Meanwhile in Ireland, his Lieutenants, T M Healy, William O’Brien and Timothy Harrington built the National League into a strong party by:

- Setting up branches around the country
- Collecting money, organising propaganda
- Picking election candidates. Each candidate had to take a pledge to sit, act and vote with the party in parliament or resign his seat

In 1884, Gladstone brought in a Reform Act which gave the vote to all small farmers.

- The number of voters went up from 200,000 to 700,000
- Most of them would vote for Parnell because of his part in the land struggle. This probably gave the Party 20 extra seats in the 1885 election
- All these developments gave Parnell a strong disciplined party behind him when he negotiated with the British leaders.

**Michael Davitt (1846–1904)**

- Born Mayo, his family emigrated to England where he lost his arm in a factory accident at 11. He joined the IRB in 1866, was arrested for gun-running in 1870 and sentenced to 15 years in jail. A campaign by Butt and Parnell got him out on parole in 1877. He rejoined IRB
- Impressed by Parnell, he and American Fenian John Devoy proposed the ‘New Departure’ – an alliance between Fenians and obstructionists
- On a visit to Mayo in 1879 Davitt discovered the small farmers facing eviction and famine. He organised resistance to evictions and got Parnell to speak at the Westport meeting. He hoped to win farmer support for a Fenian rebellion
- In October 1879 he set up Irish National Land League with Parnell as President, but Fenians dominated the League’s Executive Committee
- Land League tactics included demonstrations and ‘boycotting’. In 1881 Gladstone introduced a Coercion Act and a Land Act to defeat the Land League. He also returned Davitt to prison from February 1881 to May 1882. He was released under the Kilmainham Treaty
- While in prison Davitt rejected Fenian violence. Now he wanted to co-operate with British workers to improve life for all
- He also took up the idea of ‘land nationalisation’ instead of ‘land purchase’. This was not popular with farmers, so Parnell could ignore him
- He made his living as a journalist, campaigned for justice for the Boers in South Africa and Jews in Tsarist Russia
- He opposed Parnell over the O’Shea divorce and elected MP in 1892
- In 1905 he wrote his memoirs, The fall of Feudalism in Ireland. He died in 1906.
2.2 The Elections of 1885 and 1886

Gladstone continues to reform

- 1882–5: After the Kilmainham Treaty Gladstone continued his Irish reforms:
  - The Arrears Act let small farmers go to the Land Courts
  - The Tramways Act improved public transport in the west
  - The Labourers' Dwellings Act improved housing for farm labourers and small farmers
- But despite this, Home Rulers were hostile to the Liberals. Gladstone promised to drop the Coercion Act but this was impossible after Phoenix Park murders. Home Rule MPs resented this and attacked the Liberals in the Commons.

Liberal divisions over Home Rule

- The Liberal Party was divided about Ireland:
  - The right-wing (the 'Whigs') led by Lord Hartington, were opposed to any concession
  - The left-wing (the 'Radicals'), led by Joseph Chamberlain, proposed a Council of Irish MPs to deal with Irish affairs rather than a full Irish parliament. When Parnell turned this down, Chamberlain opposed Home Rule
- Gladstone was beginning to think Home Rule was actually essential, but he kept his views to himself.

The Home Rule Party and the Conservatives

- Early in 1885, the Home Rulers began to co-operate with the Conservatives against the Liberals. In June 1885 they defeated Gladstone who resigned
  - June-December 1885: Lord Salisbury, the Conservative leader became a caretaker Prime Minister, but he needed Parnell's votes to survive. To please his Irish allies, Salisbury;
    - Ended Coercion
    - Appointed a known Home Rule sympathiser, Lord Carnarvon as Lord Lieutenant
    - Brought in the Ashbourne Act, which was the first big land purchase act (see page 17).

Parnell negotiates for Home Rule

- The general election was due in December. Before it, Parnell hoped to get the British parties to agree to Home Rule
- Lord Carnarvon and Lord Randolph Churchill hinted that the Conservatives might back Home Rule
The Land League and the Triumph of Parnell, 1879–1886

- Parnell also tried to meet Gladstone, but he refused to talk to him.
- Parnell then called on the Irish in Britain to vote for the Conservatives in the general election.

The results of the 1885 election

- Eighty five Home Rule MPs were elected in Ireland and one in Britain.
- Eighteen Irish Conservative MPs were elected, two for Trinity College and the rest for seats in east Ulster.
- In Britain Conservatives had 249 MPs and Liberals had 335.

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<td>Unionists: 18</td>
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Forming the ‘Liberal Alliance’

- The result was unfortunate for Parnell. He could help Gladstone to become Prime Minister but could not keep Salisbury in power. As a result he had lost his negotiating position.
- Just after the results came in, Gladstone’s son let slip that his father favoured Home Rule (the Hawarden Kite).
- When parliament met in January 1886, Salisbury said he would bring back Coercion.
- The Home Rulers then voted with the Liberals against him and Gladstone again became Prime Minister with their help. This was the start of an alliance between the Home Rule Party and the Liberals.

The Irish Unionist Party and its alliance with the Conservatives

- In January 1886 after Gladstone came out for Home Rule, Irish Conservatives and Liberals met to form the Ulster Loyalist Anti-Repeal Union. In parliament, Irish Conservative MPs formed the Unionist Party. Its leader was a landlord from Cavan, Edward Saunderson.
- They opposed Home Rule because:
  - Protestants were only 25% of the population of Ireland. They would always be in a minority in an Irish parliament.
  - They feared discrimination in religion and jobs.
  - They were proud of their British identity and loyal to the British monarchy. They feared they would lose both if Ireland got Home Rule.
- Irish Unionists allied with the British Conservatives who changed their name to “the Conservative and Unionist Party”.
- Randolph Churchill went to Belfast to rally Unionists against Home Rule (‘Ulster will fight’).
April - June 1886: The first Home Rule Bill

- In April, Gladstone brought in the first Home Rule Bill
- Unionists in Ireland and Conservatives in Britain fiercely opposed it
- So did a section of the Liberals led by Joseph Chamberlain. They were called Liberal Unionists
- British unionists opposed Home Rule because:
  - Independence for Ireland might undermine the Empire
  - They feared for the safety of the Protestant minority in Ireland
  - Home Rule might be the first step to separating Ireland from Britain and an independent Ireland might side with Britain’s foreign enemies
- June 1886: The Home Rule Bill was defeated in the Commons after the Liberal Party split. 93 Liberal Unionists voted against it.
- In the general election which followed, the Liberals lost and the Conservatives under Salisbury again formed the government.

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Assessing 1885–1886

The events of this year were a turning point in British and Irish history.

- From 1868 to 1886 the Liberals were the dominant party. They were in government for all but six years. In that time Gladstone tried to win over the Irish with reforms. In the end he realised that only Home Rule would do.
- After 1886, Parnell lost his freedom to manoeuvre. To get Home Rule, he had to ally with the Liberals. During the O’Shea divorce case, Gladstone was able to force Home Rulers to choose between Parnell and the Liberal Alliance.
- Irish unionists formed the Unionist Party to defend the Union. They remained ready to act if Home Rule was proposed again.
- With 16 out of 18 Unionist MPs coming from east Ulster, the idea of cutting that area off from the rest of Ireland was raised for the first time.
After Gladstone lost the 1886 election, the Conservatives under Lord Salisbury formed the government. At first they were unsure what to do about Ireland. They faced a new land struggle, led by Parnell’s lieutenants, Harrington and O’Brien. It was caused by a new fall in agricultural prices and an increase in evictions. Harrington proposed a ‘Plan of Campaign’ to deal with this problem. Tenants would join together and refuse to pay their rent until the landlord reduced it. The ‘Plan’ was spread rapidly, but Parnell stopped it because it might offend the Liberals on whom he now relied for Home Rule. Salisbury then appointed his nephew, Arthur Balfour, to be Chief Secretary for Ireland. His task was to stop the ‘Plan’ and restore government control in Ireland:

- He brought in a land act to allow tenants to go back to the land courts after three years (not 15 as in 1881 Act)
- He introduced a Crimes Act which ended jury trials for “agitators” (i.e. Plan leaders) and gave those found guilty a mandatory six months in jail
- He also urged harsh landlords to make a deal with their tenants
- Yet, at the same time, he secretly helped a few landlords to take on the Plan so as to drain funds from it and the Home Rule Party

This policy worked. Landlords made a deal with tenants on 84 estates but the fight dragged on for years on the rest. The National League had to support evicted tenants, which cost them £240,000. But the struggle brought in foreign journalists and won sympathy for the cause.

1887-1889: Parnell and the Times forgeries

- The London Times opposed Home Rule for Ireland. In 1887, to bring down Parnell, it published letters which seemed to show that Parnell approved of the Phoenix Park murders
- When an enquiry proved the letters were forgeries, the plot backfired
- Parnell became popular in Britain. In December 1889, he held talks with Gladstone about the next Home Rule Bill.
1889-1890: the O’Shea divorce case

- At that point William O’Shea sued for divorce. Parnell had been having an affair with his wife, Katherine, since 1880.
- Parnell assured his followers that he would emerge from the divorce without a stain on his character. Thinking it was just another plot, they believed him.
- But Parnell wished to marry Katherine, so he did not defend himself when the case came up in October 1890. This presented him in a very bad light.

The fall of Parnell

- British Liberals protested to Gladstone about his alliance with the ‘adulterer’. He told the Irish MPs he could not deliver Home Rule if Parnell remained as leader.
- At a Party meeting, Parnell refused to resign and the Party split. About 30 MPs stayed loyal to him; the rest wanted him to go.
- Over the next nine months he fought and lost three by-elections.
- During these he appealed for help to republicans whom he had neglected since the Kilmainham Treaty. For this reason, republicans claimed he supported them, but in fact he was careful never to come out fully in favour of violence.
- He worked very hard and his health, never strong, gave way. He died in October 1891, aged 45.

Assessment

- A skilful politician, Parnell turned Home Rule from a vague aspiration into a political reality.
- By leading the Land League, he got farmers, the biggest group in Ireland, to support Home Rule.
- He built a strong disciplined party and was able to persuade one British party, the Liberals, to support Home Rule.
- But his arrogant refusal to step aside when his private life threatened the cause of Home Rule, split the Party and delayed Home Rule for many years.
4.1 Why was land so important in late-19th century Ireland?

- Land was of vital importance to people in 19th century Ireland because farming was almost the only way of making a living.

- Out of a population of around five million in 1871, about three million were farmers and their families. A farmer's income depended on the size of his farm:
  - About 30% of farmers had more than 30 acres. They could make a decent living from farming.
  - About 10% had less than five acres. They were very poor, living always on the edge of starvation. Most of them lived in the west. As time passed many gave up and emigrated.
  - The remaining 60% had between five and 30 acres. They got by, but life was a constant struggle.

- In 1870, almost all farmers were tenants. Each tenant paid an annual rent to a landlord for the land he farmed.

- Legally, a landlord could increase the rent or evict a tenant farmer whenever he wished. That made farmers feel insecure, though in practice, landlords seldom did either of these things.

- When a tenant farmer was evicted he lost his home and his job. There was no social welfare and few other jobs. He and his family had little choice but to enter the workhouse (a social disgrace) or to emigrate.

The political power of farmers

- In 1870, the bigger, more prosperous farmers had the right to vote. In 1884, Gladstone extended the vote to all farmers.

- As a result, various political leaders tried to please the farmers so as to win their support:
  - Gladstone was the first to do so with his 1870 Land Act.
  - Parnell tried to get them behind his Home Rule Party by leading the Land League.
  - Gladstone tried to counter this with his second Land Act in 1881.
  - Finally the Conservatives tried to ‘kill Home Rule’ by bringing in several land purchase acts.
What the tenant farmers wanted

- From the 1850s, tenant farmers campaigned for ‘tenant right’, also known as ‘The three Fs’:
  - Fair rent: i.e. rent a farmer could afford to pay
  - Fixity of tenure: i.e. no evictions so long as the tenant paid the fair rent
  - Freedom of sale: i.e. if a tenant left his farm voluntarily he would get compensation for improvements he made like barns or ditches. The compensation could come from the landlord or from the next tenant. This system existed in Ulster and was called the ‘Ulster Custom’

- Later tenants began to demand ‘land purchase’. That meant the government would lend them money to buy their land and they would pay it back over many years (like a mortgage).

4.2 1870 - 1885: Gladstone and the land question

The 1870 Land Act

- After the Fenian rising in 1867, Gladstone tried to “pacify Ireland” with his first Land Act:
  - It legalised the Ulster Custom and gave “compensation for disturbance” where the custom did not exist
  - The ‘Bright clause’ began land purchase by lending money to farmers to help them buy their farms. They repaid the loan over 35 years

- The Act was not very successful, but it set a pattern of the government helping farmers to stop them supporting nationalism.

Gladstone’s 1881 Land Act

- An agricultural depression, starting in 1877, cut farmers’ incomes. Evictions increased. Parnell, the Fenians and the Land League tried to stop them with demonstrations and boycotting

- Gladstone decided to split Parnell’s followers and win over the farmers by giving them the Three Fs

- The Act set up “land courts” to decide on a fair rent. It was fixed for 15 years and a tenant who paid it could not be evicted

- But tenants in arrears (behind with the rent) could not go to the Land Court and it did little for poor farmers with small farms

- League members were divided over the Act, but Parnell provoked Gladstone into putting him in Kilmainham and banning the League. That meant that farmers saw Parnell as a martyr and stayed loyal to him

- After the Kilmainham Treaty, Gladstone passed the Arrears Act, which helped small farmers go to the Land Courts

- The Land Court cut rents by an average of 20%. But as agricultural prices continued to fall, farmers were finding it hard to pay the new rents by 1885.