

property in land is not expedient it is unjust..." and again at Claremorris, Canon Ulick Bourke quoted from Mill.

The League planned a series of meetings not just in Mayo but throughout the country: Balla (August 15th), Westport (31st August), Limerick (August 31st), Ballyhaunis (August 31st), Tipperary (September 21st), Tuam (September 21st), Headford (September 28th), Cork (5th October), Maryborough (October 5th), Dromore West (October 5th), Ballinrobe (October 5th), Annaghdown (October 12th), Navan (October 12th), Newport (October 19th), Galway (October 20th), Galway (November 2nd), Killanin (November 16th), Turloughmore (November 16th), Aughagower (November 29th), Camlough (December 13th).

As the series of meetings took place the verbal wrath of the League occasionally focused its attentions on the 'land grabber' - a man who took a lease on the holding of an evicted tenant or who bid for such a holding. At the Maryborough meeting John Dillon gave the movement a new tool to be used with effect the following year "if any man who takes up that land, let no man speak to him or have any business transaction with him¹⁰".

The agitation brought about rent reductions on many estates but Davitt sought to continue to campaign until there was no such thing as rent.

Bishop Patrick Duggan of Clonfert was the first of the bishops to openly support land agitation. Bishop Duggan, who came from a peasant background, was unique among the Roman Catholic hierarchy in that he held extreme left wing views. He developed a close personal friendship with Davitt and became a trusted adviser to the leaders of the land reform movement.

At the Limerick meeting (August 31st) Parnell made the point that if the movement for land reform maintained its momentum, being a landlord would shortly become so undesirable that landlords would be glad to sell out. In subsequent meetings calls for immediate government action on the land question became the new movement's principal demand.

¹⁰ 'Freeman's Journal' Oct. 6th, 1879

The new land movement was already bigger and held greater potential for political and social change in Ireland than any other movement since the Act of Union of 1800. It was now much more popular, and potentially more powerful, than the I.R.B. Support among Irish exiles in America was growing rapidly. By September 10th Davitt was of the opinion that the abolition of landlordism was now approved by the entire population.

As the series of meetings progressed, Parnell, who addressed several of the meetings, came to the conclusion that the Land League of Mayo should become a nationwide organisation. On September 29th he issued a letter accompanied by an 'Appeal to the Irish Race', penned by Davitt, to various public figures with a view of establishing 'a committee for the purposes of appealing to our countrymen abroad and especially in America, for assistance in forwarding the new land agitation in favour of the ownership of the soil by the occupier, and also for the purpose of upholding the tenants during this terrible crisis by the promotion of organisation¹¹".

The Land League of Mayo was superseded by The Irish National Land League founded on 21st October 1879 in the Imperial Hotel, Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) Dublin with Parnell as its president and Davitt as its organising secretary. Its objectives were less radical than The Land League of Mayo, but its strength was to challenge the very authority of the State. The first of a series of Land Acts was passed in 1881 by which the British (and later the Irish Free State) governments bought the land from the landlords and sold it back to the tenants.

The success of the movement for land reform in bringing about major economic change greatly inspired the growth of Irish republicanism which ultimately led to the Easter Rising of 1916.

It did very little however to remove rural Ireland's main social ill: emigration.

¹¹The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland - Davitt