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of Parliaments:
Ireland and Russia**

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This issue of *Papers on Parliament* brings together in published form two lectures given in 1991 in the Senate Department's *Occasional Lecture* series.

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Russia's Parliaments

T H Rigby

Russia's parliaments. Hardly a very meaty subject, is it? Russia is famous for a lot of things, but certainly not for its parliaments. A bit like having a lecture on America's cricket-clubs, or Iceland's mosques — or even perhaps recipes for fried ice. Certainly, Russia has a parliament of sorts now, but until very recently was not it just a story of Tsarist despotism til 1917, and communist party despotism since then? That is something I would be the last to deny. But it is not the whole story. The historical roots of Russian parliamentarism are weak, but it does have roots, and they go back a long way.

Being an academic, I have start with a definition. My definition of 'parliament' is a pretty loose one, though not as loose, I must say, as the operative definition in the international Parliamentary Union. A parliament is a national assembly not chosen by the government and playing an autonomous role in law-making and government. You will immediately see that this rules out a lot of modern national assemblies that call themselves parliaments, but includes many others which are called something else, from the American Congress to the Swedish Riksdag, and the Polish Sejm. We tend to talk about 'parliamentary democracy' as if the two were indissoluble, but of course universal suffrage came onto the scene quite late in the history of parliaments. In Britain parliamentary government took shape at a time when hardly ten percent of adult males had the vote, and almost everywhere women got the vote only in the 20th century. So democracy is not an essential to a parliament, but constitutional government is. For a national assembly to play an autonomous role in law-making and government there must be some generally respected rules and conventions that define the power of the various branches of government and of course they do not have to be set out in a formal document.

So, back to Russia, and I am going to talk first about Russia's 'proto-parliaments', by which I mean bodies that had the potential to develop into true parliaments, and although in fact they did not, they formed part of a process that led to Russia's first real parliament.

The story starts in the 16th and 17th centuries. This is a time when the princes of Moscow who were now calling themselves Tsar — their version of Caesar — were consolidating their rule through the Russian lands. But just like the monarchs of Western Europe as they extended

their power against the feudal magnates, the Muscovite Tsars worked to mobilize support among wider sections of the population by making use of certain consultative and deliberative bodies. They had two of them, which I call the Barons' Council and the National Assembly.

The Barons' Council is usually known as the Boyars' Duma — *Boyarskaya Duma* in Russian. The Boyars were the local princes and other great feudal magnates. The word 'duma' is one of several words that has been used for a 'council' in Russia right down to the 20th century. It comes from the word 'to think' — the same root as the English word 'deem'. Of course our word 'parliament' comes from parler, to speak. A cynic might say that a duma is a place where people think without speaking, whereas a parliament is a place where they speak without thinking. anyway the Barons' Council was a mixed blessing for the early Tsars and under Ivan the Terrible (Ivan IV) it came to open conflict and Ivan was constrained to take what his admirer, Joseph Stalin, would call 'decisive measures'. The Council survived Ivan's purge for another couple of generations but it now had no real chance of evolving into a sort of House of Lords. It was more and more stacked with the Tsar's men and was assimilated into his system of administration.

The National Assembly — *Zemsky Sobor* in Russian — was a much larger body comprising representatives of the nobility, the clergy, and the townspeople — very like the early English and Scottish parliaments, the Imperial Diet in Germany, the Estates-General in France, and so on. Earlier national assemblies were appointed, but later ones were elected and even had peasants in them. Its greatest hour came in 1612, after thirty years of civil war, chaos and foreign invasion, when it elected young Mikhail Romanov as Tsar — the beginning of a 300 year dynasty. Mikhail convened 13 national assemblies during his 32 year reign, and it was a very important element in putting Russia together again. But as the Tsar's power grew, the assembly faded out, and at the beginning of the 18th century Peter the Great abolished both it and the Barons' Council. Now we jump forward a century, to the reign of Alexander the First, and to his brilliant adviser Mikhail Speransky, the son of a village priest. The young Alexander had been given an enlightened education designed by his grandmother Catherine the Great, and he was all for political and social reform. At first he even wanted to give Russia a constitution. He was talked out of that, but a few years later he got Speransky to work out something that almost amounted to a constitution, namely a draft law on a new system of state institutions. Speransky was a political realist, and what he offered Alexander was something well short of parliamentary government, but it did dilute the monarchical principle with large dollops of division of powers, rule of law, and responsible government. Ministers would continue to be appointed by the emperor, and would constitute his Council of Ministers. But there was to be a pyramid of elective dumas, capped by a State Duma, which would meet annually for as long as it needed to discuss proposed legislation. All laws required a majority in the State Duma as well as the approval of the Emperor. there was also to be an appointive advisory Council of State. Well, you can imagine what the conservative majority in the bureaucracy and the court thought of all that, and they succeeded in discrediting Speransky and smothering his reforms. Alexander lost interest, as he got more and more taken up with his struggles with Napoleon, and the government fell into the hands of a reactionary clique. All that survived from Speransky's package was the appointive Council of State, a pretty tame advisory body for the most part, though it went on to greater things, as we will see. There was a dramatic sequel to this sad story — the so-called Decembrist Revolt of December 1825. this was led by the cream of the aristocracy who officered the imperial guard regiments, men who had received the same liberal education as Alexander had, but had remained true to the ideals of liberty and humanity and been convinced by what they saw campaigning in Europe that Russia desperately needed radical reform. Of course they failed, but their example and their ideas lived on. The trouble was, their legacy was an ambiguous one. They mostly agreed on major social changes like abolishing serfdom, but disagreed on the political means. The larger group wanted a liberal constitutional order, but another group were convinced that for some

years a dictatorship would be needed to push through radical reforms, and these, of course, were the forerunners of a line of Russian revolutionary thought that led to the Bolsheviks and their so-called 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Now a thirty year gap. The Crimean War is over. The regime is weakened and discredited. The new emperor Alexander the Second is not a reformer at heart, but he is ready to face the inevitable. Alexander is credited with saying 'better to abolish serfdom from above than have it abolish itself from below'. So they did abolish serfdom, and there were other social reforms, a reformed legal system, and a system of elected local and provincial councils. But, despite the urgings of liberal officials and intellectuals, there was no national elective legislature. Shortly before he died Alexander II did assent to some first steps in this direction, which amounted to building up the role of the Council of State and making it partly elective. He died before this could be put into effect and his successor, Alexander III, was persuaded by his reactionary adviser Konstantin Pobedonostsev to go back on it. So, it was another might-have-been like Speransky's plan seventy years earlier.

At the end of the nineteenth century the way Russia was governed looked very like how it was at the end of the eighteenth. But underneath things were very, very different. All these proto-parliamentary institutions real and imagined — mostly imagined — had woven a liberal reformist strand into Russians political culture. There had been a process of institutional learning both in the Council of State and the provincial and city councils. There was also the spectacle of the march of parliamentary government in the world at large, even in those other autocratic empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary. And perhaps most importantly, there were social changes in Russia itself: industrialisation (between the 1890s and the first World War Russia had the world's highest rate of education, great achievements in literature, music, painting, the sciences. In this context, the old political order looked to many people more and more an anachronism, and the final blow came in 1905 with the humiliation of the Russo-Japanese War and the revolutionary chaos that followed.

The result was Russia's first real parliament. It had two houses. The upper house was an expanded Council of State with half its members elected on a corporative basis — the Church, local councils, business and so on. the lower house was called the State Duma, and was indirectly elected by universal male suffrage through a series of class and property-based electoral colleges. Political rights — freedom of expression, association and assembly — were radically improved. The result was a multi-party Duma ranging from right-wing nationalists to revolutionary socialists, but dominated at first by liberal constitutionalists. That is the good news.

The bad news was that the government was not responsible to the parliament. The conservatives were strong enough to retain the autocratic powers of the emperor as the bedrock of the constitution. He appointed the First Minister and the other ministers and they were individually and collectively responsible to him alone. The Duma could question them, and there were plenty of sharp and critical questions, and the ministers were obliged to respond, but that is as far as it went. The parliament was the acknowledged legislature, but when it was not sitting the government could enact laws subject to later endorsement. And the monarch could issue decrees — called 'sovereign commands' (*vysochaishiye poveleniia*) countersigned by a single minister, without submitting them to the Duma or the Council of State, and these were virtually an alternative channel of legislation. There is more bad news I could add, and things tended to get worse rather than better, but that is enough to make the point. From 1906 to 1917 Russia had a real parliament, but it did not yet have parliamentary government.

But now, let us stand back and add a bit of historical perspective. Would we say that Imperial Germany or Austria-Hungary had parliamentary government at the beginning of the

twentieth century? For how many decades had Italy had it? Or even Sweden? Seen in the European context, Russian political development was certainly retarded, but it was headed in the same general direction and gradually narrowing the gap. So when the monarchy was overthrown in February–March 1917, opening the way to a true parliamentary democracy, this was not something out of the blue. It was the culmination of a process that began generations before. The tragedy of Russia's first democratic republic lay in the circumstances of its birth. The War was its midwife, and the War was what enabled Lenin to smother it in its cradle at the age of eight months.

Lenin's 'dictatorship of the proletariat' meant in practice, of course, the dictatorship of the Communist Party leadership, and it was never intended to mean anything else. But they clothed it in the authority of the soviets. Now 'soviet', as you know, is another word for council, the one we have in *Gosudarstvennyi Soviet*, the Council of State. But these particular councils, these soviets, were unusual ones. They were councils that had sprung up more or less spontaneously among workers and soldiers following the downfall of the monarchy. The Bolsheviks — as the Communists were called at the time — did not invent them, but Lenin saw their potential as a vehicle of power. By October the Bolsheviks were close to getting a predominance in the soviets, and they timed their armed seizure of power to coincide with the Second Congress of Soviets. Most of the non-Communists walked out of the Congress in protest against the armed coup, and that enabled Lenin to get a majority vote approving a Communist government, which they called the Council of People's Commissars. It also elected a Communist-dominated Central Executive Committee, which functioned for a time as a kind of quasi-parliament, despite the fact that Lenin poured scorn on parliamentarism and repudiated the division of powers.

It took three or four years before the institutional shape of the new regime shook down, and then it looked like this. All other political parties were suppressed and the operative government was the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party — the Politburo. The constitutional government — the Council of People's Commissars — functioned as a kind of administrative committee of the Politburo. And the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets had degenerated from a quasi-parliament into a pseudo-parliament. From then to the 1980s the changes were mostly decorative. Of course there were enormous social changes; the so-called building of socialism, urbanisation, a new technical-managerial bureaucracy, and so on, and the two decades of Stalin's murderous dictatorship made a great difference to the way the institutions functioned, but the pattern of institutions remained essentially the same.

In 1936, at the time of the great show trials, Stalin launched the 'most democratic constitution in the world'. There were a number of things in it that made it look more palatable from the liberal democratic point of view. One of these was something like a formal division of powers between what were called the 'organs of state authority', which were the soviets, and the 'organs of administration' — the central and local governments. The All-Union Congress of Soviets and its Central Executive Committee were conflated into a Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Under the old constitution only elections to village and city soviets were direct, and the higher ones were chosen by congresses of delegates from the next level down — the so-called pyramidal structure of power. Under the new constitution all elections were direct, but in one respect it made no difference — you still only had one candidate to vote for.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR consisted of two houses: the Council of the Union or Federation and the Council of Nationalities, with deputies representing the various so-called Union republics, autonomous republics and smaller national units. I need hardly remind you of how the Soviet Union came to be a multinational state. After the revolution there was a mass breakout from the Tsarist prison-house of peoples, with a great number declaring their

independence. Poland and Finland got away with it, and so did the Baltic states for the time being, but the rest of them were corralled back in with the help of the Red Army. Hence the fifteen federal republics which formally constituted the Soviet Union, and they too had their Supreme Soviets — Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan and so on. Of course everything of any significance was decided by the

Politburo and the USSR government, and administered from Moscow through the Party apparatus, Gosplan, the industrial ministries, the KGB and so on. A phoney federalism to match the phoney parliaments with their phoney elections.

Phoney parliaments? Is that too strong a term? Consider this Under Stalin the Supreme Soviet of the USSR met once a year for one or two days, to adopt and acclaim the annual economic plan and budget. After Stalin there was a half-hearted effort to patch up the democratic facade. There was usually a second session of one or two days, and sometimes even a third, used by the Politburo to focus attention on some current measure or other. I have not done the sums, but I doubt if there was ever a year when the Supreme Soviet's sittings totalled more than a week. Conflicting views were never heard, let alone criticism of the Government's policies. Well, what about the Supreme Soviet's standing commissions? Yes, there were some, and they were well named as standing commissions, for they rarely sat, and never for long. Professor Minagawa of the University of Hokkaido did his PhD thesis at the ANU on these bodies, and confirmed what a charade it all was, though he did form the impression that they also provided an arena for various party and government bureaucrats to push their departmental and local barrow. And then again the Supreme Soviet had its Presidium, a sort of collective presidency, in whose name a lot of important measures were promulgated in the form of decrees, although there is no evidence that its members were actually convened to discuss these measures. The chairmanship of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet was a useful slot to have available for a Politburo member without portfolio, like the Lord Privy Seal or the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster. It was traditionally assigned to a second-level leader, till General Secretary Brezhnev appropriated it to raise his domestic and international profile, and all his successors followed suit, though Gorbachev took his time about it.

What more is worth saying about this whole hypocritical masquerade? One thing. We might ponder the moral and political ambiguities of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, as la Rochefoucauld pointed out three hundred years ago, is the homage that vice pays to virtue. In politics this means that while it betrays the ideals which it proclaims, it also perpetuates the very ideals which it betrays. The masquerade of the pre-*perestroika* Supreme Soviet paid homage to the ideals of democracy, of government responsible to representatives of the people, to the principle of election, and to other political rights and freedoms.

That is why Gorbachev's *glasnost* was so explosive. It pulled off the beautiful masks and revealed the ugly and vicious mugs underneath. Of course, everyone knew the reality behind the masks was not quite the same, but sudden confrontation with that reality was for many people profoundly shocking and a challenge to action.

Glasnost was only one part of the political side of *perestroika*. For decades the party machine had direct control over all public expression, association and assembly, and this was rigorously enforced by the KGB. Between 1986 and 1988 Gorbachev progressively relaxed the controls, and his main object seems to have been to open up new political arenas and use them to overcome the party-state bureaucracy's resistance to serious economic reform. By 1988 there were thousands of political clubs and associations with a great range of orientations and concerns, from proto-fascists to anarchists, from local nationalists to feminists to environmentalists, but the liberal-democratic band of the spectrum was strongest.

In 1989 *perestroika* caught up with the Supreme Soviet. And here we come to another of the beneficial legacies of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy passed on not only the ideals but also the institutions which were supposed to embody these ideals. There was a Supreme Soviet. Certainly it was only phoney parliament, but there it was waiting to be turned into a real one. And that is what happened. A new Congress of People's Deputies was created, with 2250 members, 750 of them chosen by various official organisations — the Communist party, trade unions, Academy of Sciences, and so on — and 1500 elected from local constituencies. The

Congress was to function as the full national legislature, but would meet relatively briefly, and it would elect a two-house Supreme Soviet, a much smaller body than in the past, and that would meet for two three to four month sessions a year — just like a real parliament.

Of course there were many doubts, both at home and abroad, but the realities soon dispelled them. This was no masquerade. It was the real thing. To start with the elections, in many places the local Communist Party machine was able to get the results it wanted, sometimes with the help of heavy pressure and manipulation. But most electorates were contested, the campaigning was often very vigorous, and the new democratic clubs and associations managed to get quite a few of their candidates elected. Ironically, one result of scrapping the old stage-managed elections with their centrally allocated quotas was that the new Congress and the Supreme Soviet it elected had a far higher percentage of Communist Party members, and a far lower percentage of women and blue-collar workers, than the pseudo-parliaments of the past. Of course the CPSU was still the only legally permitted party, and in most fields you had to be in it to get anywhere, whatever your actual views were.

The first meeting of the Congress lasted a fortnight and offered an unprecedented spectacle of public frankness and often sharp dispute, which was electrifying for the tens of millions of people who watched it on television. The choice of members for the Supreme Soviet was a lengthy and contentious process. Conservatives and middle of the roaders predominated, but there were quite a few liberals and radicals who formed themselves into what they called the inter-regional group. One of their first victories was to get Boris Yeltsin into the Supreme Soviet, and another was to spearhead the opposition to a number of Prime Minister Ryzhkov's proposed ministers, forcing him to come up with more acceptable names. Both the Congress and the Supreme Soviet formed standing commissions and committees, nearly a thousand men and women all told — and they really did sit, and sit, and sit, mostly working their way through a variety of overdue legislation.

This was the Soviet Union's first and last genuine parliament. With all its inexperience, with all its constitutional inadequacies, with all the political confusion surrounding it, it was an invaluable school for democracy and a giant step forward in the direction of responsible and representative government. It lasted for two and a quarter years, till the August coup cut the ground from under its feet, and all the time the political context was changing, dramatically and at times menacingly.

The collapse of communist power in Eastern Europe at the end of 1989 enabled Gorbachev to push through two vital changes: the Communist Party was stripped of its constitutional monopoly and its powers to direct all government and public institutions, and at the same time a new executive presidency was created, with powers to nominate the prime minister and other government officials, to veto legislation, and with parliamentary sanction to rule by decree. The real focus of power now moved from the Politburo to the Presidency. It was one of Gorbachev's most remarkable achievements to persuade both the parliament and the party Central Committee to approve these changes. One of his failures was to have picked a weak team for his Presidential Council and not built it into an effective institution.

New political parties had started forming even before it had been legal to do so, and now they mushroomed, with every conceivable program from monarchist to anarchist. Some of them found adherents among Supreme Soviet deputies. The trouble was that hardly any of them were based on any organised social interest. At the same time the communist Party split into factions, and it looked for a time as if breakaway factions might merge with certain of these new parties to form one or two credible opposition parties. But events moved too fast and this never eventuated. And meanwhile, within the Supreme Soviet, more important than party divisions were the voting blocs which cut across the parties. I have already mentioned one of

these — the liberal-democratic Inter-regional Group. The other major voting bloc that came to the fore last year was the conservative *soyuz* group — ‘soyuz’ means ‘union’.

Now I want to move from the federal parliament to say something about the Russian parliament. Between March and May last year new republic parliaments were elected. In some republics, mostly in Central Asia, the Communist Party machine was very much in control, but in others, including Russia, the elections were pretty open and democratic, more so than in the federal elections the year before. In several republics, including Ukraine, national separatist movements polled pretty well. When the Russian parliament convened, it turned out to have roughly equal numbers of liberals and conservatives, but the most effective force was a well organised group of liberals and radicals who called themselves Democratic Russia. Democratic Russia drummed up enough support to get Yeltsin elected as Chairman, or speaker in our terminology, and Yeltsin bolstered that support by skilfully building bridges to some of the moderate conservatives. The parliament accepted his favoured nominee as prime Minister and stood behind most of his policies, despite a substantial hostile minority. Again, the main cleavages within the Russian Parliament were between voting blocs rather than formal parties. Later, Yeltsin got the Parliament to create an executive presidency for Russia like the federal one, and in March this year, as you will recall, he easily trounced his conservative rivals in the presidential elections. All the same, despite the great personal authority he enjoys, especially since the failed coup, the parliament has retained its independence, and on three occasions in recent weeks has forced him to drop or moderate major decisions.

Now it is very tempting at this point to retell yet again the political dramas of the last few months. But that is not my subject today and time is short. The big issues, of course, have been republic independence and the future of the federation, if it has a future, and what to do about the economic system, and these issues do not line up neatly. For example, there are people who support radical market reform but want to keep a strong federation. And there are Russian patriots who are more than happy for the other nations to get their own way, as well as the so-called imperial Russian patriots who would like to hold the Union together at all costs.

Well, the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is now defunct. the present institutions of the Union, which include a sort of rump parliament, were improvised in the wake of the coup, and supposed to last only until the shape of a new Union of Sovereign Republics is agreed and its institutions are set up. Meanwhile central power is waning by the week if not by the day, and there is Mikhail Gorbachev sitting like the Cheshire cat up his tree and steadily fading away, till soon perhaps there will be nothing much left but the smile. I am not being scornful, just realistic: for me he will always be the Mikhail who slew the dragon of Communist Party dictatorship, and I think that is how history will remember him. But at this stage it is hard to believe that his new confederation will amount to much. And if there is to be a parliament of a new Union of Sovereign Republics, it will probably be about as important as the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The phoney old federal system of the USSR has provided the institutional basis for the transition to national independence, another great triumph for hypocrisy. There are now, in effect, fifteen successor states to the USSR. So far only the three Baltic republics have won international recognition as independent states, but others will follow. These fifteen states all have their presidents, their governments, and their parliaments. So far they all have the same pattern that Gorbachev established at the federal level last year, and it is not one of cabinet parliamentary government but one of presidential government, that owes a lot both to the American and French models.

The parliament can be a very powerful element in that sort of system, but whether it does or not depends very much on the social circumstances and on the political culture and experience of those operating it. I need hardly remind you that the social circumstances are far from propitious — all that economic chaos and hardship and ethnic strife. The temptation to take dictatorial action and muzzle opposition will be strong, and we already see that happening in several republics.

What about political culture and experience? Will that favour dictatorship or democratic constitutional government? The quick answer is that every one of these countries will be a different story. Despite the shared experience of Soviet rule, the political culture of Estonia is very different from the political culture of Uzbekistan. I am very optimistic about the Baltic countries, moderately optimistic about the three Slavonic countries of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and also kazakhstan, and rather pessimistic about the countries of Central Asia and Transcaucasia.

As for the Russian parliament today, it owes its existence to a strand in Russian political culture that goes back nearly 200 years to Mikhail Speransky. I believe that that strand is now a pretty strong one, perhaps strong enough to stand the strain of current circumstances. It would be tragic if the strain proves too great and once again it frays and snaps.

Parnell and the Art of Politics

Professor Oliver MacDonagh

This year we are marking — almost to the day in October — the centenary of the early and tragic death of Charles Stewart Parnell. Parnell was born in 1846 in the midst of the great Irish famine. He came from a Protestant landlord family of moderate scale, having about 5,000 acres. He had a conventional Irish upper class origin and education. He was educated mainly in England at a private school and at Cambridge University, from which he was rusticated for his part in a drunken brawl in 1869.

He returned to his estate in 1870, apparently bound for the conventional career of a country gentleman. He became Deputy Lieutenant of his county. he took up sport, especially shooting. he looked after the timber on his estate and he hoped to develop mining. So far there was nothing to indicate a revolutionary career of any sort, except for his marked hatred of England. This Anglophobia derived partly from his mother's influence — she was an American and bitterly anti-British — but apparently mostly from the humiliations and rejections that he had suffered during his English education. Whatever its cause, Parnell's Anglophobia must be carefully noted because this is one of the essentials of his later hold on Irish opinion.

Socially, in appearance, manner, style and dress, he was altogether on an equal footing with the English ruling classes. In externals, he was indistinguishable. A doctor in London who treated him for several years was amazed to learn at last that he was Irish. So Parnell was, in one sense, accepted as an equal. He knew the code, the convention and the assumptions from the inside.

On the other hand, he was always unwavering in his belief that British, and particularly English, politicians yielded only to crude force, that the appeal to moral sense, to justice, to fair play, was completely worthless. He used the phrase, 'Attack, attack, always attack. There is no other way'. He had no scruple about weapons.

What followed was a ruthless and cynical disregard of English opinion with two purposes: first, the obvious one, to force out concessions where he could; secondly, and interacting with

the first, to maintain his hold upon Irish opinion. He grasped the essential late nineteenth century truth: what nauseated, angered, scandalised English opinion was what won him total support in Irish popular opinion. He grasped that his political base was Irish opinion, not English; this was the essential basis of his power throughout. It was secured by his constant and indeed sincere hatred and contempt for British institutions — which was vital because, as a politician, he had eventually to concede much to British governments, he had to compromise, he had to retrace his steps. he could do this safely only because of the aura of Anglophobia with which he succeeded in surrounding even his largest concessions to his opponents.

Hence, we start with these two simple essentials of his equipment — his difference from his own people and his similarity to his opponents, and his pursuit of the confidence of his own people by hatred and denigration of his opponents. this apart, there was nothing to suggest Parnell's later career in the early 1870s. There is abundant testimony that he was almost totally ignorant of Irish history, of theoretical politics, of economics. there is much testimony that he hardly ever read a book in his life, though he had a marvellous facility for picking up and using other people's knowledge.

his personality was perhaps more promising than his knowledge. this was already clearly marked, as we know, by the various biographical memoirs written by his numerous brothers and sisters later on. Three characteristics of the young Parnell are worth noting. His family always spoke of his extraordinary tenacity and application. One of them said, 'Charles never surrendered an objective in his life'.

The second characteristic which is noted very often is perhaps a strange one for a politician — Parnell's silence, his repose, his economy of action. Parnell never spoke unnecessarily, he never committed himself until it became unavoidable. He had confidence in no-one.

The third boyhood characteristic which all his family noted was his passion for power and domination. He was aloof, remote, commanding by nature. Above all, perhaps summing it all up, he might be said to have been born for leadership. Certainly, one of his lieutenants, T P O'Connor wrote:

We all had various functions in the national movement. Parnell had one too. It was the only thing he could do, but no-one else could have done it: Parnell's function was to be our leader.

Of course, there must be many thousands of tenacious, dominating young men thirsting in vain for leadership. All we have said of his personality ensured him nothing. What enabled him to translate it into actuality was his superb political sense and judgment, his uncanny instinct for calculating the combinations of power, of politics as the art of the possible. When he died, there was universal agreement that in British politics in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, only Gladstone was his rival.

In 1873, when he was 27 years old, Parnell first considered entering politics. Here he and the records are completely silent as to the reasons — characteristically. We must try to read them backwards from a subsequent career. Two years later in 1875 he succeeded in securing the nomination for a by-election for the Home Rule Party in County Meath, an absolutely safe seat. The man he beat for the nomination was a former Premier of Victoria, Charles Gavan Duffy; an interesting symbolic contest.

Parnell's winning the nomination was no great achievement in itself. There was at this time, of course, no payment for members of parliament. he was by Irish standards, well- to-do. He was

young, handsome and, not least important or a nationalist movement, those two very prized things, a landlord and a Protestant into the bargain.

The party that Parnell joined in parliament was dying on its feet. Since the death of Daniel O'Connell in 1847 and the great famine of the late 1840s and early 1850s, Irish political pressures had been generally ineffectual. In parliament, various attempts had been made to keep the members of parliament from Irish nationalist constituencies independent of and opposed to the great British parties. In fact, the so-called Home Rule Party of 1875 represented yet another of the attempts to establish an independent Irish Opposition. Each of these, including Home Rule in 1875, failed sooner or later because of the immense attractions of the British Liberal Party, which could offer rewards, places, favours, and minor concessions in legislation and which was almost continually in power for the 30 years, 1845 to 1875. Whether nominally independent or not, each Irish party or faction sooner or later became a Liberal satellite.

Apart from parliamentary politics, there were three other great forces in Irish politics in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The first was the revolutionary tradition, the conspiratorial tradition, the violent tradition, represented at this time by Fenianism. Fenianism had failed in a most humiliating fashion militarily in 1867. It was discredited as a practical movement at the time. It had also fallen apart. Its cohesion was broken up by American quarrels. But it had enormous appeal, especially for the young: the sacred objective of a republic; its undying Anglophobia; its appeal to cut the Gordian knot by force; its appeal to manhood and manliness. These made a deep call to the younger generation, no matter how chimerical or impractical they seemed to their elders.

The next great body of pressure in Ireland was, as always, connected with the land and the land movements. Even still, the Irish landed system was perhaps the most inequitable in western Europe. The days when landlords had essentially engrossed not only the means of production but also the power to defend their hold on the means of production were not truly over, nor was the tenant reaction of agrarian outrage, agrarian murder, agrarian intimidation. These land movements — constitutional and subterranean or conspiratorial — were comparatively weak and sporadic in 1875, but they were growing. They were ripe for organisation, especially as the years were coming in which Britain would refuse to protect agriculture and the British markets would be swamped by overseas products. This, combined with a series of disastrous harvests in the late 1870s, was to produce the tinderbox on the land issue which Parnell would use.

The third great force in Irish life was the Catholic Church. This was absolutely vital, and had been since the 1820s, to any form of widespread political organisation. It was immensely influential in Ireland, although its influence was strongly anti-Fenian on the whole. It was vital, through the parochial system, to providing local leadership and organisation. The Church is generally classed as a conservative body, but this is in many ways a misleading description of Catholic Church politics in the later 1870s. Most priests and bishops came from the very classes who were to be leaders of the nationalist and land movements which were about to appear.

There was also a comparatively new force outside the Irish scene, the Irish overseas. The number of Irish in Australia, though relatively large, was absolutely small. But at this stage the Irish-born and first generation Irish were already immensely significant in the United States. There were more than three million Irish-born and first generation Irish in America. Not all of them, of course, were involved in or concerned themselves with Irish politics. But hundreds of thousands did and their organisations were much more radical, much more ignorant of Irish conditions and much more demanding and exigent than were the home movements to whom they were often an embarrassment and a hindrance. Yet, they had also become vital to Irish

political life because of the money they provided on an unprecedented scale for Irish agitation; vital to the organisation which they made possible by being offshore; vital to the advertisement that they gave to Irish grievances; vital to the pressures that they produced in the international scene, as well as in American politics.

Not merely were there internal divisions and conflicts within each of these four great forces; there were also collisions and divergences of object and priority between each pair. By 1875 they were all completely disenchanted with the parliamentary method of agitation and more or less contemptuous of the Home Rule Party as a whole.

Both the Irish overseas and the Fenians were opposed by instinct and doctrine to parliamentarianism. their bent was invariably towards violence and the direct method. But the other much greater and more significant centres of Irish pressure, the landed movements and the Church, had both been repeatedly disappointed by the Home Rule Party's failure to secure any substantial concession for their ends.

It was on this gloomy scene that Parnell entered the House of Commons. At first incredibly inept and, of course altogether unknown, his early speeches were reported as bumbling, stumbling and incomplete. He was raw and ignorant. No-one could have dreamt during his first year in Parliament what would come about.

Yet, within seven years he had tamed and brought under his own control, as a single instrument and for a single purpose, all the Irish forces of discontent and pressure. He was presenting, as a contemporary said, the greatest threat to British rule in Ireland since the rising of 1641.

How was this extraordinary achievement brought about? Parnell's first step was to join a small group of Irish obstructionists in the House of Commons. The Home Rule Party, as a whole, accepted English systems and English parliamentary values in their entirety. They seemed to be happy to be allowed to exist, in the parliamentary sense; happy in the applause for their oratory and wit; happy with their annual motion for Home Rule, during debate in which speakers often praised their moderation, replied to them courteously and assured them that they would always listen to reason. That was all. In Irish terms and values the achievement was nothing.

A handful of members — three, four, five — in exasperation broke into the opposite tactics, that is, to use every rule of procedure in the House of Commons to hold up parliamentary business; to try to make a mockery of that holiest of holiest of Victorian life, Westminster; to make themselves hated and, by using this pitiful force, to advertise night in, night out, Irish wrongs and the fact that the Irish were distinct and different.

parnell threw himself wholeheartedly into this group. The work was most congenial to his temperament. he soon became extremely skilled in procedures and, of course, he was the most obdurate of the obdurate. He very quickly seized leadership of this group. He also presented himself as an extremist. This won him Fenian sympathy and the presidency of the Fenian front organisation, the Home Rule League of Great Britain. Thus he had a little party within a party. he was leading this when the general election came in 1880.

Meanwhile, he had deliberately cultivated the appearance of extremism. He made increasingly violent speeches; he increasingly displayed open support for Fenian causes. All were angled, and in general successfully angled, at winning Irish revolutionary support both at home and in the United States. There was, of course, the heavy price to pay of grave clerical suspicion, grave clerical opposition and the distrust of moderate sections, including almost the entire nationalist press, the distrust of moderate sections of the nationalists in Ireland as a whole.

Parnell took the vital step in 1879 of taking over the leadership, when it was offered, of the quasi-revolutionary land movement which was launched in that year. It was launched by Fenians and ex-Fenians and it was a movement which was committed to the refusal to pay the existing rents and to fight, figuratively and literally, the system of evictions.

The Land League was initially opposed by the Church, mainly because it was organised by the Fenians, but Parnell for the first and last time in his life defied ecclesiastical condemnation and assumed presidency of the Land League. By doing so he was marked out, quite wrongly in fact, as an extremist. He was spoken of as a Fenian fellow traveller, as a secret Fenian and as director of a movement of dangerous popular revolution involving repeated clashes with the police and military, shootings and intimidation, seditious speeches and the rest. It would be much more accurate to say that he was directing a form of national strike and passive disobedience upon a vast scale.

of course, though execrated in England and widely condemned by the respectable and the middle class at home, he had mass opinion in Ireland on his side. With that it soon became clear that he had a very powerful weapon with which to force concessions: the threat of making Ireland ungovernable and behind it the threat — always unspoken — of a bloody revolution being barely held in check.

The election of 1880 justified Parnell's gamble. Whenever there was a clash in a nationalist constituency between a Parnellite and an anti-Parnellite, in every case the Parnellite won easily. Parnell secured 30 supporters and assumed the formal leadership of this aggressive group in the House of Commons.

He proceeded to build steadily his parliamentary party into something that was new, at least in degree and perhaps in kind — new in being a single instrument to be deployed at will; new in its strict parliamentary discipline, party discipline and constituency discipline; and new in demanding total loyalty from its members from the constituency level up. All Parnell's lieutenants were really his subordinates. He had a sort of cabinet, but, if so, it was a cabinet in the American sense rather than the British. perhaps even better, it was the sort of 'cabinet' that Bonaparte had for his marshals.

The next general election, which was to come in 1885, brought a complete sweep of nationalist Irish seats into Parnell's lap. He secured the 85 possible out of 105. All the Irish Liberal fellow travellers, all the Irish Whigs, all the quasi-independent members and careerists were swept forever out of political existence. But meanwhile, even the 30 of 1880 formed the spearhead of an immense assault upon the entire system of British government in Ireland.

Parnell's strategy was, of course, to concentrate initially on the land issue. The bulk of the Fenians and the bulk of the American organisations joined completely in this, especially as the land struggle became more and more a struggle of violence. The Catholic Church veered about completely on the issue. Within a year, by 1881, it had identified — almost to the last priest and the last bishop — with the Land League. Again this provided, as with the nationalist party, vital local organisation and leadership throughout the countryside. The tenant farmers organised themselves as a fighting force. There was no complete fusion as yet between these elements, but there were identifications on the immediate objective. That was the home front. Meanwhile, on the Westminster front, parliamentary obstruction was developed upon an unprecedented scale. The nights were nightmares for speakers and for Government benches. Wholesale suspensions and 'scenes' were outside the entire span of experience for a parliamentary system. Eventually the system of procedures cracked and large scale and very important changes in procedure were brought about. In fact, the Westminster system, as it is known throughout the world, is in no small way the product of what Parnell and his party did in 1880 to 1881.

The Liberals were in power from 1880 to 1885, but in difficult circumstances. They were forced to yield to the Parnellite pressure and to yield in the worst of conditions to combine coercion in Ireland with concession in Britain. This was better to be described as the typical British policy of a quick alternation of kicks and kindnesses. It produced its first fruit, its first great kindness, in Gladstone's great Land Act of 1881. This Act was an almost complete surrender to the original demands of the Irish Tenant League. The three demands were free sale — the right to sell one's interests in a holding; fixity of tenure — the right to be secure in one's holding; and fair rent — the right not to be exploited by the relative conditions of economic power. They were called the three Fs. The Land Act of 1881 gave these substantially. But the tenants' demands had increased with the agitation of the late 1870s and the early 1880s. They had now moved on to demand complete ownership and control of their land.

In 1881, Parnell was not yet completely secure in power. He felt he could not openly accept the Land Act, though it was far better than he and his Party had hoped for. The tenants had moved on and he had to cover himself. Nor could he yet afford, he believed, to alienate the extremists by welcoming openly any British measure. He was still too dependent upon them — their organisation, money and mobilisation of popular opinion — to risk toying with their Anglophobia. So he adopted a masterly course of opposing the Act in Parliament, which was quite safe to do as it was certain to be passed, formally rejecting it, but saying, 'Test it in the courts', in order to demonstrate its inadequacy. As a last step, he got himself arrested in October 1881 in order to avoid responsibility for the next round of decisions.

What did Parnell achieve by the tortuous manoeuvres of 1880 to 1882? First, he achieved the Land Act and its practical acceptance as an instalment by the tenants. He maintained formal resistance and combined it with tacit acceptance. This secured him a further round of major agrarian concessions in 1882, especially an Arrears Act which, at the cost of many millions of pounds, wiped out four or five years of rent. He also secured an extension of the 1881 Act as a blanket measure for all forms of Irish tenancy.

In the spring of 1882, he secured the diminution of the agrarian agitation. This was part of the bargain, which included his own release, which he made with Gladstone in 1882 — a bargain which produced yet more legislative concessions. Parnell felt that he could not afford to check the agitation in 1881. He felt he might not have succeeded. But during his winter in prison, the movement fell into the hands of extremists and also fell flat, as he had calculated. He resumed complete power over it on his release from prison. He showed that he was justified in bargaining with Gladstone. This was perhaps more important than the concessions *per se* or even his release to fly to the side of Mrs O'Shea.

His establishment as leader of the Irish nation was implicit in his bargain with Gladstone. Parnell proved that he could deliver. He was demonstrating to Gladstone that he could turn Irish pressure on and off like a tap. This was the basis of his later bargaining power. Because he had maintained his hold over all the sections in substance, it was now too late for Fenians and Irish-Americans to repudiate him publicly — though some of them wished to do so.

He had, by Irish standards, this immense achievement: this demonstration of parliamentary power; this humiliation of the British House of Commons; this sense of national pride. Joining them all together was the argument that Irish unity produced this; Irish unity was dependent upon Parnell's personal leadership.

The Church was not only completely involved in the land agitation but it had also become part of the new and reformed Home Rule Party — the Irish Nationalist Party. It was given a place in

party nominations, a veto over candidatures, in effect. It was given a part in the program. Parnell, as a Protestant, now fell over backwards to show that he was not an anti-clerical.

From 1882 to 1885, a line of indirect, restrained threat to the Liberals and the House of Commons was maintained. A succession of concessions were secured, even if only minor ones. But Parnell was looking to the next general election, which would probably come in 1886. He had in his sights the big prize — home Rule, substantial self-government for Ireland.

Early in 1885 he decided that the time had come to strike. He voted with the conservatives against coercion in Ireland and in doing so brought down Gladstone's Government.

This implied two interesting features. It implied, firstly, that the Tories, as against Gladstone's desire to treat Ireland on a bipartisan basis, were prepared to sacrifice policy and principle for power. This may not have been great news, but it was another lever for Parnell temporarily. The bringing down of Gladstone's Government also served notice to the Liberals that the Irish support was not theirs by right, but was for sale to the highest bidder.

There followed months of manoeuvring as Parnell struggled to set the two main British parties bidding against each other for Irish support. Irish support, in practical terms, meant about 110 House of Commons seats out of a total of 658. This meant 85 Irish Nationalist seats and approximately 25 seats in Britain, where the Irish vote was assumed to be at the disposal of the Nationalist Party — so it could go either Tory or Liberal, as directed.

Failing to get a clear commitment from either the Tories or the Liberals, Parnell threw Irish support to the Tories in the general election. He reasoned that the Liberals were going to win the election, but that it was essential from an Irish point of view to deny them an overall majority. This calculation proved quite correct. The Liberals had a majority, but neither party could govern without the 85 Irish votes. Before 1885 was out, Parnell's strategy succeeded. Gladstone committed the Liberal Party to Home Rule and committed himself to introducing an Irish Home Rule Bill in 1886.

It is very difficult for us to realise the magnitude of Parnell's achievement. Two years before, in 1883, it would have been inconceivable that three British members of parliament, let alone 300, would ever have accepted substantial legislative independence for Ireland as a principle. There were all sorts of shibboleths of apparently first importance in late nineteenth century Britain: the Empire and imperial defence; the protection of Protestantism and Protestant kith and kin; and the protection of the rights of property. They were but three of the unquestionable assumptions of mid-Victorian Britain and they were meant to be guaranteed in Ireland and guaranteed for the Empire as a whole by the Act of Union — without the Act of Union, the whole process of disintegration was likely to begin.

It is against that background that we can view the achievement of inducing a major British party — and that the normally governing party, the party which had never failed to secure a reform that was placed on its platform — to adopt the principle of Irish self-government.

Parnell's achievement is not to be measured in terms of immediate success — this was very dubious, as well he knew — but in terms of the apparent long term certainty, given the commitment of the Liberal Party and the near certainty that it was bound for power again very soon as the naturally governing party of late nineteenth century England.

Of course, there were heavy prices to be paid for this success. The Tories committed themselves totally in the other direction. They controlled the House of Lords. They also, for all practical purposes, controlled, or had a spokeswoman in, the Queen herself, the Crown — Victoria was

by this time practically an active Conservative partisan and one with considerably more effective constitutional power than any subsequent British monarch.

There was an even heavier price paid by the Liberals. The Party split in two on the issue of home rule. But this was not in itself altogether ruinous. a Considerable majority of the Liberals stayed loyal to Gladstone.

parnell himself had to pay a heavy price. The Home Rule Bill which Gladstone introduced was, by our standards, very narrow and an extremely subordinate form of parliament, if I can put it like that. If we want a rough model, in reality, of what the first Home Rule Bill offered, we can say that it was not unlike the Parliament that the north of Ireland enjoyed until its suspension in 1972; it was rather like a Stormont form of government. this was a very limited model of legislative independence, and parnell was forced by Gladstone and the Cabinet to accept it unreservedly and to state publicly that he would receive it as a final settlement, in order to commit the Liberals completely.

There was some doubt expressed by journalists as to whether parnell had endangered his support by accepting so limited a measure. Once again, he proved to have made the right choice. considerable opposition was expected from the extremists in Ireland and the United States. This was greatly written about by English observers before the event. In fact, there was practically no opposition.

Parnell argued from the patent need for a common front. As leader of the Irish people, he argued for the necessity of having a complete mandate to negotiate as he himself thought best on behalf of the Irish people. Such was the strength of the position which he had brought about, such was the personal command and control that he, towering above all the factions and interests, had won over the preceding five years, that he succeeded almost without an effort. The Home Rule Bill was accepted joyfully in all quarters.

Immediately the new move failed. A sufficient number of Liberals went into revolt in the House of Commons to secure the defeat of Gladstone's Home Rule Bill of 1886. they were permanently estranged and remained outside and hostile to the Liberal party. Worse still, Irish home rule was the issue in the general election of 1886, which followed the defeat of the Home Rule Bill. The anti-home rule forces swept the polls in Britain or, more exactly, in England. English opinion, in particular, proved itself anti-Irish. But the long term prospects were good and they steadily improved.

From 1886 on, the Liberal and Parnellite parties were firm allies. Every Irish measure in parliament received Liberal support and for the first time in history — the whole system of British Government and coercion in Ireland was steadily and systematically criticised and often opposed by one of the great British parties. This in itself had two consequences of significance. It rendered coercion in Ireland largely ineffective. In fact, the Conservative government had the worst of both worlds. As self-proclaimed strong men, they had to keep up the facade in Ireland. But, in fact, they were largely on the defensive because of the extremely heavy parliamentary pressure to which they were subjected.

As Parnell noted to a friend, this was the ideal Parnellite situation. There was enough repression for Irish militancy, but not nearly enough either to destroy Irish organisation or to revive Irish militarism. Irish militancy without Irish militarism was Parnell's objective. He also pointed out that it was a great mistake to suppose that Ireland could not be coerced effectively and, indeed, permanently by Britain. But he said, 'This will never happen while Britain has a two-party system'.

At any rate, the Tories, having ruled out the genuineness of the desire for legislative independence and having proclaimed that this was something that the Irish did not really want, something sold to them by their charlatans of politicians, were impelled to provide an alternative mode of governing Ireland, the mode later to be known as attempting to kill home rule by kindness. The theory was that the nationalists could be outbid on purely political and constitutional issues if one went for economic and social reform.

Hence we get the paradox that the major legislative concessions of the late nineteenth century, from an Irish point of view, came from Tories, not from Liberals. Not least was this noticeable in the issue of land where the pressures produced continuous rounds of reduction in the levels of rent, further Acts wiping out arrears of rent and, most important of all, the beginning of land purchase, of the transference of Irish land to the tenants. It also began an attempt at economic and social re-invigoration of the so-called congested districts — the most barren and poverty-stricken areas in Ireland — and the beginning of state planning and investment.

All this was far beyond what the Liberals had conceded and, in assailing the land effectively, the Tories were destroying the first basis of British power over the south and west of Ireland, namely the land system. The Tories, having denied national government, also felt impelled to increase the popular element in local government and so, paradoxically and ironically, turned out to be the local government reformers. In education, again they gave what the Irish party had been demanding — more and more denominationalism in the national education system.

In Irish terms, the years 1885 to 1890, the Tory years, produced immense gains, equal perhaps to the total achievements of the previous 85 years. Certainly, in the decade of the 1880s as a whole, Parnell's decade, more was achieved than in the preceding 80 years.

Meanwhile Parnell's policy was making headway in terms of the largest issue of all. The tide turned against the Conservatives soon after at the general election of 1886. There followed an unbroken run of Conservative defeats at the by-elections of 1887; it continued right through 1888; it continued through 1889. By 1890 it seemed certain that a new election could not be long postponed and still more certain that when it came the Liberals would be swept back to power on the Home Rule issue and the battle would then be transferred to the House of Lords.

A few weeks in the autumn of 1890 — and particularly in Parnell's fatal and favourite and destined and doomed month, October — destroyed all these trends and prospects. Politically speaking, with them it destroyed Parnell himself.

I am sure the human story is very familiar to you all. Since 1881 Parnell had kept Mrs Kitty O'Shea, the wife of an Irish Liberal MP, as his mistress and had children by her. Probably in the hope of financial gain — and quite possibly with the connivance of or conspiracy by the Tory central office in London — O'Shea took divorce proceedings at last in 1889 and, in the following autumn, succeeded with Parnell cited as co-respondent.

It was an accepted convention of British politics in 1890 that any person publicly demonstrated to be an adulterer must leave public life. The idea that such a person would remain as a political leader seemed altogether inconceivable. It was only three years before that Sir Charles Dilke, who was confidently predicted by many to be the likeliest successor to Gladstone and the leadership of the Liberal Party, was politically ruined forever in similar circumstances to Parnell's.

Parnell, however, treated the convention as he treated other British conventions. He determined, obviously, to defy the convention from the outset and, after months of disengagement, he now suddenly became a whirlwind of activity. He acted like lightning. He

secured an endorsement from his parliamentary party by a series of rapid manoeuvres — organised, ruthless, with a clear purpose. He secured the parliamentary party. Next he secured the Irish nationalist press by the same means. Then he secured, in effect, the Catholic hierarchy and priesthood. The privately disapproved, as indeed did the majority of Irish MPs and an even greater majority of Irish editors, of the retention of Parnell, but the Church refused to make any public pronouncement. In effect, it was acquiescing in the decision.

This left only Gladstone and the Liberal Party to be conquered or out-manoeuvred. At first it looked as if Parnell's audacity might triumph here, too. The majority of the leadership and of the rank and file might well have acquiesced, however distastefully, if the chain reaction kept going. Above all, Gladstone and almost every member of his Cabinet had known about Parnell's liaison for years and had indeed used Mrs O'Shea as an intermediary. The decisive change in the situation, however, came when the non-conformist organisations spoke out.

Non-conformity was as vital to the Liberal Party at most stages in the nineteenth century as, say, the trade union movement was to labour parties, or the Catholic Church was to nineteenth century Irish nationalist parties. When it made its direct threat not only to desert the Liberals but also to fight them if Parnell was retained as leader of the Irish party, it would have destroyed the Liberal organisations throughout Great Britain from top to bottom. Gladstone submitted to this pressure. In effect, he told the Irish party that he would be forced to resign if Parnell were retained as leader.

This left the Irish parliamentary party with an agonising choice. It was a choice which Parnell did not ease them with. He fought unscrupulously and indefatigably. He would accept no word or discussion of compromise of *modus vivendi*. He would not resign. He used all the skills of obstruction which he had employed in the House of Commons, in the committee rooms in which this battle was raging. He was dismissed, in effect, from the chairmanship in the end by a 2:1 majority. He continued his struggle with satanic fury. In fact, the Lucifer metaphor is very apt for Parnell at this stage:

... What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable will ...
And courage never submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?
(Milton, *Paradise Lost* I, 105)

The Irish Catholic Church, the Irish nationalist press, with a few exceptions in each case, and the bulk of the Irish electorate was against him. He lost every by-election in the remaining year of his life — badly, by a majority of 2:1 — but he fought unwaveringly until his sudden and tragic death within a year. He died believing that within four years he would once again be what he was called earlier: the uncrowned king of Ireland.

The aftermath was absolutely disastrous for conventional Irish nationalism. Twenty years passed before the new divisions, conflicts and personal hatreds, now compounding the old divisions which had been released again, began to die down. Home Rule was a lost cause for two decades. Ineffectuality reigned again. In a sense, it is not unfair to say that these were direct and necessary consequences of Parnell's superlative leadership.

I have mentioned his achievements fully already. His own achievement, as a study in the art of power, the art of politics, was obviously, at least to me, of the very highest order. The scale may have been Lilliputian and the time very short, but I think it can be compared without absurdity to that of Bonaparte or Bismarck.

Parnell's manipulation of the forces of his time, his sense of the possible and judgment of timing were all unerring until the end. Yet I think it is at least arguable that his leadership was disastrous for Irish independence. Almost all contemporary sympathisers, subsequent sympathisers and historians are romantic sympathisers with Parnell; indeed posterity has been won by Parnell. But nearly all of those who were involved or who involved themselves later either admitted or would admit that Parnell should have taken the course which was offered to him of resigning his leadership and, for a time at least, leading the Party from behind.

By 1890 the whole Irish strategy of a half decade had been concentrated on one thing — the Liberal alliance. There was no alternative strategy available or likely to be developed for several years. To defy the Liberal Party seemed to be to destroy all prospects of home Rule in the nineteenth century. Even worse perhaps was Parnell's almost wanton defiance of his own Party and of his own nation and his careless creation, inflaming and embittering, of antagonisms within both.

Parnell did these ultimately disastrous things, in Irish nationalist terms, because of his type of leadership. The next great constitutional Irish leader, Arthur Griffith, was a lifelong Parnellite, yet, interestingly, the two things that he hated were the cult of personality and the Westminster method — the concentration of Irish agitation in the House of Commons. As far as Parnell was concerned, the writing was on the wall as early as 1886 when he forced his Party to give an Irish nationalist seat to the hated O'Shea because O'Shea was blackmailing him over his liaison.

From 1887 and 1888 onwards, Parnell became increasingly careless, reckless and arrogant. He began to ignore Parliament for months on end. He disappeared mysteriously. His lieutenants and followers could not get a line from him. He lived under false names. He was contemptuous of all possible Irish opposition. All this rested on the well-rounded assumption of his own indispensability as the engineer and the guarantor of the Liberal commitment to Home Rule of 1886.

So, like the Greek tragedy, the nation and the leader moved to a doom together, a doom apparently implicit in the dangerous relationship which had developed between the two. I suppose in the fullest sense, the engineer was hoist with his own petard — the engineer being Parnell, the petard being the Liberal involvement. As to the man himself, I think it is impossible to avoid Acton's most threadbare but also never impertinent aphorism: Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.