

## The Effect of the Parnellite Split on Politics in Limerick City 1891-8

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The impact on politics in Limerick city arising from the rupture in the Irish Parliamentary Party, over the issue of Parnell's leadership, is discussed both in terms of parliamentary representation and the local borough council. Particular emphasis is placed on the effect it had on the election of the Mayor of the city in the period. The wider divisions in the city, sometimes leading to violent incidents particularly in regard to marching bands, are also examined.

In early December 1890 the Irish Party, Irish MPs at Westminster seeking Home Rule, met in Committee Room 15 in the House of Commons to consider the question of the leadership of the party by Charles Stewart Parnell in the aftermath of the publicity surrounding his relationship with Katherine O'Shea and his citing as the co-respondent in her divorce. In the afternoon of 6 December forty four members left the meeting in protest at Parnell's failure to resign the leadership leaving him with twenty seven supporters in the room. The Irish Party had split into two bitter opposing factions, labelled 'Parnellites' and 'anti-Parnellites'.

The animus that arose as a result of the rupture within the Irish Party soon made itself widely felt in what became an embittered civil war among constitutionalist nationalists, with both sides regarding each other as the enemy, the Parnellites who had adopted the *Boys of Wexford* as their rallying song, described the anti-Parnellites as Whigs and the latter who had chosen *God Save Ireland* as their song, accused the former as being factionists. This division was to continue for almost ten years throughout Ireland, from the upper echelons of society to the lowly foot soldier at the bottom. The situation in Limerick was no different.

Limerick city had two MPs from 1832 until 1885 when its representation was reduced to one. Up to the 1870s elections were contested mostly between Catholic Liberals and Protestant Conservatives though there were sometimes shades of grey between both extremes. The foundation of the Home Government Association in May 1870 by Isaac Butt, led to the demise of Unionist power and influence in the city. From the success of Home Rule candidates in the 1874 general election, Unionist representation came to an end and Home Rulers continued to be elected for the following three decades. Indeed the general election of 1886 and a by-election in 1888 were uncontested.<sup>1</sup> This spectacular success for the nationalists was now to be greatly undermined as a result of the split.

On Wednesday 2 December 1891 the anti-Parnellites held a convention in the city the attendance included the leading MPs William O'Brien and John Dillon, and the three MPs for the constituencies of Limerick East, West and the City, John Finucane,

<sup>1</sup> Brian M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978).



William Abraham<sup>2</sup> and Francis O’Keeffe respectively. Three days before the meeting, placards were posted on walls around the city, conveying the message 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, who were predominantly Parnellite and who were fighting for the release of John Daly and other Fenian prisoners were held responsible but denied having anything to do with it. This provoked a rival placard response from the anti-Parnellites stating 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’.<sup>3</sup>

The first test of how deep the division in the party in Limerick had gone in terms of parliamentary representation was during the general election of 1892, when the sitting MP for Limerick city, Francis O’Keeffe who had declared for the majority against Parnell in committee room 15, was challenged by the Parnellite MP for Monaghan North, Patrick O’Brien. It was clear from this that the Parnellites did not have any local popularly acceptable person to animate the electorate to vote for them. The anti-Parnellites did not shrink from alluding to this during their campaign. At a meeting outside their election room in the Crescent, O’Keeffe set about eulogizing his own character and demeaning that of his opponent:

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.<sup>4</sup>

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 at the same venue, he spoke very much on the same theme of the opposition candidate as being not only an intruder but also a man who was unaware of the problems of the city and was out to take away the seat ‘held by an old Limerick man’, and 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’.<sup>5</sup> He then skillfully used an aspect of history,

<sup>2</sup> He was elected as the MP for Limerick West in the general election of 1885. His main claim to fame rests on his proposal of the motion for the removal of Parnell as leader of the party thus provoking the Parnellite split. Abraham was the brother-in-law of Sir Peter Tait of the Limerick Army Clothing Factory. Waite, see John E. *Peter Tait: A Remarkable Story* (Stoke sub Hamdon, 2005) pp 288-9.

<sup>3</sup> *L.C.*, 1 Dec 1891.

<sup>4</sup> *L.C.*, 2 July 1892.

<sup>5</sup> Colonel Saunderson had been initially elected as a Liberal member of Parliament for Co. Cavan in 1865 but defected to the Conservatives. He represented 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 MP for Armagh North from 1885 until his death in 1906. He joined the Orange Order in 1882 and organised Ulster Unionists to resist home rule. D.J. Hickey & J. E. Doherty, *A New Dictionary of Irish History from 1800* (Dublin, 2003) p. 429 & Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary Election Results*, pp 115 & 130.



which would have been familiar to those who were listening, equating the Parnellite candidate to William of Orange who 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 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.<sup>6</sup>

For his part the Parnellite candidate O'Brien was not reticent in challenging the anti-Parnellites, reminding the electorate of the city that the one abiding creed that Parnell had espoused was that of 'independence of any British Party' and they intended to continue in the same vein. The anti-Parnellites had renounced that principle and those that had made the united Irish Party a potent force when it was in the British Parliament.<sup>7</sup> In the heel of the hunt, the election held on 7 July 1892 saw O'Keeffe returned as the MP for Limerick city with a majority of three hundred votes, the result being 1,878 votes for O'Keeffe and 1,490 for O'Brien.<sup>8</sup> Despite this victory, it was clear that there was quite a strong Parnellite following in the city.

In 1895 Limerick was to have the unique distinction of hosting a general and a by-election. The second being fought within a couple of months as a direct result of the outcome of the first and on both occasions as bitter as that fought in 1892. When the general election was called for 13 July 1895, 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 the undivided support of his fellow citizens and that if the anti-Parnellites accepted this proposition there would not be any candidate put forward by the Parnellites. In this they had the full backing of the leader of the Parnellites, John Redmond who declared that 'he may count on the enthusiastic support of our party' and that 'surely the Federation [anti-Parnellites] party will join in striking this blow for amnesty.'<sup>9</sup>

For their part the anti-Parnellites, through their spokesman, David Begley intimated that although they had genuine compassion for Daly they were only prepared to place his name at the top of the poll, which they believed would be a definite indication that he had the endorsement of the people of the city but also put forward their own candidate as it was clear that Daly would not be allowed to retain the seat and therefore their candidate would be automatically returned. Accordingly at their convention held at the city court house on 10 July they selected the incumbent MP, Francis O'Keeffe whom it was claimed had no intention of going forward unless his expenses were recompensed, and this was soon rectified by a guarantee from the local anti-Parnellites.<sup>10</sup> One of these was the Lord Lieutenant of County Limerick, Thomas E. O'Brien, who had subscribed fifty pounds<sup>11</sup> and another from his wife, Harriet O'Brien

<sup>6</sup> *L.C.*, 5 July 1892.

<sup>7</sup> *L.C.*, 28 June 1892.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> *L.L.*, 1 July 1895.

<sup>10</sup> *L.L.*, 3 & 5 July 1895.

<sup>11</sup> *L.L.*, 3 July 1895.



who donated one hundred pounds, adding that she had no doubt 'but our friends here will pay the expenses for Mr. O'Keeffe.'<sup>12</sup> They also argued that it had been brought to their attention that a candidate for the Tory interest was going to be nominated to contest the election and with Daly's election being declared void<sup>13</sup> he would be returned, which was why they contended that it was necessary for them to have a candidate.<sup>14</sup>

The Parnellites dismissed this explanation, arguing that by not giving Daly a walk over, the anti-Parnellites advocacy was not authentic and thus were denying him the undivided support of the city's nationalists. In addition to this they were responsible for incurring unnecessary election expenses on his election committee, which had to be paid 'to the tune of £150'. When it was determined that there was to be no unionist candidate they were accused of placing obstacles in Daly's path to be the unanimous choice of the nationalists.<sup>15</sup> The public reaction to the actions of the anti-Parnellites soon made itself felt and despite their insistence on having O'Keeffe as their candidate, the anti-Parnellites eventually succumbed to the pressure of public opinion and withdrew their candidate on the day of nomination. The *Limerick Leader* reported that both sides in the split had forgotten their differences and marched together 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 close association with the anti-Parnellites. The newspaper in an editorial entitled *Vox Populi – Vox Dei* declared that 'at the eleventh hour the voice of the people, the demands for justice and righteousness prevailed...'<sup>16</sup> The power of the combined nationalist parties and the unenfranchised had succeeded though the popularity of Daly as a candidate also helped to bring about a united front. However when he proved to be a threat to the constitutionalists in 1898 for the mayoralty, they united against him.

John Daly's time as the city's representative was to be short lived as 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 at parliament.<sup>17</sup> Thus Daly joined the pantheon of those who had been similarly treated such as the O'Donovan Rossa in 1870, John Mitchel in 1875 and Michael Davitt in 1882.<sup>18</sup> When the campaign for the resultant by-election commenced during the month of September 1895, John Redmond, MP came to Limerick and spoke on behalf of Joseph Nolan, who had unsuccessfully contested the seat for North Louth in the general election of July that year.<sup>19</sup> Nolan had represented the Louth constituency following the general elections of 1885 and 1886 and was now contesting the seat on behalf of the Parnellites against O'Keeffe.<sup>20</sup>

During the course of his speech Redmond was categorical in his denunciation of the actions of the anti-Parnellites in parliament. He referred to the 'dishonourable action of

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Mrs Harriet O'Brien dated 9 July 1895 to John Dillon in which she also indicated that she as the donor was to remain anonymous (TCD. John Dillon Papers. MS 6775-87/387).

<sup>13</sup> Due to his criminal record.

<sup>14</sup> *L.C.*, 4, 6 & 11 July 1895. *L.L.*, 10 July 1895.

<sup>15</sup> *L.L.*, 1, 5, 12 & 15 July 1895.

<sup>16</sup> *L.L.*, 15 July 1895.

<sup>17</sup> *L.L.*, 15 July 1895 & *L.C.*, 6 Aug 1895.

<sup>18</sup> *L.L.*, 21 Aug 1895.

<sup>19</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 364.

<sup>20</sup> Police file on Joseph Nolan, MP (National Archives London, CO 904/18) and Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results*, pp 134 & 140.



the anti-Parnellite Party in depriving John Daly of his seat in Parliament' and that it was not the resolution although passed, of the English Attorney-General that did this, it was the writ moved not by the Government as it was not their place to do so, nor was it that of the Parnellites, who were prepared to allow Daly to continue to represent Limerick city, but that of the anti-Parnellites. Had they not done this Daly would have continued to represent the city and accordingly the most expedient course of action for the voters of Limerick city was to repudiate the farcical and 'pulseless' O'Keeffe and 'to send into Parliament a man who will be pledged to the only policy which can possibly obtain benefit for the people of Ireland'.<sup>21</sup>

The *Leader* made great efforts to have Nolan elected, advising the electorate on how to vote for him on the ballot paper and to leave the space for O'Keeffe blank. It also published a letter written by Daly in 1892, where he compared the actions of O'Keeffe to that of the priest and Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan by refusing to support a motion of John Redmond for the release of the political prisoners in Parliament '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.'<sup>22</sup>

The anti-Parnellites at a meeting held outside their rooms in Henry Street tried to claim the leadership of the amnesty movement and responded to the Parnellites by announcing that they had James Daly, a brother of John Daly, with them and that he had more passion for the release of his brother than John Redmond. James Daly on addressing the meeting alleged that Redmond by his 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 them all; he was only interested in the release of his brother.<sup>23</sup> Whether he realised it or not, by his presence on the anti-Parnellite platform he was bestowing support on the candidature of O'Keeffe in the election, probably he was not aware of what his brother had said about the latter in 1892.

The Limerick Amnesty Association some months afterwards in a declaration contended that James Daly had deliberately set out to subvert the work of the Amnesty Association after he had been expelled for fabricating invective against James F. Egan, a Fenian ex-political prisoner of the highest calibre. Furthermore, they considered James Daly to be their strongest opponent 'who vilified our work and joined hands with the local executive of the Federation, of which we believe he is a member, to defeat so worthy and public a means of raising the character of John Daly above the sneers of his revilers'.<sup>24</sup>

O'Keeffe speaking at the same election meeting in September indicated that he was not a stranger to the Limerick electorate, an obvious hint that his opponent Nolan was, just as O'Brien had been in 1892 and admitted that the anti-Parnellites were responsible for moving the writ to have a by-election and that this was undertaken at the insistence of the local branch. This was done he said 'because an attempt was made by means of bogus claims and factious objections to reduce the National strength on the register'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *L.L.*, 6 Sept 1895.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *L.C.*, 10 Sept 1895.

<sup>24</sup> *L.L.*, 1 June 1896.

<sup>25</sup> *L.C.*, 10 Sept 1895.



While O'Keeffe won the election with 1,851 votes to 1,764 for Nolan, the margin of only eighty seven votes was a reduction of two hundred and ninety five on the election of 1892. However, there had been an increase in the electorate of three hundred and twenty seven or ninety four per cent on that of 1892 and these were mainly in the urban area. Nevertheless, 1,759 did not vote as against a figure of 1,675 in 1892, which meant that the Parnellites had reduced the overall majority of the anti-Parnellite vote.<sup>26</sup> Following this defeat by such a small margin, William Redmond, MP for East Clare and brother of the Parnellite leader, John Redmond MP interestingly invoked the heroes of the physical force nationalist tradition, including the local Fenian hero, to attack the anti-Parnellites:

The men who were shaking and nervous were the men who betrayed Parnell, while the men who stood upright and fearless were the men who stood by Parnell and who did not care what the votes box said, because they knew that their side was right, that it was the side of Emmet, of Wolfe Tone, of Mitchel, Fitzgerald, Smith O'Brien and last but not least, they knew that their side was the side of their poor countryman John Daly in Portland Prison.<sup>27</sup>

The bitterness following the Parnellite split was not confined to members of parliament but affected local politics also. Tensions were so serious in Limerick city between both sides that an inevitable rupture was to occur among the members of the Borough Council, with both sides vying for supremacy. The anti-Parnellites had the majority at the outset which is clearly shown at a special meeting of the Council held on 16 December 1890 to discuss the position of Parnell. A resolution was proposed by Councillor David Begley, which was highly condemnatory of the leadership of Parnell. This resolution called upon the councillors to thank 'the members of Irish Parliamentary Party who ably upheld the honour and interests of Ireland during this trying crisis, and who clearly showed that their leader, Mr Parnell, is endeavouring to take up a position which is most ruinous to the country'. Begley then went on to accuse Parnell of being alone responsible for the 'uncertainty, unrest, disharmony and disaffection' that permeated throughout nationalist Ireland.<sup>28</sup> Of the twenty-four members present, sixteen who were to form the nucleus of Limerick branch of the anti-Parnellite Irish National Federation, voted in favour and the eight remaining members, who voted against, remained supporters of Parnell and formed a branch of what became known as the Irish National League, and later became the Independent League.

The following month Councillor Begley attempted to prevent the Mayor, Alderman Patrick Riordan, who was a Parnellite, from presiding at a meeting in the city which was to be addressed by Parnell on Sunday 11 January 1891. In his efforts to propose a resolution to this effect Begley was not only opposed by the mayor and his Parnellite colleagues in Council, but did not receive any support from his own anti-Parnellite colleagues. Alderman Stephen O'Mara showing tolerance towards those who were on the other side of the nationalist political divide, argued that as the majority of the Council 'were shown to be antagonistic to the election of Mr Parnell' and had already passed a resolution to this effect, no further resolutions were needed. Without any support, Begley was forced to withdraw his proposal.<sup>29</sup> Begley's activity was an

<sup>26</sup> *L.C.*, 12 Sept 1895.

<sup>27</sup> *L.C.*, 14 Sept 1895.

<sup>28</sup> *L.C.*, 16 Dec 1890.

<sup>29</sup> *L.C.*, 8 Jan 1891.



indication of the swiftness with which opinion could change. Only three weeks earlier he had seconded a resolution of confidence in Parnell at a meeting of the Limerick National League. On that occasion, he proclaimed that:

It was with feelings of the greatest pain that every honest and true hearted Irishman, and every admirer and follower of Mr Parnell, saw what had occurred in reference to his name for the past few days. But of the many faults Irishmen have, he thought they had never been accused of ingratitude, and he thought it would be the blackest ingratitude, on the part of Irishmen if they were to desert Mr Parnell in his hour of trial. He thought it was the duty of Irishmen now to gather closely round him and give him all the conciliation in their power. No matter what Irishmen could do to console or help Mr Parnell in any way in their power, they could never half adequately repay him for the sacrifices and all the anxiety and work he had done for the country.<sup>30</sup>

Later on in 1895 Begley tried to prevent 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 would play there. Begley offered to withdraw his motion if he received a guarantee that none but military bands would play there.<sup>31</sup> He intimated that he had spoken to members of St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band and the Victuallers' Band, both anti-Parnellite, and they would not attend there as the People's Park was located in an area of the city that was strongly Parnellite. However, when the issue was voted on Begley's motion was defeated by twenty three votes against to seven in favour, a not surprising result as the Parnellites dominated the Council at this stage.<sup>32</sup>

Also in 1895 an issue that apparently united both sides in the Council was proposed by the Parnellite mayor, W. M. Nolan and seconded by the anti-Parnellite Alderman Stephen O'Mara, and passed unanimously by the twenty-three members present that in line with other public bodies in Ireland an address of honour should be presented to the Archbishop of Cashel, Dr. Thomas Croke on the occasion of his celebration 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'.<sup>33</sup> It is not clear whether this address was to lead to the conferral of the honorary freedom of the city or just an address. However, the Parnellite Sarsfield Branch of the Irish National League believed it to be a conferral of the freedom and called upon the Parnellite members of the Council to prevent this from happening. While they were:

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. We cannot forget that the first Irishman who made a charge of national dishonesty against Parnell was the Most Rev. Dr. Croke.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *L.C.*, 22 November 1890.

<sup>31</sup> Although a plaque on the Band stand 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, *L.C.*, 23 May 1896.

<sup>32</sup> *L.C.*, 6 June 1895.

<sup>33</sup> *L.L.*, 5 July 1895.

<sup>34</sup> *L.L.*, 10 July 1905.



If conferral of the honorary freedom of the city on Croke was indeed intended, the plan was abandoned as his name does not appear on the Honorary Roll of the Freedom of Limerick or subsequent lists of those conferred.<sup>35</sup>

When the Parnellite Alderman Patrick Riordan was elected to serve as Mayor for 1891, he received three votes from anti-Parnellite councillors, while a Parnellite had voted for the opposition anti-Parnellite candidate, T. Mahon Cregan. However when he failed to be elected for a second term, defeated by twenty votes to eighteen at the mayoral election for 1892, which was held on 1 December 1891,<sup>36</sup> Riordan tried to stop his successor, the anti-Parnellite Denis F. McNamara, from taking up the position on the date of inauguration and have his name removed from the Burgess Roll of the City. He published the following statement in the local newspapers:

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.<sup>37</sup>

This threat does not appear to have been acted upon and McNamara duly served as Mayor in 1892.

The ensuing elections for the next three years 1893 to 1895 saw Brian O'Donnell, a Parnellite returned as the mayor of the city. The strength of the rival groups after the local election held in November 1892 was calculated at twenty for the anti-Parnellites and sixteen for the Parnellites.<sup>38</sup> O'Donnell was elected as mayor for 1893 on the casting vote of the senior Alderman, Patrick Riordan as an equal number of votes were cast for both candidates, eighteen each and he was elected unanimously on the other two occasions.<sup>39</sup> O'Donnell had received the support of three anti-Parnellites, Councillors M. Spain, P. Herbert and W.E. Counihan as well as that of a declared unionist, Alderman Gaffney and Councillor Bernal, who was apparently not attached to any political group. They had voted for O'Donnell on the basis of his business prowess, Gaffney 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'.<sup>40</sup> This shows that while the split was an important factor, it need not be decisive when local issues and personalities were involved.

<sup>35</sup> Honorary Roll of the Freedom of Limerick City (Original in City Hall, copies of the relevant pages in the possession of the author).

<sup>36</sup> L.C., 1 Dec 1891.

<sup>37</sup> L.C., 2 Feb 1892 & 27 Feb 1892.

<sup>38</sup> L.C., 26 Nov 1892.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew Potter, *First Citizens of the Treaty City: The Mayors and Mayoralty of Limerick 1197- 2007* (Limerick, 2007) p. 143.

<sup>40</sup> L.C., 1 Dec 1892.



Subsequently, during the other two years in which O'Donnell was successfully re-elected as mayor, the Parnellites had increased their voting strength on the Council. Following the election of November 1893, they had improved by four over their opponents and in 1894 they had an additional gain of a further seat thereby placing them in a definite majority. Although the anti-Parnellites had put forward a candidate for Mayor in 1894, he withdrew his nomination, and perhaps with tongue in cheek he offered the view that it was 'not really because we were not of [the] opinion that we could carry our man here to-day that we did not oppose you, Mr. Mayor, you have achieved a great victory because of your personal merits and dignity.' Such was the voting strength of the Parnellites that when the time came for the election of mayor for 1895, the anti-Parnellites did not nominate a candidate.<sup>41</sup> When O'Donnell resigned the mayoralty just over two months through his third year in 1895 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 councillors, or fifty per cent of the total, present the majority of whom were Parnellites. Interestingly Nolan had also received support from one of the anti-Parnellites present, James O'Mara of the bacon merchant family.<sup>42</sup>

A persistent feature of this period was the attempt by both sides to have rival candidates declared ineligible to stand for election and to have voters removed from the burgess roll, the list of eligible electors, for the yearly municipal elections. The number of electors entitled to vote in the eight electoral wards of the city was exceptionally small in number. In 1892, for example, the number of electors entitled to vote in the Customhouse Ward was sixty-six, Castle Ward was seventy-nine, Market Ward one hundred and fifty three and Glentworth Ward one hundred and one.<sup>43</sup> It was not until the enactment of Local Government Act 1898 that the number of electors increased significantly.

Such attempts usually occurred just in advance of the elections. In October 1892, Patrick O'Meally [Malley], 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.<sup>44</sup> 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'.<sup>45</sup>

During the lead into the local elections of 1893 at least six objections were placed before the mayor who held a special meeting in the town clerk's office for such a purpose. A few examples will suffice. 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, J.H. Moran, the Solicitor representing the Parnellite candidate Richard A. Gleeson, lodged a protest against the nomination paper of the anti-Parnellite candidate, John O'Donnell on the basis that the name of the ward

<sup>41</sup> *L.C.*, 25, 28 Nov, 2 Dec 1893 & 17, 27 Nov & 1 Dec 1894.

<sup>42</sup> *L.C.*, 19 Feb 1895.

<sup>43</sup> *L.C.*, 26 Nov 1892.

<sup>44</sup> *L.C.*, 25 Oct 1892.

<sup>45</sup> *L.C.*, 24 Nov 1892.



was not on it. To counteract this M. McCoy, the solicitor representing the anti-Parnellite candidate, objected to Gleeson's nomination paper stating that his name was not set out in full. These objections were in the main overruled or it was decided that the election should be conducted on their merits, with the one exception, that of John Kivlehan, anti-Parnellite versus James Gilligan, Parnellite, 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', an objection that the mayor upheld and Gilligan was elected without a contest.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly such enmity between both sides did not prevent their attendance at the mayoral banquet in Cruise's Hotel hosted by the Parnellite Brian 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 anti-Parnellite MP, for the city, Francis O'Keeffe.<sup>48</sup>

When members of the Irish National Federation attempted to hold a meeting in the Town Hall in June 1892, in favour of the sitting anti-Parnellite MP for the city, Francis O'Keeffe, it was broken up by the Parnellites wielding sticks.<sup>49</sup> It was claimed that O'Keeffe had pledged his allegiance to Parnell 'to the death', but later he 'found it necessary to change his opinion' thus infuriating his opponents.<sup>50</sup>

The bitter rivalry between both sides was very much in evidence when the position of Law Agent for the Borough Council became vacant, due to the death of the previous incumbent, Mr. Connolly 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 were established legal advocates, Alderman John Dundon, anti-Parnellite and James S. Gaffney, who although not a member of the Council was a Parnellite supporter, with two members of his family, father and brother serving on the Council and both Parnellites. At the Council meeting to elect the new agent, eighteen voted for Dundon and sixteen for Gaffney. Dundon received the support of one Parnellite while Gaffney obtained the votes of two anti-Parnellites. There was discontent that only thirty five members had been present, the Mayor did not vote, and in particular at the absence of Parnellites. A member of the Sarsfield Branch of the Irish National League [Parnellite] and an elector of the Customhouse Ward called for the resignation of Richard A. Gleeson who was a member of the Executive of the Sarsfield League and who had failed to turn up, 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"'.<sup>51</sup>

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. Maura 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

<sup>46</sup> *L.C.*, 18 Nov 1893.

<sup>47</sup> *L.C.*, 17 Nov 1892.

<sup>48</sup> *L.C.*, 3 Jan 1893.

<sup>49</sup> *C.E.*, 25 June 1892 & *L.C.*, 25 June 1892.

<sup>50</sup> *L.C.*, 9 Dec 1890.

<sup>51</sup> *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.



musical bands'.<sup>52</sup> 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 others areas thereby causing disturbances which the Constabulary had to control. The Boherbuoy Brass Band, the Sarsfield Fife and Drum Band, located at Boherbuoy and Mungret Street respectively, were allied to the Parnellite cause, while St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band, situated in Mary Street and the Victuallers' Band, Cornwallis Street (later Gerald Griffin Street), located opposite the City Dispensary, were anti-Parnellite.<sup>53</sup> Two examples will suffice to illustrate the intensity of this enmity. In June 1892 St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band deliberately marched through the Boherbuoy district accompanied by a crowd of supporters, which was a sure recipe for the conflict that ensued when they were attacked 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. This was followed by a revenge attempted incursion by the fellow Parnellite Sarsfield Fife and Drum Bands to the area of St. Mary's Band. Despite the intervention of the police and the successful diversion of 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.<sup>54</sup>

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 either 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 those on both sides.<sup>55</sup> Those living in the enclave of either side in the political divide, especially during election time when emotions ran high, were often in for a very hard time.

Prior to the election of 1892, the residences of Francis O'Keeffe, MP, the Crescent, Councillor David Begley, William Street and Councillor Patrick O'Malley, High Street had their windows broken by Parnellite supporters. The latter two had greeted the anti-Parnellite William O'Brien, MP, a short time previously when he had arrived at Limerick Railway Station to support O'Keeffe.<sup>56</sup> Subsequent to the election, anti-Parnellite houses in the strongly Parnellite Queen Street [Davis Street] and Boherbuoy district were attacked; the shutters were torn and the windows smashed, while in the mainly anti-Parnellite Mary Street area, Parnellite supporters had their windows broken.<sup>57</sup> A family who were known to have Parnellite sympathies, living directly opposite the band room in Mary St. of the anti-Parnellite St Mary's Fife and Drum Band, were compelled to leave the locality in fear of their lives.<sup>58</sup> Although the latter is anecdotal information, it echoes that which was reported in the *Munster News* of 13 July

<sup>52</sup> Maura Cronin, *Country, Class or Craft?: The Politicisation of the Skilled Artisan in Nineteenth Century Cork* (Cork, 1994) p. 153.

<sup>53</sup> *L.C.*, 14 June 1899.

<sup>54</sup> *C.E.*, 13 June 1892.

<sup>55</sup> *L.C.*, 26 June 1894.

<sup>56</sup> *L.C.*, 2 July 1892.

<sup>57</sup> *L.C.*, 9 July 1892.

<sup>58</sup> Information received from Mr. Anthony O'Brien about his grandfather Thomas O'Brien and family.



1895 when the house of a man by the name of Thomas Kiely, a Parnellite, was attacked and wrecked after the election of that year.<sup>59</sup> John McGrath, in his study of St Mary's parish, has pointed out that communities on both sides of the political divide guarded their territory very aggressively.<sup>60</sup>

William O'Brien, MP and his entourage, which was led by the Victuallers' Band, were attacked by Parnellites after he had addressed a convention of Federationists in the city in October 1892. This occurred as he walked up Patrick Street, bricks were thrown from the tops of some of the houses and passing the house of Mrs. Ryan, where the committee rooms of the Parnellite candidate in the recent election P. O'Brien had been located, stones were thrown with one of the windows being broken.<sup>61</sup>

The political divisions in the council came to the fore again in 1896 during the election to replace the Parnellite William M. Nolan as mayor. The Parnellite mouthpiece, the *Limerick Leader* had indicated that there was opposition to the Parnellite candidate, Alderman Patrick Kenna, (proprietor of the Glentworth Hotel) from within Limerick Parnellism's own ranks and that at least one of Kenna's colleagues on the Council had, while attending a meeting of the Sarsfield Branch of the Irish National League which was aligned to the Independent Party, canvassed members of the Council for the anti-Parnellite contestant, Michael Cusack.<sup>62</sup> Parnellism itself was internally divided, and the newspaper called upon the Parnellites in the Council to maintain their unity by voting for their own candidate: 'whoever may be the choice of the Independent Nationalist Party; he should receive the loyal and cordial support of the rank and file'. This had received unequivocal support from the Limerick Parnell Young Men's Brigade who had also called upon 'the Parnellite members of the Council to be in their place...in support of Alderman Kenna, a man who always stood to the principles of the Independent party in Limerick...'<sup>63</sup>

Letters from local members of the League were published in the *Limerick Leader*, reminding members of the Council that it was important in the internecine struggle between both sides for the position of chief magistrate to remain Parnellite. One member wrote stating that he could not forget that Cusack had voted for the expulsion of the Sarsfield Branch of the League from the use of a room in the Town Hall. Another member expressed a similar view but also went further by pronouncing that if the Parnellites or the Independent Party, as they preferred to call themselves, were deprived of the mayoralty through the betrayal of members such as the High Sheriff and Councillor P. McDonnell, then they should be censured and their pretence of being Parnellites revealed.<sup>64</sup>

The Parnellites however broke ranks with several of Patrick Kenna's colleagues voting for Michael Cusack, who was elected by sixteen votes to thirteen, with two abstentions. The election of Cusack as mayor was the result of a dislike of Kenna by many Parnellites. It was later argued that they should have chosen Councillor Michael Donnelly of the Irishtown Ward, who was well liked 'his sterling worth as a member of

<sup>59</sup> *M.N.*, 13 July 1895.

<sup>60</sup> John McGrath, 'Sociability and Socio-economic conditions in St. Mary's Parish, Limerick, 1890-1950' (M.A. University of Limerick, 2006) p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> *L.C.*, 27 Oct 1892.

<sup>62</sup> *L.L.*, 22 May 1896 & H & E. Ashe, *The Limerick City and Counties of Limerick and Clare Directory 1891-2* (Limerick, nd).

<sup>63</sup> *L.L.*, 20 May & 1 June 1896.

<sup>64</sup> *L.L.*, 29 May & 1 June 1896.



the Town Council is recognized alike by friend and foe', and he would more than likely have received the majority of votes.<sup>65</sup> Donnelly had pledged his support not in writing but by a gentleman's agreement to Kenna in his candidature and the latter's refusal to release him from the agreement meant that Donnelly, being a man of his word, refused to allow himself to be nominated.<sup>66</sup>

The local National League [Parnellites], at a meeting shortly after this mayoral election severely reprimanded those 'who both, by voting for the Whig nominee and refusing to vote and absenting themselves, caused the defeat of Alderman Kenna'. A more drastic fate befell the High Sheriff, Joseph P. Gaffney, president of the Sarsfield Branch of the Irish National League, the constituency organization of the Independent Party, who was not only expelled from office but also from the branch. His brother, Alderman James Gaffney, had seconded the nomination of Alderman Kenna and voted accordingly. The *Limerick Leader* in an editorial was scathing in its attack on the Parnellites whom it accused of placing 'the individuality of a man...before a cause' and that because of this the 'vapid pride and petty intrigue of a few Parnellites turned the balance in the wrong direction'. It saved its most vitriolic comments for the City High Sheriff, whom it asserted declared himself 'to be a Parnellite' but by 'his vote...nullifies that claim... It was not sufficient for this ideal Parnellite to vote for Mr. Cusack, the Federationist candidate; he felt in duty bound to second his nomination'.<sup>67</sup> He was to do so again during the election for the mayoralty of 1897.<sup>68</sup> Such was the resentment against the High Sheriff's action that when he died on 29 October 1897 at the age of twenty nine years, he was not given an obituary in the local nationalist newspaper.<sup>69</sup>

The occupancy of the mayoralty for the following two years, 1897 and 1898 was also filled by the anti-Parnellite Michael Cusack but not without an attempt by the Parnellites to regain the position, but their divided and disorganized state was again evident. Councillor Michael Donnelly was encouraged to go forward in their interest but he refused on the basis that he did not have a commitment 'that the party would vote for him *en bloc*', thus Cusack was returned unanimously.<sup>70</sup> There had been an attempt by the *Limerick Leader* to increase the odds in Donnelly's favour; when it was believed that he was going to challenge for the position. On the eve of the election issues relating to Cusack's credibility as a nationalist were raised. He was charged with masquerading as a nationalist due to the cordial welcome that he had given to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland when he arrived at Limerick railway station 'in the name of the inhabitants of Limerick – in the name of the descendants of the brave men and women who repelled Dutch William and his troops from their city walls'. It asked had the mayor the permission of the Council to discharge this act of servility 'towards the representative of her Britannic Majesty'. He was also accused of 'touching skirts with the Viceroy and the aristocratic satellites that move around the representative of Royalty' when attending a ball at Adare Manor hosted by Lord Dunraven. With these two incidents alone he figuratively invoked fidelity to the emissary of a country that continues to steal from this country without any qualms. But the biggest transgression of all for a nationalist mayor was that he was guilty of failing to attend in his capacity as mayor, at which he

<sup>65</sup> *L.L.*, 18 May & 3 June 1896.

<sup>66</sup> *L.L.*, 22 May & 3 June 1896.

<sup>67</sup> *L.L.*, 5 June & 8 June 1896.

<sup>68</sup> *L.C.*, 1 Dec 1896.

<sup>69</sup> *L.C.*, 2 Nov 1897.

<sup>70</sup> *L.C.*, 1 Dec 1896.



was invited to take charge of, the commemoration of the deaths of the Manchester Martyrs.' It went on to declare that the responsibility of the Council was clear, if the members agreed with his deeds they would re-elect him if not it was their duty to do otherwise 'if they are too slow to see or too cowardly to perform it, the fault must rest with themselves'.<sup>71</sup> The division within the Parnellites was still evident the following year when Donnelly did stand but was defeated by twenty three votes to eight in favour of Cusack.<sup>72</sup>

The Parnellite split was the most divisive issue in Limerick city during the last decade of the nineteenth century. It saw a once united party ruptured. At parliamentary level it led to repeated but ultimately unsuccessful attempts by the Parnellites to dislodge the sitting Limerick City MP, the anti-Parnellite Francis O'Keeffe. At local level two separate organisations were established, the anti-Parnellite Irish National Federation and the Parnellites who retained the title of the Irish National League. Both had members elected to the County Borough Council of Limerick where a mini civil war was fought for control. This bitter division extended to their supporters within the eight electoral wards of the city, and was evident particularly in the city's various musical bands.

<sup>71</sup> *L.L.*, 30 Nov 1896.

<sup>72</sup> *L.C.*, 2 Dec 1897.