

Limerick Constitutional Nationalism,
1898-1918

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Change and Continuity

By

Tadhg Moloney

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the evolution of constitutional nationalism in Limerick city from the late nineteenth century till the decisive election of 1918. It originates from a previous study of the experience of the city during the years 1914-1918, a study that looked at the effects of the First World War on the social, economic and political shape of Limerick. In that previous study, it was apparent that a major political change had taken place in 1918 when the hitherto dominant Irish Party was replaced by the Sinn Féin activists. This raised questions as to whether this change was the result of short or long term factors. Had the advanced nationalists (a term used to describe those who espoused separatist and usually physical force nationalism) been developing their strength over a long period, or was the 1918 change the result of the emotions roused by the 1916 rising and the anti-conscription crisis? What exactly had constitutional nationalism achieved in the city over the previous decades? And who were the constitutionalists?

The decision to trace these developments from the later years of the nineteenth century was determined by the identity of the man who represented Limerick city in the Imperial Parliament. He was Michael Joyce, who had entered politics first in the early 1890s as an Anti-Parnellite, but then moved temporarily into more radical circles in the later years of the decade, becoming a member of the 'Labour' party led by the ex-Fenian and abrasive but charismatic Limerick man, John Daly. Joyce soon moved out of this group and into mainstream moderate constitutional nationalism, winning the 1900 election and continuing to represent the city until the dramatic events of 1918. His career, therefore, spanned the entire period during which constitutional nationalism reigned almost unopposed over Limerick city.

His career prompted further questions. Was Joyce primarily a nationalist or a local politician? How did he maintain his popular appeal? What role did forces like the Catholic Church and the party machinery (centered on the United Irish League) play in his political life? Broader issues were also considered, including the interlinking of municipal and national politics and the issues that shaped popular nationalism in Limerick city over the course of two decades. How important, for example, was the influence of the centenary commemorations of the

rebellion of 1798? And what about the political reaction to the Boer War in a garrison city?

It was also necessary to consider how constitutional nationalism was challenged from within. Over the course of the two decades examined, many of those who supported Joyce and the United Irish League also became members of other organizations that, though supporting the Home Rule idea, prioritised other issues like cultural identity and economic revival. While these were not incompatible with Home Rule, the study examines whether they diverted from it to become influential in pushing some elements in local society towards a more radical nationalism. The study also asks whether political enthusiasm was as great as contemporary newspapers made out, and whether it was, except at election time, an irrelevance to many.

This study is influenced by a number of scholarly works in the area. Michael Laffan's *Resurrection of Ireland* analyses the evolution of radical nationalist politics in the post-1916 years.¹ At a local level, a great deal of understanding of the period is to be got from Morrissey's biography of Bishop Dr. Edward O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick particularly in relation to the interaction between the Catholic Church and politics in Limerick in the period.² Equally valuable as a profile of politically active priests is the thesis by Tobin on the priests of the Limerick diocese.³ Insights on the evolution of Limerick municipal government are available in two works by Potter on the corporation and mayoralty of the city.⁴ A number of recent studies, still unpublished but available in thesis form, have also given some very useful parallels for the examination of constitutional politics in early twentieth century Ireland. These include work by McConnell and Wheatley on the role and composition of the Irish Parliamentary Party.⁵ Most valuable of all, however, is Maume's *Long*

¹ Laffan, Michael, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Fein Party 1916 – 1923* (Cambridge, 1999).

² Morrissey, Thomas, *Bishop Edward O'Dwyer of Limerick, 1842-1917* (Dublin, 2003).

³ Tobin, Matthew. 'The Priests of the Diocese of Limerick 1878-1917' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Limerick, 2005).

⁴ Potter, Matthew, *The Government and the People of Limerick: The History of Limerick Corporation/Council 1197-2006* (Limerick, 2006); and *First Citizens of the Treaty City: The Mayors and Mayoralty of Limerick 1197- 2007* (Limerick, 2007).

⁵ McConnell, James Richard Redmond. 'The View from the Backbench: Irish Nationalist MPs and their Work, 1910-1914' (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham, 2002); Wheatley, Michael. 'Right Behind Mr. Redmond:

Gestation that, covering precisely the same period as this study, examines the ‘silent rise’ of the various dissident groups that eventually elbowed the Irish Party aside in the 1918 election.⁶ The primary sources that form the basis of this study can be divided into three main groups. First there are the local newspapers, the Conservative or Unionist *Limerick Chronicle*, which gives insights into the attitudes of the local Protestant minority and acts as a counterbalance to the reporting of the nationalist press. The latter include the *Limerick Leader*, rhetorically quite radical – supporting the 1798 centenary, and the Daly ‘Labour’ Party at the end of the nineteenth century, but actually quite moderate and constitutionalist, becoming predominantly Redmondite in the years after 1900. The *Munster News* was equally moderate, but seems more clerical in orientation and so gives some interesting insights into the denominational side of local politics. Other papers, most of them lasting for only a few years, are useful for analyzing the composition and attitudes of minority political groups – these include *The Cork Free Press*, *Young Ireland*, *The United Irishman* and *The Cork Accent*.

The second main group includes the minute books of organisations as well as the private papers and correspondence of leading public men of the day. These include the papers of John Redmond and John Dillon, both of which collections contain quite a lot (though scattered) of correspondence relating to Limerick, most of it linked with the parliamentary representative of the city, Michael Joyce. From a different perspective, the minute books of Sinn Féin, both at national level and in terms of the Limerick *Comhairle Ceanntair*, give information on the identity and outlook of some of the dissident nationalists, i.e. those with a more separatist orientation.

The third main group is the invaluable set of Police Inspectors’ Reports in the Colonial Office Paper collection (CO 904) and the parallel Crime Branch Special Papers. One can see a difference between these two sources, the Police Inspectors’ Reports being far more sanguine about local political activists than were the more paranoid reports of the Crime Branch detectives. Both together give valuable information on the political atmosphere in Limerick city at any given time in the period studied, as well as the identity and background of political activists.

Nationalism and the Irish Party in Provincial Ireland 1910-14’ (Unpublished Ph.D. University of Surrey, 2002).

⁶ Maume, Patrick. *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life 1891-1918* (Dublin, 1999).

Limerick Politics before 1890

Limerick city on the eve of the twentieth century was a centre of slowly increasing population, moderate economic prosperity and political flux. Its population had risen just under three percent over the past decade, though there was to be a further 2.5 percent increase over the following twenty years.⁷

In terms of physical structure, there was also a moderate increase in the size of the city. By the late eighteenth century, just as in Cork, a number of villas appeared to the south of the city, while further villas were built on the north side of the river after the 1840s.⁸ Towards the end of the nineteenth century there was further expansion, especially from the 1860s when such schemes as Summerville Terrace, South Circular Road and Rose Terrace being built in 1869 and 1878 respectively, expanding the city towards the southern bank of the River Shannon. The last decade of the century saw further expansion with the building of St. Alphonsus Terrace in Quin Street (not far from the southern bank of the river Shannon) in 1892 and Clareview Terrace, South Circular Road in 1896. The city also spread westwards, with Grattan Villas and Garryowen Villas off Mulgrave Street being erected in 1895 and 1897 respectively. The twentieth century saw a further increase in construction with County View Terrace, Ballinacurra, O'Connell Terrace, O'Connell Avenue, Verona Esplanade, off O'Connell Avenue and Ashbourne Villas, South Circular Road all being built in 1903, 1904, 1910 and 1913, almost all of this development extending the city in a southwardly direction. All of these establishments catered for the upwardly mobile strata of society. There was also some building of working class dwellings, most notably in the city centre or on the periphery of the built-up area, with Bishop Street off Athlunkard Street, and O'Donovan Rossa Avenue off Mulgrave Street built in 1908 and 1913 respectively. The greater part of this expansion derived from the

⁷ *Census of Ireland, Province of Munster, City of Limerick* 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911; *Department of Industry and Commerce: Saorstát Eireann, Census of Population 1926* (Dublin 1930). Ages and conjugal conditions classified by occupations and industries. The city's population had risen steadily from 37,155 in 1891 by 996 to 38,151 or 2.61 per cent in 1901. By 1911 it had further increased by 366 to 38,517 or 1.05 percent and by 1926 39,448 – a mere rise of 2.4 percent over the previous fifteen years.

⁸ Hill, Judith, *The Building of Limerick* (Cork 1991), p. 168; Fahy, Angela, 'Place and class in Cork' in O'Flanagan, Patrick and Buttimer, Cornelius G, *Cork: History and Society* (Dublin, 1993), p. 797; Daly, Mary E, *Dublin: the Deposed Capital: A social and economic history 1860-1914* (Cork, 1985), p. 118.

increasing prominence of the commercial class or upwardly mobile white collar workers and resulted in the spread of the city southwards with a wave of terrace building, much the same as that in Dublin and Cork at the same period. This increasing building activity was reflected in the growing number of builders working in the city. In 1881 according to the census for that year there were twenty builders registered and by 1891 this had increased by 76.92 per cent to twenty-six. But by 1926 the number had contracted to seven, possibly due to the amalgamation of smaller businesses as much as to a fall-off in building.⁹

Economically, according to the trade directories of the time, Limerick was a city where trade and commerce flourished. This was very evident in the number of major industries that it could boast of and the employment that they gave. By 1890 its harbour had undergone a complete overhaul with the construction of floating and graving docks, costing £80,000 and £21,000 respectively. This lent itself to the importation of large stocks of timber, coal, grain, salt and tobacco. The main employers of labour by the end of the nineteenth century, along with the railways, were bacon processing, represented by the four major establishments of Denny's, Matterson's, O'Mara's and Shaw's, employing an approximate thousand workers between them; tanning, particularly the two establishments owned by O'Donnell's and O'Callaghan's; Cleeve's Condensed Milk Company, employing about four hundred hands; Spaight's Saw Mills and Cooperage, which employed over two hundred people; the Limerick Clothing Factory, with around one thousand workers of various grades; the Limerick Distillery that employed around one hundred men; as well as several large timber yards, cooperages, drug companies and retailing establishments.¹⁰

Politics

Limerick city was predominantly Roman Catholic in composition, and becoming more so as the decades passed. Whereas Catholics had accounted for some eight-nine percent of the population from 1891 to 1901, the percentage was ninety-two percent by 1911 and 97 percent by 1926.¹¹ The denominational make-up was reflected in the political profile

⁹ *Saorstát Éireann, Census of Population 1926* (Dublin, 1930).

¹⁰ Stratten's. *Dublin, Cork and South of Ireland: A Literary, Commercial and Social Review* (London 1892), pp 275-304; *Limerick Chronicle* (cited hereafter as *L.C.*) 25 Oct 1898, 28 May, 7 June & 5 July 1910; *Limerick Leader* (cited hereafter as *L.L.*) 30 July 1897.

¹¹ The number of Catholics in the city's population in 1891 was 32,894; 33,977 in 1901; 34,865 in 1911; and 37,640 in 1926.

of the city, which, by the later nineteenth century, was largely controlled at both municipal and parliamentary levels by nationalists. The latter half of the nineteenth century saw Limerick city electorate break the unionist hold in its representation in the House of Commons at Westminster. Since the Act of Union in 1800 the city had one M.P., but this had been increased to two representatives on the eve of the general election of 1832 and thereafter the representation of the city was contested between Catholic liberals and largely Protestant conservatives, though there were some shades of grey between the two extremes.¹² This was to change during the last three decades of the century with the advent of the Home Government Association on 19 May 1870.¹³ In 1871 its founder, Isaac Butt, a Donegal man and a lawyer who had defended Fenian prisoners, was returned unopposed in a by-election in the city. The latent nationalism of the electorate that had hitherto been submerged had now come to the fore. Following on from this, Unionist political clout in Limerick city was at an end and Home Rulers continued to represent the city for the following three decades despite the best efforts of the conservative element.¹⁴

In the general election of 1874 in which they received twice as many votes as the conservatives, there were four Home Rule candidates. Out of a total electorate of 2,193, Isaac Butt, and Richard O'Shaughnessy received 1,704 (34.45 per cent) to the mere 587 votes for James Spaight who had represented the city for a brief period in 1858. The other two Home Rule candidates, Sir Peter Tait and Colonel C.S. Vereker received a combined vote of 533, the former having previously stood in the general election of 1868 as a liberal candidate.¹⁵ He was possibly one of the numerous Home Rulers that F.S.L. Lyons described as remaining intrinsically liberal despite a nominal support of Home Rule.¹⁶ Spaight continued to be the great loser on the political scene in Limerick city, contesting two by-elections in 1879 and 1883 and general elections in 1880 and 1885, after which he bowed out. In all these contexts he received a consistent vote of around six hundred (or thirty percent of the total) with the exception of the by-election of 1883 when he only secured 473 votes.¹⁷

In the general election of 1885 Spaight again received just under six hundred votes (now only twelve percent of the total due to the enlargement

¹² Walker, Brian M. (ed.) *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978) pp. 224-225 & 292.

¹³ Jackson, Alvin. *Home Rule: An Irish History 1800 – 2000* (London, 2004) p. 31.

¹⁴ Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, pp. 280-300.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 292-293.

¹⁶ Lyons, F. S. L. *Ireland Since the Famine* (London, 1985) p. 155.

¹⁷ Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, pp. 293 & 360.

of the franchise and the redistribution of seats under the 1885 act and saw the representation of Limerick city again reduced to one seat.¹⁸ The electoral defeat of Spaight (who was also the last member of the Conservative minority to fill the post of mayor) was the sign of permanently changed political times.¹⁹ As the Home Rule mayor of the city, Stephen O'Mara, put it to a meeting of the Limerick city branch of the National League after the contest:

They had the general election and the usual old horses were trotted out. Mr Spaight once more came forward. Well, they had walloped and battered him and again kicked him out. As a certain gentleman remarked, he was like a cat with nine lives. They killed him eight times, and the last was the ninth. He hoped they would not have to kill him again.²⁰

Though Spaight's defeat was guaranteed in the rising Home Rule enthusiasm of the time, his position and reputation as a successful local businessman might have brought him electoral success in different circumstances.²¹ The Home Rulers, on the other hand, had to rely on candidates from outside the city, e.g. Edward McMahan who replaced Richard O'Shaughnessy as one of the MPs for the city in the by-election of 1883, and Henry Joseph Gill, Roebuck House, County Dublin, elected as the city MP in the general election of 1885, both of whom were chosen at small private meetings in advance of the ostensibly democratic public selection conventions.²² McMahan was chosen behind closed doors by a private selection group, a choice that went down badly at the public meeting held afterwards.²³ Dermot Meleady has shown that local ambition was frequently overridden by 'the placing of the choice of candidates in the hands of the leader and a few confidants as the best guarantee of a strong party', so that 'The links binding a potential candidate to a particular constituency for family, historical or other reasons were no longer sacrosanct'.²⁴ Cronin has similarly pointed out in

¹⁸ *ibid.* pp. xi – xii.

¹⁹ *L.C.* 21 Jan 1892.

²⁰ *L.C.* 5 Dec 1885.

²¹ *L.C. L.C.* 18 March 1880; 21 Nov 1885 21 Jan 1892.

²² *L.C.* 28 Nov 1885 & Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, pp. 129 & 132; *L.C.* 21 Nov 1885; 14 March 1891. Richard O'Shaughnessy had resigned the seat on being appointed registrar of petty sessions clerk. He was appointed Commissioner of Public Works in 1891. Roebuck House, incidentally, was later to become the home of Maud Gonne McBride and her son, Sean McBride.

²³ *L.C.* 21 Nov 1885.

²⁴ Meleady, Dermot. *Redmond: The Parnellite*. (Cork, 2008) p. 96.

both the Cork and Limerick contexts that there was a good deal of local discontent at the propensity of the Home Rule movements centralising tactics and in particular Parnell's inclination to foist strangers as candidates on the city's election for parliamentary representation.²⁵ However, as the *Limerick Leader*, the most influential local mouthpieces of Home Rule put it, 'the question at present was not one of supporting local men but the National cause of Ireland.'²⁶ The propensity to exalt the national over the local was obvious in 1885 when the only local nomination to be placed before the selection convention was John McInerney, a farmer from Cratloemoyle, Cratloe, County Clare, closely acquainted with the city and its environs, and an active member of the Limerick Board of Guardians, but it was alleged that due to the intervention of C.S. Parnell and P. N. Fitzgerald, of Cork, McInerney withdrew and the outsider Henry Gill's nomination was placed before the convention.²⁷

This victory of Home Rule candidates was not peculiar to Limerick city, and with the exception of the major towns in the north eastern part of the country and Dublin University, which were unionist enclaves, all the other important towns or cities had similarly transferred their allegiance to Home Rule representation in the 1870s. In Cork city the by-election in 1872 and the general election of 1874 saw Home Rule victorious, and although a Conservative candidate gained a seat in the 1876 election, the ensuing contest of 1880 saw the seat returned to the Home Rule fold where it remained thereafter.²⁸ Galway and Waterford had to wait until the 1874 general election for the opportunity to return a Home Ruler, and Tralee until 1880 when the O'Donoghue, who had previously won the elections of 1865, 1868 and 1874 as a liberal, won on a Home Rule ticket.²⁹

When Parnell took over as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party on 17 May 1881, he instituted a policy of discipline and vigorous leadership within the party, a strategy which had been repugnant to Isaac Butt.³⁰ This code was to ensure that any prospective Home Rule candidate who

²⁵ Cronin, Maura. 'Parnellism and Workers: Cork and Limerick' in (eds). Lane, Fintan and O' Drisceoil, Donal. *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945* (Hampshire, 2005) p. 145.

²⁶ *L.C.* 24 Nov 1885.

²⁷ *L.C.* 21 Nov 1885 & Bassett, William. *Limerick City and County and Principal Towns of Clare, Tipperary and Kerry Directory, 1880-1* (Limerick, n.d.) p. ix.

²⁸ Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, pp. 294-265.

²⁹ *ibid.* pp. 264, 282, 315 & 318.

³⁰ Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, p. 155.

presented himself for parliamentary honours had to take the party pledge before being selected.³¹ When the general election of 1885 was fought under the leadership of Parnell, the Limerick candidate and victor, as well as all of the contesting candidates in the country, no longer described themselves as Home Rulers but as nationalists. However, their agenda was the same, i.e. self-government for Ireland. Following on from this and before the split that was to tear the party asunder, two elections in Limerick city (a general election in 1886 and a by-election in 1888) were uncontested – a further sign of the demise of Unionism as a political force in the city.³²

Home Rule candidates continued to dominate the political landscape of Limerick city, with their vote rising over time, by the early 1890s gaining control of sixty percent of the vote and thus ensuring the demise of the conservative interest. There was an attempt to reinvigorate the unionist cause during the lead up to the 1892 election; with an editorial in the *Limerick Chronicle* declaring that ‘the present opportunity is one that should not be let pass’, meaning of course that the Parnell-related divisions among the nationalists should be exploited.³³ However, with the death of Spaight in January 1892, Limerick city unionists lost the motivation to contest elections.³⁴ There was an indication from James Fitzgerald Bannatyne, flour merchant, who had a large business located on the Dock Road that he was willing to contest the 1895 election on behalf of the unionist interest but this did not happen and it was not until 1900 that Unionists again contested Limerick city.³⁵

³¹ O’Brien, Conor Cruise. ‘The machinery of the Irish parliamentary party, 1880-85’ in *Irish Historical Studies Journal* Volume V, March 1946, p. 77.

³² Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 360.

³³ *L.C.* 21 June 1892.

³⁴ *L.C.* 21 Jan 1892.

³⁵ *L.C.* 13 July 1895. The *Chronicle* had copied this letter which had appeared in the *Irish Times* on the same day. James Fitzgerald Bannatyne had resided at Summerville, Limerick.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SHAKING OF CONSTITUTIONALISM, 1890-1902

The Parnellite Split

The animus that arose as a result of the rupture within the Irish Parliamentary Party soon made itself felt in what became an embittered decade-long civil war among constitutionalist nationalists.¹ On Wednesday 2 December 1891 the anti-Parnellites held a convention in Limerick city the attendance included such notable public men as William O'Brien, John Dillon, MPs and the three MPs for Limerick East, West and the City, John Finucane, William Abraham² and Francis O'Keefe. Three days before the meeting, placards from an unknown source were posted on walls around the city, whipping up public excitement by announcing that the men responsible for Parnell's death were coming to Limerick city: 'Independent Nationalists of Limerick, the men who drove our chief, Charles Stewart Parnell, to his grave, will attempt to parade their Whig policy before you in the City of Sarsfield...Will you tolerate their presence?' The Amnesty Committee whose membership was predominantly Parnellite, and who campaigned for the release of Fenian prisoners, were held responsible but denied having anything to do with it,

¹ The Parnellites adopted 'The Boys of Wexford' as their rallying song, while the anti-Parnellites chose 'God Save Ireland' as theirs.

² Waite, John E. *Peter Tait: A Remarkable Story* (Stoke sub Hamdon, 2005) pp. 288-289. William Abraham was the brother-in-law of Sir Peter Tait of the Limerick Army Clothing Factory located in Edward Street. He had been involved in the management of the factory until its sale in 1884 after which he became immersed in the political scene in Limerick. He was elected as the MP for Limerick West in the general election of 1885 under the leadership of C.S. Parnell and later represented Cork North-East and Dublin Harbour. He died in 1915 at the age of 75 years. His main claim to fame was that he instigated the split that was to tear the Irish Parliamentary Party asunder. He it was who proposed the motion for the removal of Parnell as leader of the party.

while counter-placards declared that ‘a scandalous and atrocious placard has been extensively posted through the city to offer insult and outrage to the distinguished Nationalists who are to visit Limerick...That placard was an insult to the patriotism of the citizens...’³

The first real indicator of how deep the division in the party had gone in terms of parliamentary representation came seven months later, during the general election of 1892, when the sitting MP for Limerick city, the anti-Parnellite Francis O’Keeffe, faced a challenge from Patrick O’Brien. It is significant that O’Brien was the former MP for Monaghan North, indicating that the Parnellites lacked political clout in Limerick city in that they had no popularly acceptable local public figure to stand for election – something on which the anti-Parnellite O’Keeffe was quick to make capital during the campaign:

Would the people of Limerick disgrace themselves by returning as their representative the outcast of another constituency, who would not be nominated by his own people, and was he [Mr. O’Keeffe, who had been their representative for four years, who served them in the highest capacity as their Chief Magistrate for three years – was he who had no fault either politically or personally to be thrown aside and discarded for a stranger. The proposition was so ridiculous and humiliating to put before the people of the city that he could scarcely bring himself to seriously argue it.⁴

When the anti-Parnellite MP for Cork North-East, William O’Brien, came to Limerick a few days later and addressed another meeting on behalf of O’Keeffe, the local argument was again to the fore. O’Brien spoke very much on the same theme of the opposition candidate as being not only an intruder but also a man who, unaccustomed to the problems of the city, aimed to take away the seat ‘held by an old Limerick man’, and warned the electors that to allow the seat to be taken by ‘Mr. Pat O’Brien at the present moment would be as fatal a step to the cause of Ireland as if you were to elect Colonel Saunderson’. He then skillfully used a ploy frequently resorted to by public speakers in the context of Limerick politics, i.e. he used an aspect of history familiar locally, equating the Parnellite candidate to William of Orange who had laid siege to the city in the seventeenth century

You are the sons of the men of Limerick who held Limerick’s walls against all the cannon of King William, and your forefathers would turn in their graves if there was the slightest fear you would surrender its ancient

³ *L.C.* 1 Dec 1891.

⁴ *L.C.* 2 July 1892.

walls to the enemies of Irish freedom... This ancient stronghold, which met King William's Brandenburgers in the breach is not going to go down before the Liliputian pop guns of Mr. Pat O'Brien ...⁵

For his part the Parnellite candidate Patrick O'Brien, played the unity rather than the local card, reminding the electorate of Parnell's policy of 'independence of any British Party'.⁶ In the heel of the hunt, the election held on 7 July 1892 saw O'Keefe returned as MP for Limerick city with a majority of three hundred votes over his opponent, the result being 1,878 votes for O'Keefe and 1,490 for O'Brien.⁷ Despite this majority, and despite the failure to find a local Parnellite candidate, it is plain to see that there was quite a strong Parnellite following in the city.

The position of Parnellism was strengthened locally by the publicity given it by the *Limerick Leader* newspaper. The *Leader*, established on 9 August 1889, had flawless nationalist credentials. It was set up as a Parnellite Party newspaper to cater for the counties of Limerick and Clare by Jeremiah Buckley who was himself a staunch Parnellite, and its first editor was John McEnery, a native of Tralee, County Kerry, who was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment in 1890 for subscribing to the twin objects of boycotting and intimidation in his newspaper during the Plan of Campaign.⁸ McEnery had had an interesting and varied career. Having joined the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1882, he lasted in the force for only two months, when he got into some trouble at the Depot and consequently resigned. He then enlisted in the army: that too did not last and his father secured his discharge in 1883. Following on from these two misadventures he decided on a journalistic career, and was employed on the staff of the *Kerry Sentinel*, *Kerry Evening Post*, and *Kerry Weekly Reporter* respectively, and in 1887 received employment with the *Freeman's*

⁵ L.C. 5 July 1892, Hickey, D.J. & Doherty, J.E. *A New Dictionary of Irish History from 1800* (Dublin, 2003) p. 429 & Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, pp. 115 & 130. Colonel Saunderson had been initially elected as a Liberal Member of Parliament for Co. Cavan in 1865 but defected to the Conservatives. He was to represent Co. Cavan in that capacity until 1874 when he was defeated in the general election of that year by Home Rule candidates. He was later to represent Armagh North from 1885 to 1906 when he died. He joined the Orange Order in 1882 and organised Ulster Unionists to resist Home Rule and invited Lord Randolph Churchill to Belfast to speak in opposition to the measure.

⁶ L.C. 28 June 1892.

⁷ Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 147.

⁸ Jones, Siobhan. 'The War of the Words: Limerick's media in the 1890s' in Lee, David & Jacobs, Debbie (eds.) *Made in Limerick: History of Trade and Commerce*, Volume I (Limerick, 2003) pp. 218-19.

Journal and from there was appointed editor of the *Limerick Leader* on the date of its establishment.⁹

The *Leader* was the main mouthpiece of Parnellism in Limerick. It was in its pages that *The Parnellite*, a monthly newspaper magazine, and *United Ireland*, the leading Parnellite national weekly journal, were advertised at local level.¹⁰ It was also the main organ for more advanced nationalists to enter the political arena in 1895 when Limerick was to have the unique distinction of hosting both a general election and a by-election, the latter being fought within a couple of months as a direct result of the outcome of the first, and both contests were as bitter as that fought in 1892. At the centre of the political quarrelling of 1895 was the issue of the candidature of John Daly, the Limerick Irish Republican Brotherhood member who was in Portland Prison for alleged dynamiting offences. It had been decided that putting Daly forward for election would strengthen the campaign to have him released from prison.¹¹ The impending contest provided a potentially unifying focus for the opposing nationalist political groups in the city when the calling of the general election for 13 July 1895 saw a deputation of members of the Amnesty Movement, many of whom were Parnellites, make overtures to the anti-Parnellites in Limerick for an assurance that there would not be any opposition to John Daly as the representative for the city. They indicated that the purpose for such a move was to indicate to the government of the day that Daly had had the undivided support of his fellow citizens and that if the anti-Parnellites accepted this proposition no rival Parnellite candidate would be put forward. In this they had the full backing of the leader of the Parnellites, John Redmond, who declared that he, could ‘count on the enthusiastic support of our party’ and that ‘surely the Federation [anti-Parnellites] party will join in striking this blow for amnesty’.

Unity was not so easy to achieve, however. The anti-Parnellites intimated that, much as they admired Daly, they considered a convicted felon would not be allowed to retain his seat – which, should a Unionist candidate be put forward, would deprive nationalist Limerick of a representative. They therefore put forward their own candidate, the incumbent city MP, Francis O’Keeffe. When it turned out that O’Keeffe would not stand unless his expenses were recompensed, and when no Unionist candidate materialised, the anti-Parnellites withdrew O’Keeffe’s

⁹ CO 904/18. List of Suspects. Police file on John McEnery

¹⁰ *L.L.* 7 Jan 1895.

¹¹ *L.L.* 30 April 1894 & *L.C.* 1 May 1894.

candidature on nomination day.¹² In an effort to paper over the deep divisions that had emerged during the squabble about the candidature, the two sides marched together in a pro-Daly demonstration through the streets of the city accompanied by the bands, and laid specific emphasis on the inclusion of St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band due to its longstanding proclivity with the anti-Parnellites.¹³

The anti-Parnellites fears turned out to be well founded, however. John Daly's time as the city's representative was to be short lived as within a month of the election he was declared to be 'incapable of being elected or returned as a member of this House [of Commons]' as he had been found guilty of a criminal offence and incarcerated in prison for life and consequently was unable to submit the returning officer's authentication in parliament.¹⁴ Thus Daly joined the popular pantheon of those who had been similarly treated, such as O'Donovan Rossa, in 1870, John Mitchel, in 1875 and Michael Davitt, in 1882.¹⁵ More importantly, the old Parnellite and anti-Parnellite divisions re-emerged in Limerick city politics, the anti-Parnellites fielding O'Keefe again, and the Parnellites putting forward Joseph Nolan, who had represented the North Louth constituency following the general elections of 1885 and 1886 and unsuccessfully contested the same seat in the election of July 1895.¹⁶ The campaign was used by John Redmond, visiting Limerick to support Nolan, as a whip with which to beat the Anti-Parnellites, while the pro-Parnellite *Limerick Leader* showed how bitter the contest was when it discredited O'Keefe by publishing a letter written by Daly in 1892, where he compared O'Keefe's refusal to support John Redmond's parliamentary motion for the release of the political prisoners to the actions of the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan: 'I will not dwell on the contempt in which this priest and Levite have been held by the whole Christian world. But to think that the dear old city of Limerick should be represented in the London Parliament by a Levite is indeed painful'.¹⁷

Further local complications were created, and the deep divisions within the Amnesty Movement itself were revealed, when an anti-Parnellite election meeting in the city was addressed by James Daly, a brother of

¹² *L.L.* 1, 3, 5, 10 July 1895; *L.C.* 4, 6 & 11 July 1895; TCD. John Dillon Papers Mss 6775-87/387.

¹³ *L.L.* 15 July 1895.

¹⁴ *L.L.* 15 July 1895 & *L.C.* 6 Aug 1895.

¹⁵ *L.L.* 21 Aug 1895.

¹⁶ CO 904/18. List of Suspects. Police file on Joseph Nolan, MP & Walker, Brian M. (ed.) *Parliamentary Election Results*, pp. 134, 140, 364.

¹⁷ *L.L.* 6 Sept 1895.

John Daly, who alleged that Redmond's actions had ensured that the doors of the prison had been 'double locked' and 'if he thought that Mr. Redmond was sincere on the question of Amnesty he would right or wrong follow him'. He further asserted that he had no interest in the Liberals or Parnellites or anti-Parnellites that he was unconnected to any of them, being interested only in the release of his brother.¹⁸ Whether he realised it or not, by his presence on the anti-Parnellite platform he had bestowed support on the candidature of O'Keefe and his colleagues in the election. He may have been unaware of what his brother had said about the latter in 1892, or, as the Limerick Amnesty Association alleged some months later, had deliberately set out to subvert the work of the Amnesty Association after he had been expelled for denouncing. James F. Egan, another Fenian ex-prisoner.¹⁹

While O'Keefe won the election by 1,851 votes to 1,764 for Nolan, the margin was only by eighty-seven votes, a reduction of 295 on the election of 1892 when O'Keefe polled 1,878 to O'Brien's 1,490, giving him a much bigger majority of 388. There had been an increase in the electorate of 327 or ninety-four percent on that of 1892 and these were mainly in the urban area, yet 1,759 electors abstained from voting as against 1,675 in 1892, which meant that the Parnellites had reduced the overall majority of the anti-Parnellite vote in the intervening period.²⁰

The bitterness following the Parnellite split extended also into local municipal politics. Initially, of course, all nationalist members of the council had joined in support of Parnell with proclamations like that of Councillor David Begley, that 'it would be the blackest ingratitude on the part of Irishmen if they were to desert Mr Parnell in his hour of trial'.²¹ Within three weeks, however, former supporters had become bitter enemies, and within the borough council both sides vied for supremacy, with the anti-Parnellites having the majority at the outset. Of the twenty-four council members who came together on 16 December to debate the Parnell issue, sixteen took an anti-Parnell stance and were soon to form the nucleus of Limerick branch of the anti-Parnellite Irish National Federation, while eight members remained supporters of Parnell and formed a branch of what became known as the Irish National League, and later became the Independent League.²²

¹⁸ *L.C.* 10 Sept 1895.

¹⁹ *L.L.* 1 June 1896.

²⁰ *L.C.* 10, 12 Sept 1895. There is no way of knowing how either side would have fared had another election been held before the unification of 1900.

²¹ *L.C.* 22 November 1890.

²² *L.C.* 16 Dec 1890.

There were some desperate attempts by a number of council members to prevent an irreparable split. When one councillor (Begley, whose previous speech in favour of Parnell is noted above) attempted to prevent the Parnellite Mayor, Alderman Patrick Riordan, from presiding at a meeting to be addressed by Parnell on Sunday 11 January 1891, his resolution to this effect was opposed not only by the mayor and other Parnellite councillors, but also by the other anti-Parnellites on the council.²³ Four years later, Begley was still taking a lone stand against the efforts of more tolerant anti-Parnellite council members. This time he tried to frustrate the building of the band stand in the People's Park on the basis that its proposed construction was politically motivated and that no band other than a Redmondite band was likely to play there since the Park was located in an area that was Parnellite in the extreme. However, when the issue was voted upon, Begley's motion was defeated by twenty-three votes to seven, and though the Parnellites had come to dominate the Council at this stage, a number of those opposing Begley's motion were themselves anti-Parnellites.²⁴

Other attempts to bridge the divide between the groups were made from time to time – without necessarily diluting their respective attitudes on the Parnell issue. In the summer of 1895, for instance, the Parnellite mayor William Nolan, and the anti-Parnellite Alderman Stephen O'Mara, supported unanimously by the twenty-three members present, agreed to present an address of honour to the Archbishop of Cashel, Dr. Thomas Croke, on the occasion of his silver jubilee. It was to be made because 'he ...had always identified himself with the struggle of the masses of the people for the attainment of their national aspirations'.²⁵ It is not known whether this address was to lead to the conferral of the honorary freedom of the city or just an address. However, such conciliatory moves were not universally welcomed at local level and the Sarsfield Branch of the Parnellite Irish National League, believing it to be a conferral of the freedom, called upon the Parnellite members of the Council to prevent this from happening. While they were:

²³ *L.C.* 8 Jan 1891.

²⁴ *L.C.* 6 June 1895 & 23 May 1896. Although a plaque adorning the Band stand in the People's Park states that it was erected in 1895, it was officially opened on 22 May 1896 by the Mayor, William Nolan, his last official act in that capacity as the following day he became Town Clerk. Interestingly, the band that played at the opening was a military band, that of the Royal Irish Regiment.

²⁵ *L.L.* 5 July 1895.

Willing to suitably recognise the Most Rev. Dr. Croke's abilities and distinguished services as a churchman, we protest against the proposal that the members of Limerick Corporation should be called on to honour him as an Irish patriot... [since] the first Irishman who made a charge of national dishonesty against Parnell was the Most Rev. Dr. Croke.²⁶

Whether because of this popular outcry, or some other factor, Croke did not receive the honorary freedom of the city, and the evidence for this is that his name does not appear on the Honorary Roll of the Freedom of Limerick or subsequent lists of those conferred.²⁷

As in Cork, the Limerick Mayoralty became the main focus of Parnellite and Anti-Parnellite animosity from 1891 onwards, being predominantly fought on party political lines.²⁸ After the Parnellite Riordan's defeat by twenty votes to eighteen at the mayoral election for 1892, he tried to stop his successor, the anti-Parnellite Denis F. McNamara, from taking up the position on the date of inauguration, going so far as to threaten to have McNamara's name removed from the Burgess Roll to render him ineligible for any position on the Borough Council, and to reduce the anti-Parnellites slim majority on the Council.²⁹ On the other hand, the party alignments for mayoral elections were not as clear-cut as

²⁶ *L.L.* 10 July 1895.

²⁷ Limerick City Council. Copies of the relevant pages of the Honorary Roll of the Freedom of Limerick City that are in the possession of the author, which the City Council allowed the writer to digitally photograph.

²⁸ Cronin, Maura, *Country, Class or Craft?: The Politicisation of the Skilled Artisan in Nineteenth Century Cork* (Cork, 1994) p. 125, fn, 81.

²⁹ *L.C.* 1 Dec 1891. At this election, Alderman Riordan had received three votes from anti-Parnellites, who had for reasons not known broken ranks with their fellow members of the Council. On the other hand a Parnellite had voted for the opposition anti-Parnellite candidate, T. Mahon Cregan. *L.C.* 2 Feb 1892 & 27 Feb 1892. The terms of notice to prevent McNamara from taking up the position of the mayoralty was as follows; Sir – Take notice that on behalf of Alderman Riordan, Mayor of Limerick, I hereby caution you, as Mayor-elect for the city of Limerick for the year 1892, to abstain from assuming the position of Mayor, or in any way exercising the functions of Mayor for the year 1892, inasmuch as you are not legally entitled to fill the office of Mayor for said year; and take notice that Alderman Riordan is instituting legal proceedings in the Court of Queen's Bench for the purpose of declaring you ineligible for the office of Mayor for said year and that the said Alderman Riordan be declared re-elected Mayor for said year by said court. And take further notice that in case you assume the position or in any way exercise the functions of Mayor for said city, I will take such proceedings against you as may be advised, and will use this notice against you in any such proceedings. Dated this 30th Dec 1891.

appeared, and common business interests frequently proved more important than party. For example, while Bryan O'Donnell, a Parnellite, was returned as mayor between 1893 and 1895, some of the votes he received were from a mix of anti-Parnellites, Unionists and uncommitted members of the council.³⁰ Such cross-party votes were given to O'Donnell on the basis of his business prowess, his Unionist supporter, for instance, stating that he had known him before he became a member of the Council and that at any time he had met him 'he was always a real *sine qua non* in business'.³¹

But Parnellite strength in the council was also growing, and such was their voting strength that when the time for the election of mayor came in 1895, the anti-Parnellites did not nominate a candidate.³² When O'Donnell resigned the mayoralty in 1895, just over two months through his third year in office, in order to take up the position of city rate collector he was replaced by another Parnellite, Councillor W.M. Nolan, without a contest at a council meeting at which there was only twenty (fifty per cent of total council membership) present, the majority of whom were Parnellites. Interestingly, on this occasion too, there was cross-party cooperation, and Nolan received support from one of the anti-Parnellites present, James O'Mara of the local bacon merchant family.³³

The same combination of bitter political rivalry and cross-party voting was also very much in evidence when the position of Law Agent for the Borough Council became vacant in 1894. This job, by its very nature, had always been occupied by a solicitor and this occasion was no different, the two contestants vying for it being established legal men, Alderman John Dundon, anti-Parnellite and the Parnellite James Gaffney. While the Council vote on the new Law Agent ran largely on party lines, there were mavericks again, one Parnellite voting for the anti-Parnellite candidate, and two anti-Parnellites supporting the Parnellite. As in the case of the honouring of Archbishop Croke, the following year, the fallout from this appointment was an outcry from the political rank-and-file outside the council. One member of the Sarsfield Branch of the Irish National League [Parnellite] and an elector of the Customhouse Ward wrote an irate letter to the *Limerick Leader*, expressing his discontent at the absence of Parnellite members of the Council, and especially that of Richard A.

³⁰ Potter, *First Citizen*, p. 143. The declared Unionist was Alderman Gaffney, while Councillor Bernal was apparently not attached to any political group.

³¹ *L.C.* 1 Dec 1892. The three anti-Parnellites were Councillors M. Spain, P. Herbert and W.E. Counihan.

³² *L.C.* 25, 28 Nov, 2 Dec 1893 & 17, 27 Nov & 1 Dec 1894.

³³ *L.C.* 19 Feb 1895.

Gleeson, who was a member of the Executive of the Sarsfield League and whom he alleged had stated that he would be at the meeting and vote for Gaffney but failed to turn up. Furthermore, because of his dissatisfaction at Gleeson's action, he called upon him to resign his seat on the Council as 'he has broken the confidence placed in him, and with all common decency – if he possesses any – he should apply for the "Chiltern Hundreds"'.³⁴

It was outside the ranks of the council, however, that the bitter divisions between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites were most marked. The burgess roll was the main focus in this conflict, both sides seeking to have as many opposition names as possible removed in the immediate run-up to the elections. The number of electors in the city's eight electoral wards was exceptionally small in the period before the 1898 Local Government Act. In 1892, for example, the number of electors entitled to vote in the Customhouse Ward was sixty-six, while that in the Castle Ward was seventy-nine, the Market Ward had 153 voters and the Glentworth Ward had 101.³⁵ Because of the smallness of the electorate, the conflicts surrounding the burgess roll were quite personal and therefore bitter. For example, prior to the elections of 1892, Patrick O'Meally, T.C., an anti-Parnellite, sought to have the names of Francis, Joseph and James Gaffney, Parnellites, removed from the lists for the Market Ward on the basis that they were not resident occupants during the year prior to the 31 August, and had been struck off the Parliamentary register in the same ward.³⁶ William Nolan, T.C., who had represented the Castle Ward and was now standing for the representation of the Market Ward, alleged that the same Patrick O'Meally, who was his opponent, 'had sought to prevent Mr. Dan O'Connor, Gas Rate Collector from giving me his support by threatening to have him dismissed from his situation'.³⁷

The pattern of tit-for-tat objections continued during the lead into the local elections of 1893. In the Castle Ward the incumbent Councillor, William Bassett, who was classified as a neutral objected to the nomination paper of P. O'Donnell, Parnellite, on the grounds that one of the approving burgesses had not signed the paper. In the Customhouse Ward, John Hishon Moran, the solicitor representing the Parnellite candidate Richard A. Gleeson, lodged a protest against the nomination

³⁴ *L.L.* 18 May 1894. The Parnellite member who voted for Dundon was R. Smith and the two anti-Parnellite members who voted for Gaffney were P. Herbert and J. Anglim.

³⁵ *L.C.* 26 Nov 1892.

³⁶ *L.C.* 25 Oct 1892.

³⁷ *L.C.* 24 Nov 1892.

paper of the anti-Parnellite candidate, John O'Donnell on the basis that the name of the ward was not on it. To counteract this M. McCoy, the solicitor representing the anti-Parnellite candidate, objected to Gleeson's nomination because his nomination paper did not set out his name in full. These objections were in the main overruled or it was decided that the elections should be conducted on their merits. The one exception involved the anti-Parnellite John Kivlehan versus the Parnellite James Gilligan, for a seat in the representation of the Market Ward. It was argued by counsel for Gilligan that Kivlehan 'had described himself as No 120 on the Burgess list, whereas his number was 121', a seemingly petty objection that the mayor upheld and Gilligan was elected without a contest.³⁸ Paradoxically, however, just as business interests over-rode political animosities, the existence of such enmity between both sides could also be bridged by individuals' common sociability, the two sides coming together for the mayoral banquet in Cruises Hotel hosted by the Parnellite Bryan O'Donnell after he was installed as mayor on 2 January 1893. At this celebratory meal political differences were set aside and thirty-two members of the Council from both sides of the political divide attended, including the city's anti-Parnellite MP, Francis O'Keeffe.³⁹

The most violent manifestation of the divisions between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites were at popular level. For example, a meeting of the Irish National Federation in the Town Hall in June 1892 in favour of the city's sitting anti-Parnellite MP, Francis O'Keeffe, was broken up by the Parnellites wielding sticks.⁴⁰ It had been previously alleged that O'Keeffe had pledged his allegiance to Parnell 'to the death', but for some unapparent reason he 'found it necessary to change his opinion'.⁴¹ As was the case in other cities, specific areas in the city, and particular leisure associations were known to be in favour of one side or the other. Cronin has argued that that in Cork this very bitter enmity had 'filtered down to working-class level not only through press and clerical pronouncements but also through ...highly politicised musical bands'.⁴²

Limerick was no different. A strong inter-locality political rivalry was enforced by the location and traditional rivalry of the city's various musical bands that often crossed into each other's areas thereby causing

³⁸ *L.C.* 17 Nov 1892. Kivlehan had the year previously objected to Gilligan's nomination on the basis that he was not on the Burgess roll for 1891-92 and therefore was not capable of being a candidate.

³⁹ *L.C.* 3 Jan 1893.

⁴⁰ *Cork Examiner* (cited hereafter as *C.E.*) 25 June 1892 & *L.C.* 25 June 1892.

⁴¹ *L.C.* 9 Dec 1890.

⁴² Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?* p. 153.

disturbances which the Constabulary had to control. The Boherbuoy Brass Band and the Sarsfield Fife and Drum Band, located respectively at Boherbuoy and Mungret Street, were allied to the Parnellite cause, while St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band, situated in St. Mary Street and the Victuallers' Band, Cornwallis Street (later Gerald Griffin Street), located opposite the City Dispensary, took anti-Parnellite side.⁴³ Two examples illustrate the intensity of this enmity. In 1892 St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band deliberately marched through the rival Boherbuoy district, accompanied by a crowd – a sure recipe for the conflict that ensued until the police calmed the situation and the band returned to its rooms with some of its instruments damaged and others lost to the attackers. As if to give expression to the Old Testament creed of 'an eye for an eye', the Sarsfield Fife and Drum Band paid a visit to the Boherbuoy Band room where it was decided to seek retribution for the encroachment into Parnellite territory by making a return visit to the area of St. Mary's Band. Despite the intervention of the police in diverting the Sarsfield Band away from the immediate area, skirmishing between both sides ensued, resulting in injuries and this band also losing some of its instruments and having others damaged.⁴⁴

Two years later in 1894, when the Nelson Street Parnellite Band was passing through Cornwallis Street, it was attacked by some members of the Victuallers' Band, which in turn led to the bandroom of the Victuallers' being broken into and damage estimated to be about sixty pounds caused, with practically all the instruments broken or vandalized. It had been thought that both sides were on 'the most friendly terms' and that 'they had buried the hatchet' but obviously old enmities died hard and the proverbial hatchet was buried in the heads of opponents.⁴⁵

If a person or family happened to be living in the enclave of either side in the political divide, especially during election time when emotions ran high, then they were in for a very hard time. John McGrath in a recent study on late nineteenth century Limerick, has pointed out that communities on both sides of the political divide guarded their territory very aggressively.⁴⁶ During the 1892 election, anti-Parnellite houses in the strongly Parnellite Queen Street [later Thomas Davis Street] and Boherbuoy district were attacked; the shutters and windows were torn and smashed, while in the St. Mary Street area, which was largely Anti-

⁴³ *L.C.* 14 June 1899.

⁴⁴ *C.E.* 13 June 1892.

⁴⁵ *L.C.* 26 June 1894.

⁴⁶ McGrath, John. 'Sociability and Socio-economic conditions in St. Mary's Parish, Limerick, 1890-1950' (M.A. University of Limerick, 2006) p. 29.