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A Community of Revolutionaries? The Land War in Ballydehob 1879-1882

Abstract. — In 1879 Ireland had suffered 3 years of poor harvests and communities had genuine fear that famine might be close. In early 1880 in the village of Ballydehob in West Cork, Ireland, the community seemed to be cohesive and united in their efforts to get government relief for the poorest in their community. Landlords, magistrates, farmers all co-operated suggesting and agreeing on proposals and the approach to take in response to the government's offer of financial aid. However, the government awarded a fraction of the funds requested. In the absence of government help and with the formation of local branches of the Irish National Land League, the apparent communal spirit evidenced in early 1880 fell apart. Under the control of the Irish revolutionary organization the Irish Republican Brotherhood and directed from the US branch of the Fenian movement, Clan-na-Gael, a revolutionary land movement emerged pitting farmers against their landlords and government officials. This led to a new community emerging that was militant, nationalist and organised. This paper examines the end of one communal order and the emergence of another which was nationalist, revolutionary and which targeted those who lived among them who represented the British state and landlordism.

Keywords. — landlords and tenants, Fenianism, Ireland, The Irish Land War, revolution, County Cork, Irish Republican Brotherhood, Land League, Irish nationalism.

Une communauté de révolutionnaires ? La Guerre des terres à Ballydehob, 1879-1882.

Résumé. — En 1879, l'Irlande avait souffert de trois années de mauvaises récoltes et les communautés craignaient de voir sévir une nouvelle famine. Au début de 1880, dans le village

de Ballydehob à l'ouest de Cork, en Irlande, la communauté semblait être cohésive et unie dans ses efforts pour obtenir le soutien du gouvernement pour les plus pauvres de leur communauté. Propriétaires, magistrats et paysans coopérèrent tous ensemble, avancèrent des propositions et s'accordèrent sur les demandes et l'approche à adopter en réponse à l'offre gouvernementale d'une aide financière. Cependant, le gouvernement n'a accordé qu'une fraction des fonds demandés. En l'absence d'une aide gouvernementale et du fait de la formation de branches locales de la Ligue nationale irlandaise, l'esprit communautaire évident et manifeste du début de 1880 s'est brisé. Sous le contrôle de l'organisation révolutionnaire irlandaise, la Confrérie républicaine irlandaise dirigée par la branche américaine du mouvement Fenian, Clan-na-Gael, un mouvement agraire révolutionnaire émergea opposant les paysans à leurs propriétaires et aux responsables gouvernementaux. Cela mena à l'émergence d'une nouvelle communauté militante, nationaliste et organisée. Cet article examine la fin d'un ordre communautaire et l'émergence d'un autre qui était nationaliste, révolutionnaire et qui ciblait ceux qui vivaient parmi eux et qui représentaient l'État britannique et les propriétaires terriens.

Mots clés. — Propriétaires, Tenanciers, Fenianism, Irlande, « Guerre des terres », Land War, révolution, Comté de Cork, Confrérie Républicaine Irlandaise, « Ligue agraire » Land League, Nationalisme irlandais.

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A Community of Revolutionaries? The Land War in Ballydehob 1879-1882

The village of Ballydehob is situated in West Cork about 9 miles from Skibbereen. It was founded in 1620 and in the 19th century was in the Skull (Schull) Poor Law Union.¹ The district was remote and difficult for the authorities to maintain order in, due to its terrain, rugged coastline and its history of agrarian violence and faction fighting.² While in the grip of a famine in 1822, Richard Griffith (famous for his later land valuation survey of Ireland) built a road through the Mizen Peninsula, where Ballydehob is situated, enabling the authorities easier access to the area as it was considered lawless and in the sway of ‘Whiteboys, smugglers and robbers’.³ Police were first stationed at Ballydehob in 1823. The area was greatly afflicted during The Great Famine. Rev F. F. Trench visiting Ballydehob and Schull (Skull) in March 1847 noted that the only children he viewed outside were sick or

¹ Patrick Hickey, 2002, *The Famine in West Cork*. Cork & Dublin, Mercier Press, p. 14.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-6, p. 50. Note: Whiteboys were an agrarian secret society.

dying.⁴ Trench noted that the famine affected both Protestants and Catholics. On Sunday 14 March he met with the local Catholic priest and Protestant minister and arranged with them to establish eating houses in the remotest parts of the district.⁵ The Great Famine brought the local community from different faiths together in both common suffering and death and also in efforts to relieve the effects of the famine.

Fear of Famine and Destitution

During the agricultural downturn of the late 1870s, people in West Cork again began to fear the approach of a famine. Initially it appeared that the entire community would come together in a manner that would protect the poorest of the district. However, in the late 1870s and early 1880s the poorer districts and especially those that had been strongly affected by the Great Famine were targeted by a political and social movement which ostensibly sought to improve the lot of tenant farmers but which was led by and organised by members of the revolutionary Fenian movement: the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). The agitation was organised under the direction of local Fenian cadres and was significantly influenced by the directives of Clan-na-Gael, the American wing of the Fenian movement. It was in the interests of the revolutionaries to attempt to create a different type of community which would be proselytised to Irish revolutionary nationalism. In order to do this under the banner of tenant rights, landlords, especially the medium sized ones who lived locally, provided perfect targets for the IRB whose intention was to alter community loyalties and promote a new community headed by a new revolutionary elite. During the first “Land War” 1879-82, the IRB helped create a mass movement, the Irish National Land League, and in agitating in the remotest parts of Ireland helped ensure a new nationalist focused community emerged in Ireland. The case of Ballydehob in the Land War clearly illustrates the effectiveness of their approach and the radical community changes that occurred in these years.

In early 1879 it would appear that the communities in the Skull Union were quite cohesive. A public enquiry held into the death of starvation of Nora Goodwin was held on 21 March 1879, in the boardroom of the Skull Board of Guardians. The enquiry was initiated by a complaint from a police constable, Maurice O’Donnell, whose report had reached the Lord

⁴ W. Steuart Trench, 1868/1966, *Realities of Irish Life*, (The Fitzroy Edition), London, MacGibbon & Kee. p. 244.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 244-5.

Lieutenant of Ireland and was referred to the Local Government Board. After five and a half hours of sworn testimony and discussion, it emerged that Goodwin's husband was employed by landlord Isaac Notter. Both Notter and his brother Richard H. Notter were Poor Law Guardians in the Skull Union. The evidence that emerged showed that the Goodwins had received outdoor relief of between 1s and 2s 6d from the Board of Guardians of the Skull Union without even applying for it, but rather, at the suggestion of Isaac Notter.⁶ As well as asking for outdoor relief thus saving the woman from the workhouse Isaac Notter also provided soup, rice and rice pudding from his own house to the family. But Mrs Goodwin, remaining unwell, existed only on milk and tea that her husband purchased. Prior to her death in early 1879, she refused to go into the Poor House. While there was some disagreement as to the level of relief offered to the Goodwins, Dr McCormack claimed he had reported them to be living in miserable conditions. However, what is noteworthy about the case is, firstly, the paternalistic nature of the relationship between the employer, Notter, and his employee. Notter provided personal charity and secured financial relief from the Poor Law Board without the Goodwins applying. Secondly, the case illustrates the fact that one incident of reported starvation in 1879 could come to the attention of a great number of government offices and officers, from the local Poor Law Union's board to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and back down to the Local Government Board which, initiated a public enquiry at a local level.⁷

The Notter family had immigrated to the area in the 17th c. from Germany and been involved in relief efforts during the Great Famine.⁸ It is noteworthy that seven of the nine people who died of dysentery on Richard Notter's land during the Great Famine were his protestant co-religionists.⁹ It is also of note that the Notter family lost a great deal of their land in the aftermath of the Great Famine, forfeiting 1500 acres in 1858 in a sale forced by the Encumbered Estates Court.¹⁰

The winter of 1879-80 led to great hardship in the Skull Poor Law Union. However, by January 1880 this hardship and local privation appeared to have had the effect of uniting the community. Both farmers and landlords initially worked together in their efforts to seek

⁶ *West Cork Eagle*, [WCE], 22 Mar. 1879.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Hickey, *Famine in West Cork*, pp. 16-7, p. 199, p. 234.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.192.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

help in order to alleviate the suffering of the poor in their district.¹¹ However, there were also the rumblings of discontent. One Poor Law Guardian and a Justice of the Peace, D. McCarthy, at a regular meeting of the Poor Law Board of Guardians, expressed his concern about the ‘distressed circumstances of the ratepayers’, declaring that: ‘In a year of unparalleled distress the ratepayers should be protected, and relief given only to those who require it’.¹² It must be noted that McCarthy’s place on the board was an *ex officio* member of the Board of Guardians. His view of protecting local taxpayers from financial strain did not sit well with an elected Guardian, Richard Hodnett, who noted the high level of idleness and poverty in the district and laid the blame on the landlords:

“The landlords of the country are in a measure to blame for the destitution that prevails. They do not feel the misery themselves, and they look on, callous hearted and apathetic, while their dependents are famishing with hunger.”¹³

Hodnett suggested that the Board apply for central funds and the next meeting of the Board on 20 January was attended by 300 farmers. The Board discussed the various ways in which they could secure relief from both government funds and from charitable donations.

The meeting was far from revolutionary in character and those present included four Catholic clergymen and the Church of Ireland rector of Holy Trinity Church, Schull, Rev. John Triphook.¹⁴ The meeting, convened by Captain Somerville J.P., chairman of the Skull Board of Guardians, was characterised by a calmness and seemingly a coming together of both the resident local landlords, justices of the peace and the farmers, in order to discuss a circular from the Board of Works which allowed for a sum of £250,000 to be granted to poor districts. Under the scheme, Poor Law Boards could borrow sums for 35 years, pay no interest for the first two years and carry out works that would employ the needy of their districts.¹⁵ The final stipulation was that applications could only be considered for works that would be completed within six months. This constraint required them to be completed by 31 July 1880.

¹¹ *Return of the loans applied for and granted in each of the various unions in Ireland scheduled as distressed, up to 7 Feb. 1880; also, return (in continuation of the above) of the loans applied for and granted in the various unions in Ireland since they were scheduled as distressed, up to 29 Feb. 1880*, H.C. 1880 (158) lxii.285 (ordered 29 Mar. 1880); *WCE*, 24 Jan. 1880.

¹² *WCE*, 17 Jan. 1880.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *WCE*, 24 Jan. 1880; Web site of Kilmore Union of Churches, kilmoeunion.com/schull viewed 16/06/2020.

¹⁵ *WCE*, 24 Jan. 1880; T.H. Burke, Dublin Castle, 13 Jan. 1880, Enclosure (1) No 12, *Correspondence relative to measures for the relief of distress in Ireland 1879-80*, p. 19 [C.2483] [C.2506] H.C. 1880, lxii, 175.

This date was deemed to be too soon by all present and it was noted that farmers would be unlikely to have their potatoes harvested by that date and so would be in distress.¹⁶

Captain Somerville suggested that the best thing would be to form a committee from the present large gathering that was representative of the various districts in the Schull Union. Among the suggested works considered were the widening of the road and building a 'footpath of uniform size from the village of Ballydehob to the church' and extending Skull pier by 75 feet.¹⁷ Richard H. Notter suggested that the hill at Ballydehob be cut and noted that the opening of roads was previously charged as a local tax, the county cess.¹⁸ Richard Hodnett said of the cess: 'the poor farmers have to pay it all'.¹⁹ Father Forrest, parish priest of Goleen, suggested that the landlords be asked permission to carry out drainage works. Hodnett pointed out that of the 66 landlords owning land in the union only '8 or 9 were residing in it'.²⁰ The Chairman, Capt. Somerville, asked 'What do you say about asking the landlord's consent to which Richard Notter replied: 'The time for relief would have expired before you would get an answer'.²¹ After much discussion about the way to proceed, with Hodnett suggesting that it would be necessary to apply to the County Surveyor, Mr Jackson, and have him inspect and report on all work that would be necessary. Isaac Notter told the meeting that he had been informed at a meeting with the secretary of the Duchess of Marlborough fund at Dublin Castle that the fund was not for providing employment but for relieving the distress of the poor through purchasing food. He informed the meeting that Skull was as entitled to such relief as any other part of the country since there was 'great distress and sickness amongst them, and unless immediate relief was given a famine would result'.²² To expedite an application to the government fund, it was suggested that a local resident, Capt. Thomas, visit Schull, Ballydehob, Crookhaven, Goleen and other parts of the union and present a report to the next meeting. The latter part of the meeting presents a stark insight into the plight of the people in the Skull Union. One Poor Law Guardian, J. Coughlan, received a loud cheer when he declared that the farmers were in as much need of relief as the labourers. Several speakers suggested that the farmers needed seed potatoes and should be supplied with these from

¹⁶ *WCE*, 24 Jan. 1880.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

Scotland and given a meal to eat while their potatoes grew. It is clear from the report of this meeting that though Richard Hodnett appeared to be advocating for the tenant farmers and having previously blamed the landlords for the woes of the poor, the local resident landlords were engaged in constructive discussions and seemed earnest in their efforts to find a way to get relief for the poor.

By 7 February 1880, the landlords in the Skull union applied to the Local Government Board for loans totalling £1,353. However, they were granted less than 15% of that amount, a mere £200.²³ Between 7 and 29 February, they applied for a further £2,820 but received only £300, a mere 10.6% of what they sought.²⁴ By March 1880, the *West Cork Eagle* reported incidents of nakedness due to poverty in the Skull district.²⁵

The Land League “Revolution”

It is impossible to say what might have transpired in the Scull Union over the next year and a half had the government provided all the funds that the local community had asked for. However, by the autumn of 1880 the mood in Ballydehob and the Skull district was in stark contrast to the meetings held in January and February. In October 1879, the Irish National Land League was formed with its headquarters in Dublin. Charles Stewart Parnell, Co. Wicklow landlord and obstructionist MP for the Home Rule party, was its president and its board and officers were made up of former or current members of Ireland’s Fenian organisation, the IRB. In March 1880 Parnell returned from a fundraising tour of the USA and Canada in order to stand in the general election as a candidate for Cork city where he was elected in early April.

In the late summer and autumn of 1880, the national policy of the Land League was one of expansion, seeking to strengthen the organisation and develop ‘its techniques of resistance’.²⁶ In furtherance of this policy, Land League branches were established in parts of the country that had previously had none. The expansionist policy of the Irish National Land League was partly a reaction to the failure of the government to pass a bill that would have

²³ *Poor law unions (Ireland) loans. Return of the loans applied for and granted in each of the various unions in Ireland scheduled as distressed, up to 7 Feb. 1880; also, return (in continuation of the above) of the loans applied for and granted in the various unions in Ireland since they were scheduled as distressed, up to 29 Feb. 1880*, p. 5, H.C. 1880 (158), lxii.285 (ordered 24 Mar. 1880).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *WCE*, Mar. 6, 1880.

²⁶ T. W. Moody, 1982, *Davitt and the Irish Revolution*, Oxford, OUP, Clarendon Press, p. 417.

deterred landlords from evicting tenants, as they would have been compelled to compensate those tenants in the most distressed parts of the country. On 18 June, the government, with some foresight and in the face of a bill proposed by John O'Connor Power MP, sought to place a two-year moratorium on landlords exercising their legal right to seek the eviction of tenants for non-payment of rents.²⁷ This, it was thought, would give them time to establish a committee to examine the workings of the 1870 Land Act and address Irish landlord and tenant legislation with a new Land Act.²⁸ On 15 August in Kildare, John Dillon, a leading militant in the Land League, made a speech calling for a rent strike and the mass recruiting of 300,000 men into the Land League claiming that: 'With 300,000 Irishmen enrolled in the National Land League, all the armies of England would not levy rent in that country.'²⁹ By the end of the month Richard Hodnett of Ballydehob had both gone to Westminster where he met with Parnell, and asked the Co. Cork Land League executive for permission to establish a local branch in Ballydehob. He was introduced to the meeting by John O'Connor who was also secretary of the Cork IRB.³⁰

On 8 August 1880 Hodnett had informed the meeting of the Cork Land League executive that if they gave him permission to establish a branch of the league in Ballydehob, the Land League would soon be established throughout that part of the county. He stated that he had expected a branch to have previously been formed in Skibbereen but that 'there was some underhand influence at work there that prevented them'.³¹ It is notable that in February 1880, IRB Supreme Council member James J. O'Kelly informed one of the leaders of Clan-na-Gael, John Devoy, that the 'famine districts of the West of Ireland offer the best field just now for our activity'.³² Devoy was one of the chief revolutionaries who had supported the formation of the Land League and Parnell's political accession. It is clear that Ballydehob and the Skull Union having been badly impacted by mortality during the Great Famine fitted perfectly with O'Kelly's plans for the expansion of the IRB in rural Ireland. On Saturday 11 September, an advertisement appeared in the *West Cork Eagle* for a:

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 393-394; *A bill to make temporary provision with respect to compensation for disturbance in certain cases of ejectment for non-payment of rent in parts of Ireland*, H.C. 1880 (232), 427 (18 June 1880).

²⁸ Moody, *Davitt*, p. 393.

²⁹ Sir W Barttelot quoting a newspaper report in the House of Commons, 17 Aug. 1880, *Irish Times*, 18 Aug. 1880.

³⁰ *WCE*, 4 Sept. 1880.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² James J. Kelly ('Blake') to John Devoy, 11 Feb. 1880, William O'Brien and Desmond Ryan, dirs., 1948 & 1953, *Devoy's Post Bag, 1871-1928*, 2 vols., Dublin, C.J. Fallon, i, p. 488.

“Monster Land League Meeting at Ballydehob, On Sunday Next, Sept. 12, 1880 At 2 o’Clock. Men of West Carbery assemble in your thousands, and show our Rulers that the present Land Laws are the cause of Famine and Emigration, and declare your determination to live and die in the homes you were born in. The following as Deputation from Dublin and Cork Land Leagues, will address you: - Messrs. Kettle, Farrell, Heffernan, O’Hea, Brennan, Byrne, O’Brien, and Fuller. Down with Landlordism. GOD SAVE IRELAND.”³³

The text of this advertisement linking famine and emigration with the land laws also equates elected representatives with rulers as though parliamentary democracy was little different from feudal serfdom. The last phrases ‘Down with Landlordism’ sitting above ‘God Save Ireland’ evoked the Fenian or Advanced Nationalist sentiment that characterized many Land League posters in areas where such sentiments were likely to appeal to a public already sympathetic to their ideals or to encourage unbelievers to come around to their way of thinking. While the meeting took place on the land belonging to the Catholic Church no local clergy attended.³⁴

Two weeks after the local branch of the Land League was formed in Ballydehob, the inaugural meeting of the Skibbereen branch was held on 26 September 1880 and attended by a strong contingent of Catholic clergy.³⁵

The police reporter, Thomas O’Rorke, who had arrived the night before, noted that on the Sunday morning he found:

“[...] a large platform erected in a square off the main street, across the front of which was a strip of calico, on which was in black letters ‘Ireland for the Irish. The land for the people. The husbandman who laboureth must partake of the fruits’, with a green shamrock before and another after it. From the front corner of the platform floated a green flag, bearing which on both sides in yellow ‘A harp— God save Ireland’. And from the other front corner of the platform floated an American flag ‘the Stars and Stripes’.”³⁶

The poster for the meeting was headlined ‘Skibbereen was to the Front’ with the stated aim of the gathering being: ‘To consider the position of the Irish People with regard to The Land of Ireland!’³⁷ In smaller lettering, it exhorted: ‘Men of the Carberies assemble in the Numbers and Strength of your Manhood! Show that you have the spirit and aspirations of Freemen, and

³³ *WCE*, 11 Sept. 1880.

³⁴ *WCE*, 18 Sept. 1880

³⁵ *WCE*, 2 Oct. 1880.

³⁶ Sub-Constable Thomas O’Rorke, ‘Skibbereen, Co. Cork. W.R. Sunday, 26 Sept. 1880’, National Archives of Ireland [N.A.I.], Chief Crown Solicitor [CCS], Queen v. Parnell, box 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

that you are determined no longer to be ground down under the Oligarch's sway'.³⁸ There is no doubt that the choice of terminology, pitting the men of the Carberies against government by the few, expanded the object of the meeting beyond just land laws and tenant rights into a more revolutionary realm. What could replace an oligarchy? Government of the many? Fenianism advocated for a republic.

The three men accorded with being responsible for the meeting were Jeremiah Daly, a Poor Law Guardian, Patrick Spillane, a publican, and Patrick O'Hea, a solicitor who was in London with Hodnett the previous August.³⁹ It is likely that it was O'Hea who entered "oligarchy" into the lexicon of the West Cork Land League. The inclusion of the word on the poster expanded the language used to advertise the Ballydehob meeting to include a Republican character and object for the gathering. In police reports extant at the time of the Land War, the use of the word 'Republican' to refer to individuals is infrequent. However, of O'Hea, Sub-Inspector Hume of the Royal Irish Constabulary based in Skibbereen, would later say that: 'He is an active member of the Land League, of Republican tendencies, and has been known to say he "was a Fenian" but in such a way as to imply he has ceased to be one'.⁴⁰

The *West Cork Eagle* stated that: 'Viewed in a representative and an influential light, "the cradle of revolution", for that was Skibbereen's appellation in by-gone days, surpassed any gathering of the kind held in the noble county of Cork'.⁴¹ The fact that the principal speaker at the meeting was John Dillon, who was a rising political star advocating a radical militant approach, is extremely significant in assessing the true rationale of the forces at work in the organisation of the Land League in West Cork.

Dillon's speech at Skibbereen was no less provocative and, indeed, possibly more radical and advanced in its separation doctrine, than the one he gave almost six weeks earlier in Kildare. He began by declaring that the people assembled were there to declare that they would not stop until they had destroyed the system that was ruining the country and that the people should have 'no terms' with landlordism. He disparaged those who wrote letters to the papers asking for people not to attack the system in their campaign by asking what

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *WCE*, 2 Oct. 1881; Lady Resident of Skibbereen to Lord Cowper, 7 June 1880, N.A.I., Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers [CSORP]/1881/20424.

⁴⁰ Sub-Inspector Hume, Constabulary Minute, 17 June 1881, *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *WCE*, 2 Oct. 1880.

landlordism had ever done for Ireland?⁴² ‘Nothing but tyranny’ a voice cried.⁴³ To those who wrote saying that a crusade against landlordism was endangering the ‘nationality of Ireland’, he asked: ‘name the landlords who are honourably known to the people for their work done in service of the country’.⁴⁴ He could only remember four and stated that in the last seventy years there were only two: William Smith O’Brien, the Young Ireland leader, and Charles Stewart Parnell. However, were he to name the landlords whom he asserted had taken:

“[...] their stand among the enemies of the people; who hunted the priests, who threw down the houses of the people, and drove out your relations and ancestors, I would keep you here till morning [...]. From the day that an English and foreign force first gave them a footing in Ireland, they have found themselves on the side of oppression and injustice, and never on the side of the people.”⁴⁵

While evoking the names of two Protestant nationalist leaders, O’Brien and Parnell, it is clear that Dillon was also promoting a denominational and anti-English creed as opposed to merely seeking tenant rights.

The founding of the Land League branches in West Cork was soon followed, on Saturday, 16 October, by a gun attack in broad daylight on a landlord, Samuel Newburgh Hutchins, near Skibbereen, resulting in the driver, John Downey, being mortally wounded.⁴⁶

Ballydehob Land League Branch

Following its inaugural meeting, the Ballydehob Land League branch began holding what became regular weekly meetings. These meetings at first allowed the airing of general grievances such as landlords raising the rent on farms that people had taken over by between 50% and 100%. In other anecdotes, unnamed landlords were said to have raised rents and taken several acres of the best land from tenant’s farms. When a farmer asked what the Land League’s position was regarding the payment of rent, Richard Hodnett advised that the Land League did not object to the payment of rent that was at Griffith's Valuation. However, land agents began to be named in particular cases, such as one raised in October where William Good was in dispute with Samuel Jago (*sic*).⁴⁷ At that juncture, William Good hoped to bring

⁴² Sub-Constable Thomas O’Rorke, ‘Skibbereen, Co. Cork. W.R. Sunday, 26 Sept. 1880’, N.A.I., CCS, Queen v. Parnell, box 5.

⁴³ *WCE*, 2 Oct. 1880.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ ‘Skibbereen, Co. Cork. W.R. Sunday, 26 Sept. 1880’, N.A.I., CCS, Queen v. Parnell, box 5.

⁴⁶ *WCE*, 23 Oct. 1880.

⁴⁷ *WCE*, 16 Oct. 1880.

the case to the Quarter Sessions and was offered the support of the Land League in doing so.⁴⁸ In this early period, the Land League at Ballydehob was merely cutting its teeth. It would soon take on the character of a court that attempted to arbitrate disputes and dictate remedies. This process was relatively slow and was emboldened by factors such as the numerical strength of the branch and local factors determined by the influence the Land League could exert. On 29 October the Land League meeting was attended by a Protestant tenant named Kingston, who sought their assistance in a dispute with his landlord, J.R. Swanton.⁴⁹ This case is noteworthy as it indicates that the populist appeal of the Land League was not confined to the nominally nationalist Catholic community. Other cases were discussed relating to another landlord, George Swanton. The discussion soon became more general, referring to the government wishing to bring in coercive measures while judges who were being paid thousands of pounds a year, with claims they were forced to pass unjust judgements. Later, Mr. Donovan suggested that the room the Land League was renting ought to be open on Sundays for the public and that the League should subscribe to newspapers. After some discussion, it was decided that the Ballydehob Land League should subscribe to the '*Irish World, Nation, Freeman's Journal and Eagle*'.⁵⁰ It is notable that the American publication *Irish World* was an extreme Nationalist newspaper edited by Patrick Ford which had advocated 'scientific warfare' against Britain including the use of hot air balloons circling London and dropping bombs.⁵¹

Notter's Powder and Ball

The pressure being applied on local landlords by the Land League in Ballydehob was soon evident when the local landlords and magistrates, Richard H. Notter, George Swanton, Becher Lionel Fleming, and Robert Swanton, presided over a Presentment Session at Ballydehob Court House on 18 November. The cess-payers were represented by John Ardunel, Denis McCarthy, J. McCarthy, John Mahony, E. Leahy, D. Reagan, and Isaac Notter. A case for compensation for malicious damage to houses belonging to one of George H. Swanton's tenants, Timothy Holland, raised local tensions. As the compensation would be levied on the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *WCE*, 30 Oct. 1880.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Niall Whelehan, 2009, "'Cheap as Soap and Common as Sugar': The Fenians, Dynamite and Scientific Warfare", in F. McGarry and J. McConnel dirs., *The Black Hand of Republicanism: The Fenians and History*, London, Irish Academic Press, p. 105 citing *Irish World*, 9 June 1877.

townland and with local tensions running high, when a voice urged the magistrates to consider the poor people, Notter intemperately declared that ‘The poor people of the country must behave themselves; if not I hope they will get powder and ball before long’.⁵² A vote was taken with the two Notters, Isaac and Richard, B.L. Fleming, Carew O’Grady and Robert Swanton voting for £30 compensation to be paid while George Swanton, the landlord who owned the property, abstained. In contrast, the cess payers Regan, the two McCarthys, Harrington, Leahy and Mahony insisted that £8 compensation was fair.⁵³ Ultimately, only £8 was levied against the townland and the landlords suffered not only a defeat in terms of their wishes being overruled but also notoriety because of Notter’s outburst. On 3 December, the Ballydehob Land League branch passed the following resolution:

“That we, the Ballydehob branch of the National Land League, deem it our duty to protest against the language uttered by R.H. Notter J.P. in his capacity as chairman of the Presentment Sessions held at Ballydehob on the 18th inst., when he said that he hoped the people would get powder and ball. In our opinion this language is calculated to foment disturbance and dissatisfaction, and to induce a peaceably disposed people to violate the law. We beg to draw the attention of Mr. Parnell and his colleagues to Mr. Notter’s conduct, with the view of having it brought before the proper authorities at the earliest opportunity.”⁵⁴

Soon threatening notices citing Notter’s outburst were posted throughout the district, including one on the chapel gate at Ballydehob, cautioning people not to pay more rent than their Griffith valuation:

“Notice is hereby given that the West Cork Shooting Gallery is now supplied with Notter’s powder and ball and Enfield rifles, which will be ready immediately for landlords and land-grabbers. Will give our additional peelers work in guarding landlords. Sam Jagoe will be collecting rents on Wednesday next. Farmers pay him only Griffith’s valuation. I am practicing my aim.
Rory⁵⁵”

Other notices which the police found were variations of the above and included references to drunk policemen and boycotting: ‘We must give our drunk additional peelers work in boycotting our land-grabbers’ as well as making direct threats against Samuel Jagoe: ‘Sam,

⁵² *WCE*, 20 Nov. 1880.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1880.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 Dec. 1880; ‘County of Cork, WR, Crime and Outrage resulting from the Establishment of the Land League at Ballydehob, on 12th September 1880, and continuing until the summer of 1883, showing the direct connection between the League and several outrages’, p. 2, N.A.I., Irish National League [INL] papers, box 10.

look out'.⁵⁶ Two notices found by the police also contained direct threats against farmers, demanding that they not pay more than the Griffith's Valuation of their land as rent or, they would be sure to be 'visited by Rory Junior who is supplied with Notter's powder and ball'.⁵⁷ Thus the allusion to Notter's outburst was melded with a demand of adherence to a tenet of the Land League: not to pay rent of more than the Griffith valuation. Though the *nom de guerre*, Rory of the Hills, was originally associated with Ribbonism, in 1880 it was closely associated with attacks on landlords, as well as with Fenianism and Irish republican agitation in the Land War.⁵⁸ The I.R.B. Supreme Council president, Charles Kickham, had, in 1857, penned what would become a popular Nationalist/Fenian ballad, 'Rory of the Hills', which referenced Wolfe Tone, pike-making and freedom. Whether it was from fear of reprisals, genuine adherence to the Land League or merely an opportunistic use by tenants of the publicly posted threats to withhold their rent is unclear. However, the notices had the desired effect of depriving the landlords and their agents of their rents.

On 8 December, at the fair in Ballydehob, tenants refused *en masse* to pay rent in excess of their Griffith's Valuation and withheld payment when this demand was rejected by the landlord's agents, including Abraham Jagoe.⁵⁹ While driving to the fair, Robert H. Swanton JP observed a notice which stated:

"Take notice, I came here to-day to give advice to Mr. Jago's (sic) tenants not to pay more than Griffith's valuation, for if any one of ye pay it death will be your doom. If you want to save your lives pay no more, for I have a rusty gun waiting this many a day to get one charge to scour it. "ONE WHO KNOWS RORY OF THE HILLS."⁶⁰

Like his brother Abraham, Samuel Jagoe, while attempting to collect rents owed to James H. Swanton at Ballydehob, also encountered a refusal to pay rents above the Griffith valuation.⁶¹ A similar pattern was evident in Skull, where John Limerick and Mr French were both refused rents above the valuation. However they adopted the course of accepting the offer but refusing to give receipts indicating rent had been paid in full.⁶² By doing this they both received a part

⁵⁶ 'County of Cork, W.R., Crime and Outrage...', p. 2, N.A.I., INL papers, box 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *New York Times*, 18 Oct. 1879; Charles Townshend, 1983, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance Since 1848*, Oxford, OUP, The Clarendon Press., p. 23; Seumas MacManus, 1921, 2005, *The Story of the Irish Race*, New York, Cosimo Classics History, pp. 612-3.

⁵⁹ 'County of Cork, W.R., Crime and Outrage ...', p. 3, N.A.I., INL. papers, box 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *WCE*, 11 Dec. 1880.

payment, and by implication reserved the right to take legal action in the future to recover their lost rental income. The *West Cork Eagle* reported that landlords throughout the West were adopting this course of action. The same paper also reported that tenants from Calf Island had been refused lodging in Skibbereen after paying their rents in full. When they found a public house to have a meal, the windows were smashed, and the landlady turned them out. They were subsequently set upon and savagely beaten and cautioned ‘never again to pay more than the valuation’.⁶³

On 9 December, three local men who worked for landlords, Richard Daly, Henry Allen and Thomas Allen, received threatening notices signed ‘Rory of the Hills’ ordering them to ‘join the League’.⁶⁴ Though there is no evidence that such intimidation was the work of the Land League, the police suspected their involvement. When preparing evidence for *The Times/Parnell Special Commission 1888-9*, two policemen based in West Cork District, Inspector Hume and Sub-constable Lang, stated that when the Land League was founded in Ballydehob it ‘began its tyranny in the neighbourhood’.⁶⁵ Two days after the Ballydehob fair, at the weekly meeting of the Ballydehob Land League branch, one committee member stated that he would like to see the membership of the League increased and that he would continue to support ‘the League undeterred by what anyone might say’.⁶⁶ In response Richard Hodnett said ‘You are not afraid of the “powder and ball man”’.⁶⁷ In light of the fact that there were now two parties associated with the ‘powder and ball’ phrase, namely Rory of the Hills and Richard Notter, the reference may well have been a *double entendre*. It is possible that Hodnett meant that once in the Land League one need not be afraid of either a magistrate like Notter nor the nocturnal visitations of Rory of the Hills. However, despite widespread public threats to murder farmers who paid their rents either in full, or above the Griffith valuation, and also, threats to harm agents of landlords, it is remarkable that Hodnett’s comment evoked laughter. Notter was later rebuked, for his comments, by the Lord Chancellor at the end of January 1881. However, his outburst had already served to alienate the local people and provided propaganda material for those determined to usurp the functions of the authorities and local government.⁶⁸

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ ‘County of Cork, W.R., Crime and Outrage...’, p. 4, N.A.I., INL papers, box 10.

⁶⁶ *WCE*, 11 Dec. 1880.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, 1 Feb. 1881.

In January 1881, the Chief Secretary of Ireland, W.E. Forster introduced a bill for the Protection of Person and Property in Ireland. It received Royal Assent on 2 March. The act allowed the government to suspend *habeas corpus* in a proclaimed district. Early on the morning of 25 April, Hodnett became the 54th person arrested under the act. At first, he refused to dress, which delayed his removal until a crowd had gathered. Car drivers hired by the police refused to carry them, forcing them to return to Skibbereen on foot.⁶⁹ Telegrams were sent to Skibbereen and John O'Connor had the time to come from Cork in order to address the crowds that were assembling before Hodnett and his escort arrived in the town.⁷⁰ On their arrival, the police and their prisoner were met by large crowds. A band struck up 'God Save Ireland' and the policemen were compelled to march through the crowd with Hodnett while green banners 'floated over them'.⁷¹ At Skibbereen railway station, they were met by a large crowd headed by John O'Connor. O'Connor referenced the IRB by comparing Hodnett to Morty Moynihan and Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, two Skibbereen men who were notable early members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He blamed 'tyranny on the part of the English Government' for placing Hodnett in a prison cell in 'the cause of good old Ireland.'⁷²

Hodnett was replaced as head of the Ballydehob Land League branch by Henry O'Mahony, who was a returned American with a business in the village. On Sunday 8 May, a monster indignation meeting was held at Ballydehob under the slogan 'Freedom for the People! No Compromise!'.⁷³ The new-found status of political prisoner that Hodnett was now accorded was put to good effect in posters and advertisements for the meeting:

To protest against the action of the Govern-
ment and their Representatives for the unwarranted and uncalled for
ARREST of Mr. R Hodnett
President of the Ballydehob Land League,
Chairman of the Schull Board of
Guardians, and Chairman of the Ballydehob Dispensary
Committee.

⁶⁹ Lang, *The Special Commission Act, 1888, Report of the Commissioners appointed by the Act reprinted from The Times, also the full Report of the Judges and Full Index*, (4 vols, London, 1890), i, p. 526.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; *WCE*, 30 Apr. 1881; Frank Rynne, 2013, "'Redressing Historical Imbalance: The Role of Land League leaders', Richard Hodnett and Henry O'Mahony in the Land League Revolution in West Cork", in Brian Casey, dir., *Defying the Law of the Land*, (Dublin, 2013), pp. 133-53, *passim*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *WCE*, 14 May 1881; 'Crime and Outrage...', p. 6, N.A.I., INL papers, box 10.

Tillers of the Soil, assemble in your
 Thousands, and prove to your
 Countrymen, who have been driven, by Landlord Tyranny and Magis-
 terial influence, from their
 Homes to British Dungeons,
 That they are deserving of
 our sympathy and
 support
 FEAR NOT, MEN OF CARBERY
 Stand to the cause to break oppression
 And unjust Laws-
 Dread not Coercion
 Tho' your bitterest foe,
 Freedom for all is our motto!⁷⁴

The guest of honour at the meeting at Ballydehob was James Gilhooley, the 1860s IRB Head Centre for Bantry. Henry O'Mahony 'spoke violently against the local magistrates including George Swanton'.⁷⁵ On 19 May, George Swanton was shot at while returning home from Skibbereen.⁷⁶ The police concluded that three people had lain in wait for him behind a hedge. Having fired one shot which 'whizzed past his head' the assailants throw stones at the carriage.⁷⁷ On 1 June, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Henry O'Mahony for 'incitement to murder' Swanton.⁷⁸

When ten policemen attempted to arrest O'Mahony in Ballydehob on 4 June, the people of the district forcibly resisted.⁷⁹ O'Mahony, arrested under the provisions of the Protection of Person and Property Act, was freed by a crowd.⁸⁰ Having prior knowledge that he would be arrested he had asked that it should be effected by a single constable in order to avoid the possibility that people might get injured.⁸¹ However, this foreknowledge also gave him an opportunity to organise resistance. Fifteen hundred people assembled on hearing the chapel bell and the blowing of horns. They rescued him twice from armed police, who

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ George Swanton, 5 Dec. 1888, *Special Commission*, i, p. 529; Lang, *Special Commission*, i, p. 526.

⁷⁶ D.I. MacDonald, "Crime and Outrage ...", pp. 6-7, N.A.I., INL box 10.

⁷⁷ *WCE*, 21 May 1881.

⁷⁸ List of Warrants by county and district, Skull, Cork West Riding, N.A.I., P.P.P. Act 1881, box 1; *The Times*, 6 June 1881, p. 11.

⁷⁹ D.I. A.L. MacDonald, Report on the Arrest of Henry O'Mahony, N.A.I., CSORP/1881/21205; N.A.I., P.P.P. Act (1881) papers, box 1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ N.A.I., CSORP/1881/21205.

withdrew to avoid loss of life.⁸² O'Mahony refused to contemplate the opportunity to escape on an American ship and declared that the 'boys of Ballydehob will make it hot for the Swantons as he set off for Skibbereen at the head of the crowd.'⁸³ According to the Senior Inspector leading the police:

"[...] I could not withdraw any police from Ballydehob on account of the excitement there. Mr Robert Swanton, father to Mr George Swanton who was fired at (see my reports of 19th May) applied this evening for protection for the night and three men were sent to his house from Ballydehob, threatening language having been used towards both Mr Geo Swanton and his father by the mob today."⁸⁴

On 6 June, a rumour was circulated that the parish priest at Skull was to be arrested. Horns were blown and chapel bells rang which according to the *West Cork Eagle* were 'the summons that the hour for action was drawing nigh'.⁸⁵ A bridge was destroyed and the telegraph was cut.⁸⁶ Three thousand people 'armed with sticks, stones, some few firearms and enormous pikes [...] took complete charge of the village' of Skull stoning police under the command of leaders who were overheard ordering the crowd.⁸⁷ Navy gunboats, the H.M.S. Britomart and H.M.S. Valorous, were sent to Skull and the H.M.S. Orwell to Bantry.⁸⁸ An attempt to restore order at Ballydehob by E.B. Warburton RM and a company of marines proved unsuccessful, forcing their retreat to Skull.⁸⁹ On the night of 7 June, men commanded in military fashion, marched to the house of Richard Notter and formed a line opposite but on hearing the order 'Halt! Front! Uncase revolvers', Notter commenced shooting and the group withdrew.⁹⁰ Later in the summer, on 30 July, Robert Swanton was shot near Ballydehob.⁹¹

Between its founding from 12 Sept. 1880 to 9 May 1881 one hundred and thirty-one people had joined the Land League branch in Ballydehob, a further 81 people joined at unknown dates. However, between 12 May and October 1881 when the Land League was suppressed by the government a further 562 people joined the branch.⁹² The fact that the

⁸² D.I. MacDonald, "Crime and Outrage ...", p. 6, N.A.I., INL box 10; *The Times*, 6 June 1881, p. 11; N.A.I., CSORP/1881/21205.

⁸³ *The Times* 6 June 1881, p. 11; N.A.I., CSORP/1881/21205.

⁸⁴ MacDonald, Report on the Arrest of Henry O'Mahony, N.A.I., CSORP/1881/21205.

⁸⁵ *WCE*, 11 June 1881.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ E.R. Cobb to Rear Admiral R.T. Hamilton, 6 June 1881, N.A.I., CSORP/1881/19291.

⁸⁸ Rear Admiral R.T. Hamilton to W.E. Forster, Chief Secretary, 8 June 1881, N.A.I., CSORP/1881/19372; *The Times*, 9 June 1881.

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 9 June 1881; E.B. Warburton, R.M., 'Crime and Outrage ...', p. 8, N.A.I., INL papers, box 10.

⁹⁰ Richard H. Notter, 'Crime and Outrage...', N.A.I., INL papers, box 10, p. 8.

⁹¹ D.I. A.L. MacDonald, 'Crime and Outrage...', p. 9, N.A.I., INL papers, box 10.

⁹² Membership Book of the Ballydehob Branch, N.A.I., INL papers, box 9.

majority of the members joined after the arrest of Henry O'Mahony and that membership increased after each attack on local landlords and the riots in June 1881 indicates that membership of the Land League was an affirmation of a section of the community who celebrated the violence and discord that the Land League was accused of sowing in the district.

Conclusion

It is clear from this examination of West Cork and Ballydehob during the first 2 years of the Land War that the community that existed before the Land League agitation had fractured. The community where local landlords and office holders, in 1879 and early 1880, appeared to be engaged in a way they deemed was right and proper; attempting to assist the poor and those in distress was replaced by a different order and the formation of a separate community which issued demands and enforced their will using rent strikes and mass disorder. If the government, in early 1880, had the foresight or deeper pockets when the community as a whole sought funds, in order to effect works that would have employed the less well-off, perhaps the political agitation fomented by a deeply embedded revolutionary cadre could have been forestalled. Despite being asked in the correct manner for relief funds the amounts awarded were more than 85% less than what quite prudent and conservative members of the local establishment had asked for. Had the leaders of the community, who held important appointed rather than elected positions on the Poor Law Boards, been successful in their pleas, their position may not have been so vulnerable to the later agitation organised by elected members of the board like Richard Hodnett. The apparent leaders of the community such as Notter and the Swanton families became vilified and the targets of violence. In a period of intense political organisation directed by the American wing of the Fenian movement, government miserliness in districts that had been greatly impacted by The Great Famine allowed for a separate community to flourish. This new community was emboldened by revolutionary rhetoric and references to past failures and feats and assumed a truly revolutionary character.

Author's Note

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