

Land Reform and Agitation | Sample answer

‘What was the importance of one or more of the following: land agitation and land reform; the co-operative movement; industrial development in Belfast?’ (2018)

From 1873 to 1896 there was a Great Depression in Britain. There was a fall in the prices of agricultural exports and thus less need for Irish labourers in Britain. Farmers feared mass evictions and conflict between tenants and farmers. So in July 1878, Michael Davitt set sail to America and sought support for the 'New Departure'. Fenians believed that their new goal should be to focus on land reform over Irish Independence and so they asked them and Parnell for support. Davitt and Devoy, who was the leader of the American Fenian Movement, believed that all groups should work together to achieve their goal and so, constitutional nationalists, Fenians and Irish Americans had to work together.

In April 1879, James Daly set up a meeting in Mayo which protested against the increases in rent. Parnell identified with the protests and in June of that year he gave a speech about them. In October Davitt set up the Land League and Parnell became the leader. They had three main aims, a reduction in rent and evictions, secondly, to achieve the three Fs (fixity of tenure, freedom to sell and fair rent) and thirdly, for peasant proprietorship. Parnell's slogan the "land of Ireland for people of Ireland" became widely known.

The Land League supported peaceful means to achieve their three aims but they couldn't control the extreme violent actions of some tenants. In 1879 farmers whom were not willing to be evicted in vast amounts led to agrarian violence. Land related crimes rose from 236 in 1877 to 4439 in 1881. Rising evictions meant that tenants were unable to pay rent.

Then there was the General election of 1880, Gladstone became the prime minister for the second time. He believed the Land League was encouraging not to pay rent and so introduced strict Coercion Laws in the spring of 1881. Gladstone then introduced the Second Land Bill which included the 3 Fs, and that tenants would get 3/4 of the land paid by a 35 year loan. The 2nd land Land Reform & Agitation | Sample Answer

bill didn't apply to tenants in arrears of leaseholders. If Parnell opposed it he would alienate those in his party but if he supported it he would alienate small farmers.

Parnell had a plan that the Home Rule party would abstain from voting. The Land League neither opposed nor supported it until individual cases were seen in court. He then got himself arrested by denouncing Gladstone. From Kilmainham Prison, the Land League leaders issued a 'no rent manifesto' which ordered the Land League not to pay until they were released, thus becoming an illegal party. Parnell said Captain Midnight would take his place, which was a metaphor for violent agrarian attacks that would take place, which was correct as there was an increase in violence between October 1881 and April 1882.

Then in Spring of 1882, Gladstone needed Parnell to restore calm and order in Ireland. Parnell wanted to be released because firstly, the power of the Land League was broken, secondly, the wealthy farmers defied the 'no rent' manifesto and went to the land court to reduce rents, finally he wanted to be with his lover, Kitty O'Shea, who had just given birth to their son who had died. So on the 2nd of May the Land League leaders and Parnell were released on terms of the Kilmainham Treaty.

Between 1882 and 1885 Parnell created a strong pledge bound home rule party in Westminster. After the 1885 general election his party held the balance of power in the House of Commons and helped the Conservative Party to form a government. Parnell's support for the Conservatives was short-lived and, with the conversion of Gladstone and the Liberal Party to the cause of Home Rule (Flying the Hawarden Kite), the Liberal Alliance began.

Gladstone became Prime Minister February 1886 and introduced the First Home Rule Bill in April. The bill was defeated but Liberal Alliance remained. Parnell's career, at the height of his popularity, came to a dramatic end when his affair with a married woman called Katherine O'Shea was made public. There were divisions in the Home Rule party that lasted until a decade after Parnell's death in 1891.

Parnell's involvement in the land reform and agitation movement forged a link between constitutional nationalism and physical-force nationalism. In championing land reform, he secured important concessions for tenant farmers and advanced the quest towards a lasting resolution of the Land Question.