

to "enthusiasm for the new movement" in *The Nation*'. About eight thousand people heard Parnell speak at Westport. He arrived to the platform from his hotel flanked by five hundred young men on horseback.

Davitt was the main speaker at further mass meetings which followed at Milltown, Co. Galway (Sunday 15th June), Claremorris (13th July), Shrule (29th July) and Balla (15th August). Parnell did not attend any of them.

As the summer of 1879 progressed the alarming prospect of a bad harvest loomed larger. Consequential severe distress was expected to follow in Spring as food and funds became exhausted. Tenants were now ready to support an anti-rent campaign.

Elements of the clergy, more attuned to the developing situation than their ageing prelate, witnessed the deteriorating situation in farming conditions, and, no doubt, grew anxious not to alienate themselves from their flocks in favour of the emerging radical secular leaders, called on landlords to reduce rents. The Parish Priest of Claremorris, Canon Ulick Bourke presided over a land reform meeting in that town which was attended by Devoy and Davitt. Canon Bourke had hoped that the meeting would pass resolutions in favour of denominational education and the temporal power of the Pope but the organisers would not allow any sectarian motions be put forward. Davitt, by now, was confident that the movement would become nationwide and did not wish to alienate non-Roman Catholic tenants by dabbling in the politics of religion. At the Claremorris meeting John Blake Dillon, a council member of the Home Rule League, joined the movement.

On that same evening Davitt and Devoy attended a meeting of leading I.R.B. members in Ballyhaunis. Devoy returned to America a few days later and in August forwarded \$2000 to Davitt to continue the land reform campaign.

Davitt was now of the opinion that "the energies released by the agitation needed to be canalised⁸". Parnell was not yet so sure if the time was right so as an intermediate step Davitt proposed the holding of a delegate conference with the purpose of establishing a

⁸See 'Davitt and the Irish Revolution', P. 315.

body representing the tenant farmers of Mayo.

PART 6.

THE NATIONAL LAND LEAGUE OF MAYO

CONVENTION

The convention was held in Daly's⁹ Hotel, The Mall, Castlebar (now the Imperial Hotel) on 16th August under the chairmanship of J.J. Loudon at which The National Land League of Mayo was established. Davitt proposed the Statement of Objectives which was adopted.

The founding officers were: President: J.J. Loudon; Vice-President: James Daly; Treasurer: H. Feeny; Secretaries: P.W. Nally and J. W. Walshe.

Nally, the I.R.B.'s provincial Head Centre, was not present at the Castlebar meeting and declined the position. It would appear that, by this stage, the I.R.B. did not intend to direct the activities of the new movement. Nally and a small number of radical members of the I.R.B. were to continue violent campaign against selected targets; principally landlords' agents. Davitt was not an officer of the new organisation though he guided its every move. About this time he foresaken I.R.B. activity.

The Land League of Mayo was a lawfully constituted organisation with the radical goal of removing landlordism. It was careful to conduct its public business within the letter of the law. Politically, its meetings advocated Irish independence and denominationally its' membership was almost entirely composed of Roman Catholics. Its leadership was drawn mainly from the middle-class and contained many who had no interest in land at all.

The organisation found justification for its central aim in the writings of the radical English thinker John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873). Mill's philosophy was first quoted at Irishtown by J.J. Loudon "...When private

⁹Daly's Hotel is now The Imperial Hotel. Contrary to popular belief James Daly of the '*Connaught Telegraph*' was not the proprietor of the hotel.