

their headquarters in a house at Knockadoon under the direction of Pat 'Crop' Corr. He liaised with Davitt who visited the area occasionally. Joseph P. D'Alton, John O'Kane, J.W. Walshe and P.W. Nally and other local I.R.B. members were to the fore in organising the historic mass meeting. Nally, O'Kane, Walshe and J.P. Quinn publicised the meeting through the posting of bills and by word of mouth. Davitt engaged the speakers and prepared the resolutions.

THE MOTIVES OF THOSE INVOLVED

It is worth examining the motives of those involved in organising the Irishtown meeting and in formulating the resolutions that it passed.

In addition to his I.R.B. beliefs, it is patently obvious that Davitt held a deep personal hatred of landlords. He saw landlords as "foul pestiferous social rinderpest", "the bastard offspring of force and wrong", "ruthless predators", "a brood of cormorant vampires" and "an alien garrison". Yet, he had no personal experience of tenant life in rural Ireland.

Davitt's understanding of tenant life in Mayo was based on stories he had heard in his youth in Lancashire about evictions (including that of his own family) in the Famine times. As a child labourer he had lost an arm. The Irish emigrant community in which he grew up were the victims of discrimination and hostility from their working class English neighbours with whom they competed for employment. As an I.R.B. man Davitt saw in land agitation the possibility of removing the "alien garrison" through a popular mass movement. He had not yet thought out what should be done with the land should the "garrison" go.

Daly and Loudon sought justice, security and equity for the down-trodden tenants. O'Kane, Walsh and D'Alton had two sets of motives. As I.R.B. supporters they would have seen, like Davitt, the removal of the landlords as a step closer to the aim of an independent Ireland. From a more commercial point of view, the reduction or removal of rents would make money available for the hard pressed shopkeepers.

In publicising the Irishtown meeting in *'The Connaught Telegraph'* Daly was careful to distance himself from its organisers, because of the strong I.R.B. involvement, but when formally requested at the meeting he took the chair. The meeting was attended by about 7000 people and was reported on by *'The Tuam Herald'*, *'The Freeman's Journal'* (quoting a Press Association telegram), *'The Nation'* and *'The Connaught Telegraph'*.

PART 5

"THE LAND FOR THE PEOPLE"

IRISHTOWN

The speakers platform (constructed of borrowed timber from McDonald's Store supplied by Joseph P. D'Alton) was erected in the field of the Widow Higgins at Burris. On the day of the meeting it was impressively flanked by almost 100 men mounted on grey and white horses. Above the platform fluttered Thomas J. Quinn's flag proclaiming "The Land for the People". Speakers, engaged by Davitt, included John O'Connor Power, John Ferguson, a veteran campaigner for land reform of Glasgow, Thomas Brennan, John J. Loudon, Malachy O'Sullivan, Secretary of the Ballinasloe Tenants Defence Association, and Matt Harris, vice-president of the Ballinasloe Tenants Defence Association. Davitt did not appear on the platform, but was in the Irishtown vicinity about a week earlier.

The chief point agreed on at Irishtown was that tenant farmers were entitled to a fair income from their holdings before discharging their debts to shopkeepers or to landlords. The meeting also passed resolutions supporting Ireland's right to self rule, the removal of landlord proprietorship, that landlords evicting tenants for non-payment of unfair rents be seen as 'enemies of the human race', and that evicted tenants should be protected by every possible means.

This militancy received strong condemnation from the clergy of the area who were doubly alarmed: Canon Bourke was not a typical landlord and a secret revolutionary society were obviously the instigators of the meeting. The pulpits rang with denunciations of the I.R.B. and the disregard and disrespect shown to the clergy at Irishtown. Ven. Archdeacon Kavanagh P.P.