Background

- Protestant landlord, estate in Wicklow
- Hated England and English
- American mother
- MP for Meath

Beginning – Parnell and obstructionists

- Joined obstructionists (some of the Home Rule MPs) and quickly became their leader
- Isaac Butt (leader of HR party) disagreed with obstructionism because he thought it would turn British MPs against the Irish cause
- However, obstructionism was very popular at home in Ireland and Parnell realised the importance of being popular at home

Courting Support

Fenians:

- They supported the obstructionists; this is part of the reason Parnell joined them
- Parnell defended Manchester Martyrs (3 men executed for killing a policeman during a Fenian escape)
- He worked to free imprisoned Fenians – very importantly, Michael Davitt (sentenced to 15 years for gun-running)
- Parnell wanted the support of the Fenians to take advantage of their widespread branches and funds from America
- Danger getting too close to them, he could scare off other groups
- He never committed to them

Catholic Church:

- Suspicious of Parnell – Protestant and they didn’t like Fenians or obstructionists
• To win over support, Parnell supported their demand for state aid for Catholic schools and for the Catholic University

End of Butt

• Butt died; party split between Parnellites and people who preferred Butt
• William Shaw elected
• Parnell realised that he needed more support

Parnell and New Departure

• Michael Davitt wanted Fenians to cooperate with more extreme Home Rulers
• IRB rejected idea, but gave permission to individual Fenians to take part in constitutional politics
• Davitt and Devoy (American) were interested in Parnell
• Talked to him about their proposals, he committed to nothing
• Devoy thought he would support them, went to America and collected money for Parnellite Home Rulers

Crisis in West

What happened:

• Michael Davitt went to visit relatives in Mayo, found economic crisis
• Long depression, worldwide
• Caused cut in demand for Irish products, falling prices
• Tenants found it difficult to pay the high rents
• Big farmers and small farmers were suffering – bad harvest
• Tenants faced eviction
• Worst in Mayo – no work for them, harvests failed, facing starvation and eviction

Land Movement began:

• Fenians encouraged tenants to resist eviction
• Westport meeting – Davitt believed if Fenians helped small farmers, small farmers would support Fenians
Invited Parnell to be speaker
Parnell told audience to demand fair rent, gave a passionate speech

Land League set up:

- By Michael Davitt
- Parnell president, but it was really under Fenian control
- Aims:
  - Reduce rents and evictions
  - Abolish landlord system
  - Using peaceful agitation and parliamentary pressure at Westminster

**Situation**

- Parnell collected money for expected famine in America – no famine, now had £2 million to use for Land League and HR Party
- Conservatives defeated and now Gladstone was PM again, but this time didn’t want to focus on Irish affairs
- Parnellite HRs won, Parnell now leader of HR Party
- However, party was divided

**Parnell and Land League**

- Parnell had to strike a balance between:
  - Home Rule MPs – not sure of Land League
  - Tenant farmers – just wanted land reform
  - Fenians – wanted complete revolution and split from Britain
- Farmers economic problems continued
- Land League spread all over the country – popular due to depression
- Agrarian violence – intimidate landlords, threatening letters, violence, burned barns, killed animals and people
- This was bad publicity, and the British could possibly retaliate harshly
- To deal with this:
  - Mass meetings
Parnell told them to use moral force

“...by isolating him from his kind as if he were a leper of old...”

Captain Boycott – had to get English in to work his land, protected by soldiers.

Cost more than harvest, he eventually left for England

- Boycotting became a favourite strategy, and it gained a lot of publicity
- Reporters appalled at conditions in Ireland – pressured Gladstone into acting

**Second Land Bill and Protection of People and Property Bill (coercion)**

- Gladstone, due to international pressure, proposed two bulls together:
  - Coercion bill – anyone suspected of organised boycotting could be arrested without trial
  - Generous land bill giving tenants full tenant rights
- Parnell and 20 of his MPs began to obstruct – 41 hours later debate stopped and obstruction banned
- Michael Davitt’s parole cancelled
- Dillon, Parnell and 34 HR MPs protested and were ejected
- Parnell as a constitutional politician:
  - Refused to go back to Ireland – instead stayed to vote on Land Bill
  - Although he possibly believed he just wouldn’t have had enough support to do this
- Leading members of League began to be arrested under coercion bill – actually increased agrarian violence

**Second Land Bill**

Terms:

- Land Court set up where landlords and tenants could go to get fair (judicial) rent fixed
- Judicial rent set for 15 years, while it was paid a tenant could not be evicted
- After that time, tenant could return to get it adjusted
- Contained land purchase clause

Failures:
- Tenants with leases and in arrears could not go – this was a large number
- 15 years too long

Results:

- Split Parnell’s followers
- Parnell dealt with that by avoiding showing his side – got suspended for a noisy protest and could not vote on it.

**Parnell in Kilmainham**

- Arrested for speeches attacking Gladstone
- Signed No Rent Manifesto
- Gladstone declared Land League illegal
  - Already had been falling apart
  - Now Gladstone rather than Parnell was blamed
- Ladies’ Land League still present and keeping Land League ideals alive, but chaos prevailed

**Kilmainham Treaty**

Causes:

- Government could not control agrarian violence, needed Parnell’s help
- Parnell wanted to get out – prison was bad for his health, and he wanted to see Katharine O’Shea and his child
- Negotiations were indirect, neither side wanted to be seen talking to the other

Treaty:

- Not actually signed
- Gladstone would:
  - Amend Land Act to allow those in arrears into the Land Court
  - Help tenants in arrears to pay rents
  - Drop coercion and release suspects
- Parnell would:
Phoenix Park murders

- Lord Frederick Cavendish (newly-appointed, pro-Ireland Chief Secretary for Ireland) and T.H. Burke (Under-Secretary) brutally killed with butchers’ knives
- By the Invincibles, splinter group of Fenians
- This caused a drop in support for the Fenians
  - Solved Parnell’s problem with split in followers over Kilmainham Treaty
- Parnell and HR Party left as undisputed leaders of nationalist community in Ireland
- Gladstone introduced new, harsher coercion act in response
  - United HRers against him

Parnell after Kilmainham Treaty

- Style of leadership changed – almost no contact with Fenians, paid little attention to farmers, spent more time in England than Ireland and he became remote from his followers
- Why?
  - No one threatened his leadership, so he was safe
  - He had less energy because of his time in jail
  - He wanted to be with Katharine O’Shea
  - He needed to be in the House of Commons, because all the important decisions were made there
- No one minded that he had changed, everyone saw him as the ‘uncrowned king of Ireland’

National League

- Let the Ladies’ Land League die out
- Instead of reviving the Land League, he replaced it with the National League
- Aims:
  - Home Rule

Try to quieten country
Support Liberals


- Land purchase
- Reform of local government to make it more democratic
- Wider franchise

- Home Rule now more important than land reform
- Very different from Land League
  - Not controlled by Fenians
  - Political party (worked for Home Rule Party)

- Branches all over country
- Encouraged priests to join and chair meetings to get Catholic support
  - Scared Protestants

- What they did:
  - Collected money
  - Organised elections
  - Chose candidates and imposed party pledge (to go along with whatever Parnell said, or leave the party)

1884 Reform Act

- Franchise widened to every man in UK who owned or rented a house, or even a room
- Gave vote to extra 500,000 men
  - Mainly poorer men who would support and vote for Parnell

Negotiating with the British

- Independent opposition – remaining independent, but saying they’ll vote for whichever party supported Home Rule
- Only worked if Conservatives and Liberals were equal – Liberals currently had large majority
- Liberals (currently allied through Kilmainham Treaty)
  - Relations got worse between HRP and Liberals
  - Liberals had not dropped coercion as promised
  - Liberals divided over coercion
- Parnell turned down Joseph Chamberlain’s plan for a Central Board
• Conservatives
  o Had some similar aims to HRP – education, land
  o Began to be friendly to Parnell – especially Lord Randolph Churchill
• Liberals (due to quarrels over coercion and Gladstone’s retirement) were divided and fell – Gladstone resigned
• Due to the current redrawing of boundary lines, an election could not take place. Salisbury took power (Conservative)
• He began to court Parnell
  o Did not renew coercion
  o Appointed Lord Carnarvon – pro-Home Rule
  o Land Purchase Act – lent £5 million to Irish farmers
• Unionists began to worry and organise and take action
  o Both northern and southern unionists
  o Unionists united against the threat – both Anglicans and Presbyterians
  o Orange Order revived
    ▪ Demonstrations, no violence

Parnell chooses Conservatives

• Lord Salisbury had refused to meet with him, but the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Carnarvon, and Lord Randolph Churchill met with Parnell and seemed to support Home Rule
• Gladstone refused to say anything about his stance on Home Rule
• Also, Conservatives controlled House of Lords

1885 election – Results (Case study, part 1)

In Ireland:

• South:
  o Unionist candidates got no seats, despite their campaigning
  o National League won all 68 seats
  o Only graduates of Trinity, entitled to elect 2 MPs, elected Unionists
• Ulster:
Unionists divided between Liberals and Conservatives, so their voting power was diminished

17 seats for National League, 16 for Conservatives, 0 for Liberals

In Britain:

- Irish affairs did not really affect the election
- Liberals got 86 more seats than Conservatives, exactly the number of HR MPs
- This put Parnell in a bad bargaining position – he could not help the Conservatives
- However, Gladstone needed Irish votes to become Prime Minister again

First Home Rule Bill (Case Study, part 2)

- Gladstone’s son ‘let slip’ that Gladstone intended to bring in Home Rule Bill.
- Unionists shocked – organisations grew rapidly, and the Unionist Party was founded
- Salisbury rejected HR and said he would bring back coercion – alliance broke down
- HR MPs voted with Liberals, Gladstone became PM
- Conservatives become unionist
  - Wanted to stop HR bill, realised that Ulster unionists were the key
  - ‘playing the Orange card’
  - Conservatives united over this, changed the party’s name to ‘Conservative and Unionist Party’
- Gladstone’s plans:
  - Presented HR bill
    - Ireland gets its own parliament, which would elect Irish government
    - Westminster only controls the Crown, defence, war and peace, trade and navigation, coinage, post office, colonial relations
    - No Irish MPs in Westminster
    - Ireland would pay 1/15 of cost of running the empire
  - Land Purchase Bill – British lend to Irish tenant farmers to buy their farms
    - To protect Irish landlords from HR parliament controlled by tenant farmers
    - So Irish farmers would get along with the landlords
  - Misunderstanding of unionists
- Thought land purchase would deal with unionists
  - Completely wrong

- HR splits Liberals
  - Arguments for:
    - Separate nation, majority voted for HR
    - Only alternative was coercion, which had failed before
    - Irish wouldn’t put up with anything less
    - The bill would protect minorities
    - Reconciliation between Ireland and Britain
    - Irish were distracting from important British issues
  - Arguments against:
    - Ireland part of Britain, so British people had to agree too
    - Irish didn’t really want it, they were persuaded
    - Eventually, Ireland would then want independence
    - Protestant minority would suffer
    - Irish not able for self-government
  - Liberals were split
    - Majority wanted HR, but many reluctantly to be loyal to Gladstone
    - Minority, Liberals unionists, opposed it
    - Conservatives and unionists were united

- HR bill defeated – Gladstone calls a general election to try to increase his power

**The 1886 Election (Case study, part 3)**

- Situation in Ireland wasn’t going to change, British opinion was what mattered
- Both sides went around Britain campaigning
  - Isabella Tod made an impact on the unionist side
- Majority of British rejected HR
  - Conservatives won, Gladstone resigned and Salisbury became PM
  - Liberal Party was destroyed for many years
- Consequences of 1885-1886:
Partition was suggested for the first time, although rejected
Liberals much weaker, no longer strongly supported HR
Independent opposition now impossible – HRP reliant on Liberals
Irish Unionist Party now was the voice of Irish Protestants
Conservatives dominant party for 20 years

Parnell’s Final Years

- Parnell spent most of his time in England with Liberals to try to regain support from HR and convince British that HR posed no threat
- Land agitation by Parnell’s lieutenants:
  - Parnell disapproved, stopped them after a few months for fear of annoying British Liberals
  - It attracted British journalists, who publicised terrible conditions of tenants
  - Sympathy was won among British Liberals, they also became embarrassed
- Pigott forgeries
  - Pigott claimed to have letters showing that Parnell supported the Phoenix Park murders
  - The Times published them
  - Conservatives set up a commission to look into the links between Parnell and the Fenians
  - In it, Parnell’s lawyer eventually cross-examined Pigott, proving that the letters were forgeries
  - Parnell had won, and the whole Liberal Party celebrated for him
  - Gladstone and Parnell began to discuss a second HR bill
- O’Shea divorce case
  - William O’Shea had turned a blind eye to his wife and Parnell because of money from Katharine’s aunt – aunt died, William filed for divorce
  - At first, nationalists supported Parnell and believed it was a plot against him
  - Then in court, Parnell didn’t deny William (he wanted them to divorce, so he and Katharine could marry) – William painted Parnell as heartless and immoral
• Public reaction:
  - Ireland – very few questioned Parnell’s position. Davitt most extreme, called for Parnell to step aside until it died down
  - Britain – Gladstone was urged to cut off ties with him. Liberals would lose votes if they stuck with Parnell

• The fall of Parnell
  - Re-election:
    - Parnell only candidate for leader of HRP
    - Gladstone told McCarthy, vice-chair, that Liberals wouldn’t support HRP with Parnell as leader
    - McCarthy told Parnell, no one else was told
    - Parnell was re-elected, although many hoped he would resign in gratitude for loyalty – he didn’t
  - Gladstone’s threat held – now should the Irish MPs abandon their leader, or ruin alliance and chance of HR?
  - Meeting called of HRP, in which Parnell created a diversion
    - Introduced a manifesto saying terms of HR bill were too limited
    - This gained some support with extreme nationalists, but destroyed the alliance with the Liberals
  - Party splits in Committee Room 15
    - Parnell chaired meeting – changed discussion to his manifesto every time leadership issue was brought up. Continued this for 6 days
    - On 6th day, 45 MPs, led by McCarthy, walked out. 27 MPs left with Parnell.
    - Parnell said he had won, since the others were traitors
  - Who supported which side?
    - Anti-Parnellites supported by Catholic Church
    - Parnellites supported by Fenians and other extreme nationalists
  - By-election in Kilkenny tested Irish opinion – anti-Parnellites won two to one
  - Parnell worked tirelessly, making speeches all over Britain and Ireland – still kept losing by-elections
- Parnell’s health deteriorated, he died from a cold he got while making a speech

- Legend of Parnell
  - At the end, he supported Fenians and so he became a republican hero
  - Hero to romantics – e.g. Yeats and Joyce
  - It’s not clear if Parnell actually was a republican
    - He was always ambiguous when made to give his opinion
    - He changed his views to please different audiences and to get as much support as possible
    - We don’t know his true views