellent in its treatment of the set question, particularly if it shows detailed learning, wide reading, analysis or extensive coverage.
28-33 marks	Very good	Very good - but not excellent - in its treatment of the set question, ie: accurate and substantial.
22-27 marks	Good:	Good standard treatment of the set question, without being exceptional in the information or the commentary supplied.
16-21 marks	Fair:	Fair attempt at the set question, but has identifiable defects, eg: incomplete coverage, irrelevant data, factual inaccuracies.
10-15 marks	Weak:	Poor, in that it fails to answer the question as set, but has some merit.
0-9 marks	Very weak:	Very poor answer which, at best, offers only scraps of information.

Step 4: Add up the Marks and arrive at a mark out of 100: