

that was far more conservative than the Conservatives"<sup>3</sup>.

### OTHER OPTIONS

In addition to tenant proprietorship and land nationalisation there were two options both of which had their merits, but which were not considered: land distribution and co-operative farming.

Land distribution would have involved the removal of the grazier class, the setting of controlled rents, combined with the introduction of the 'Three F's'. The average tenant's holding would thereby increase by 50% and his security and profit-making potential would be greatly enhanced. Landlords would eventually sell because of the fall in incoming rents due to the reduced demand for land.

Co-operative farming was also an option. Prior to the Famine, when a large percentage of landlords were resident on their estates, each estate operated as an *semi-feudal* economic unit. Almost all estates had animal housing, smithies, lime-kilns, mills, orchards and the agricultural infrastructure which could have made the estates more viable than independently held small holdings. Well-managed co-operative units also had the possibility of developing small agriculturally based industries such as textile manufacture, flour milling and food processing. Under this option landlords could be bought out by the co-operative as it generated wealth.

### ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH AND PRESS

On Sunday, 8th June, a mass meeting of between 4000<sup>4</sup> and 8000<sup>5</sup> people was addressed at Attyreesh near Westport by Charles Stewart Parnell MP.

The Westport meeting, and its organisers, were denounced the day prior to the meeting being held by 89 year old Archbishop John McHale of Tuam in a letter to the *Freeman's Journal* "... night patrolling, acts and words of menace, with arms in hand, the profanation of what is most sacred in

<sup>3</sup>James Daly and the Land Question by Gerard Moran in *Retrospect* 1980.

<sup>4</sup>'Freeman's Journal's' figure.

<sup>5</sup>Davitt's figure.

religion - all the results of lawless and occult association, eminently merit the solemn condemnation of ministers of religion, as directly tending to impiety and disorder in church and society"<sup>6</sup>.

The Archbishop was not without support in his opposition to the new movement. Some of his admirers organised a meeting at Ballyhaunis and invited the prelate to attend. In his reply he stated "...In some parts of the country in calmer moments the people will not fail to be astonished at the circumstance of finding themselves at the tail of a few unknown strolling men, who with affected grief, deploring the condition of the tenantry, seek only to mount peace and preferment on the shoulders of the people; and should they succeed in the ambitious designs they would not hesitate to shake aside at once the instruments of their advancement as an unprofitable encumbrance..."

The fact that the Archbishop's opinion and the exertions of many of his clergy were largely ignored gives an insight into the momentum which the agitation movement had achieved as early as mid-June 1879.

### WESTPORT MEETING

The Westport meeting was organised chiefly by J. J. Louden assisted by William Doris. James Daly chaired it. Davitt made the first speech. Malachy O'Sullivan, in his address, advocated the use of physical as well as moral force. Mathew Harris, spoke of his conviction that the death knell of landlordism had been sounded. Thomas Joyce of Louisburgh traced the history of landlordism and John W. Walshe again declared that "the land of Ireland belongs to the people of Ireland". Parnell, the principal speaker, defined a fair rent as "a rent the tenant can reasonably pay according to the times"<sup>7</sup> and went on to exhort tenants to "... keep a firm grip on your homesteads and lands".

Parnell's speech ensured widespread press publicity - the sentiment of which varied from "...Communism in Connaught..." in the *Dublin Evening Mail* to "... a wild and foolish scheme..." in *The Freeman's Journal*

<sup>6</sup>'Freeman's Journal', 7th June 1879.

<sup>7</sup>'Freeman's Journal', 7th June 1879.