

How did Home Rule develop from 1870 to 1886 and what were the obstacles to the movement achieving its aims? (2017/2013)

The period from 1870 to 1886 was fast paced and ever changing politically for home rulers. The movement developed dramatically due to Gladstone, Butt and Parnell. They did face many obstacles throughout the years, such as the failure of independent opposition and dissatisfaction in the HR party. However, this period was a greatly significant one as it encompassed the introduction of the first HR bill to the House of Commons.

The origins of the HR movement began with the Protestant barrister, Isaac Butt. He became concerned with the treatment of Fenians, thus causing him to not only represent them in court, but also to start an amnesty campaign. Through these actions he eventually came to the conclusion that HR was necessary for Ireland. Widespread dissatisfaction in Ireland allowed him to spearhead this new yet popular movement from 1870 onwards.

In May 1870, representatives from the many discontent groups met in Dublin. It included tenant farmers, landlords, Fenians, Protestants, Catholics and so on. Butt made a compelling speech instilling the idea that Ireland needed a local parliament to deal with internal affairs like transport and agriculture in the minds of all attendees. The Home Government Association was set up afterwards. Unfortunately, it was a disparate group, many of the group's aims contradicted themselves. Butt considered it a Dublin-based pressure group and made the mistake of not developing it into a national political party until 1873 when it became the Home Rule League. Then, in 1874, it contested its first election and won 59 seats. However, over half of these new MPs were not fully committed to home rule.

There was a lot of debate within the IRB about whether they should support Butt or not. Many chose to and a network of Fenians in Britain was set up called the Home Rule of Confederation. They organised Irish people in Britain to vote for whichever party would support HR. This was a great development for the movement.

In 1872, the Ballot Act was introduced by Gladstone. It meant tenant farmers could vote in secret. This was both a positive and negative development for the HR party. Tenant farmers could vote for whomever they wanted and many of them supported HR. However, it also led to

many landlords leaving the association as an Irish parliament elected by people that they couldn't control did not appeal to them.

After the 1874 election, the HR movement faced two significant obstacles. The Home Rule League wasn't strong enough to negotiate with other parties and Gladstone was no longer in power. The PM was Conservative Disraeli, an imperialist with little time for Ireland. The conservative majority meant they had no need for Irish votes, rendering a policy of independent opposition useless. The new HR MPs found it very difficult to make an impact.

Another weakness of the movement was Butt's leadership. He lacked political skill and had a serious gambling problem that meant he was often absent from Westminster. As a result, the younger, bolder Parnell's popularity grew. By 1879 the party was deeply divided on around 20 MPs known as Parnellites wanted Parnell to lead the party with more aggressive and active policy. The other 40 MPs or 'Whigs' supported Butt and considered Parnell an extremist. In May 1879, Butt died suddenly, and William Shaw was chosen as the new leader of the HR party. Parnell's popularity continued to grow. He was president of the Land League and Home Rule Confederation. The 1880 election was a successful one for Parnellites. Gladstone returned to power and 61 HR MPs were elected. Soon after Parnell was elected leader of the home rule party.

In 1882, Parnell's Land League was turned into the National League which was almost entirely focused on HR rather than the land question. It was a political party completely focused on getting MPs elected. Parnell had complete control over it, and it was an efficient, tightly disciplined, political machine. All members had to take a party pledge and were instructed to always "sit, act and vote as one". Parnell's lieutenants made sure support in Ireland was widespread, and by 1885, there were 1200 branches across the country. These local branches collected money, organised elections, chose candidates to run and imposed the party pledge. This impressive organisation was essential to the success and efficiency of the movement. The Reform Act of 1884 meant an extra 500,000 Irishmen could vote. Many of these new voters' lives have been greatly improved by the land reforms and as such supported Parnell.

From 1882 to 1885, many obstacles faced Parnell. Shaw and the Whigs joined the Liberals who had a large majority in the Commons. Parnell only had 45 MPs, ruling out a policy of independent opposition. As a general election in 1885 grew closer Parnell was still attempting a policy of independent opposition. Conservatives like Lord Carnarvon and Randolph Churchill had been making overtures to the HRP. Although Parnell feared these individuals didn't represent the views

of the entire party, he instructed his followers in England to vote conservative. However, the November 1885 elections resulted in the Liberals winning 335 seats and the Conservatives 249. The exact difference between these numbers is 86 which coincidentally was also the exact numbers of seats won by Parnell and the home rulers. This proved to be an obstacle as it rendered Parnell useless to Churchill.

However, an important development soon followed on December 17th 1885. Gladstone's son let slip that his father intended to introduce a HR bill at an event that became known as the Hawarden Kite. When parliament met in January 1886, Salisbury rejected HR and the alliance was over. Parnell and his MPs voted alongside the Liberals and Gladstone became PM again.

Gladstone introduced the first Home Rule Bill in April 1886. It was much more generous than anyone had expected. There would be a parliament in Dublin to deal with local affairs and while no Irish MPs would sit in Westminster, they would still deal with external affairs like issues of war and peace. Ireland would also be required to pay 1/15 of the Imperial budget. Although it was eventually rejected in June, it was still one of the most significant developments of the movement. The real obstacle for this bill were the 93 'Liberal Unionists'; the members of Gladstone's own party who voted against it.

The period of 1870 to 1886 was full of obstacles, however, it was also full of amazing developments. After the HR bill was rejected by the Commons, Gladstone was forced to resign. The Conservatives remained in power for most of the next 20 years by "playing the orange card". Parnell was now tied to his Liberal alliance and had lost his ability to manoeuvre. "Independent opposition was dead", and another home rule bill was impossible until 1893.