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Abstract

Redmond is traditionally associated with Charles Stewart Parnell, whom he replaced at the head of the small Parnellite faction following the split of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1890. More recently Redmond has been compared to Edward Carson in an attempt to highlight that, despite being political opponents, both men also shared much in common. Redmond might have succeeded Parnell as one of the senior figures of the Irish Home Rule movement and yet historians concur that he 'did not resemble his erstwhile hero and mentor [...] either in his power or in his style of leadership'. Beyond the question of leadership and political clout, it may also be suggested that Parnell was not the only figure that played an influence in shaping Redmond's ideas and discourse. In a 2014 paper, Colin Reid contended that '[w]hile the Parnellite strand of John Redmond's political leanings has received considerable attention in recent years, his Buttite inheritance remains to be explored by historians, shaping as it did his conciliatory rhetoric, imperial sensibilities and openness to a federalist solution'. Our proposed paper intends to further explore this suggestion and compare Isaac Butt and John Redmond. Personal lives, historiography and the questions of Home Rule, federalism and empire will be focused upon.

Comparing Isaac Butt and John Redmond

Pauline Collombier-Lakeman

John Redmond is traditionally associated with Charles Stewart Parnell, whom he replaced at the head of the small Parnellite faction following the split of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1890. Redmond himself claimed he upheld Parnell's legacy, as is exemplified by this extract of a speech delivered in the House of Commons in March 1894, at a time when the British Liberals were considering shelving Home Rule until 'England, as the predominant Member of the partnership of the Three Kingdoms, would be convinced of its justice and equity':¹

By 'Home Rule' we Irishmen mean something more than a purely local self-government for purely local affairs. We mean by 'Home Rule' a government which would be consistent with the supremacy of this Parliament, and with our position in the Empire, a National Government with something of the pride and the honour attaching to a National Government and a National Parliament.²

More recently Redmond has been compared to Edward Carson in an attempt to highlight that, despite being political opponents, both men also shared much in common.³ Redmond might have succeeded Parnell as one of the senior figures of the Irish Home Rule movement and yet historians concur that he was nothing like Parnell. As is emphasized by Conor Mulvagh in his recent work on the Party in the early twentieth century, '[w]hen he took over leadership of the reunited party in 1900, John Redmond certainly did not resemble his erstwhile hero and mentor Parnell either in his power or in his style of leadership'.⁴

Beyond the question of leadership and political clout, it may also be suggested that Parnell was not the only figure that played an influence in shaping Redmond's ideas and discourse. In a 2014 paper, Colin Reid contended that '[w]hile the Parnellite strand of John Redmond's political leanings has received considerable attention in recent years, his Buttite inheritance remains to be explored by historians, shaping as it did his conciliatory rhetoric, imperial sensibilities and openness to a federalist solution'.⁵

In keeping with Alvin Jackson's view that comparative political biographies and comparative political history are 'remarkably underdeveloped genres within modern Irish history'⁶ and yet would benefit the study of Irish political life in the nineteenth century, this paper will follow Reid's suggestion and attempt to compare Isaac Butt and John Redmond. This comparison is all the more justified as both led the Home Rule movement at crucial stages of its development — Butt at the start of the movement with the creation of the

¹ Lord Rosebery, 12 March 1894, Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 22, c. 32.

² John Redmond, House of Commons, 13 March 1894, *Home Rule Speeches of John Redmond, M.P.*, ed. R. Barry O'Brien (London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1910), 70.

³ Alvin Jackson, *Judging Redmond and Carson* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2018), xix.

⁴ Conor Mulvagh, *The Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, 1900-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 3. See also Jackson, *ibid.*, 76-90.

⁵ Colin Reid, "'An Experiment in Constructive Unionism": Isaac Butt, Home Rule and Federalist Political Thought during the 1870s', *English Historical Review* 129.537 (2014): 360.

⁶ Jackson xvii.

Home Government Association and later the Home Rule League, Redmond during its decline and demise. Isaac Butt and Redmond have also both puzzled scholars. Butt's political identity has long been a source of debate among historians who have called him either a nationalist, or an imperialist or a unionist. And while Redmond's political identity as a Home Ruler has been less of a question, the legacies he tried to uphold throughout his career remain a topic that requires further exploration. Personal lives, historiography, the question of leadership as well as the interrelated issues of Home Rule, federalism and empire will be successively examined.

Personal lives and personal backgrounds

Butt was born in 1813 in co. Donegal while Redmond was born over 40 years later and came from co. Wexford. Both men obviously belonged to two different generations of Irish politicians and yet, there are a number of interesting parallels and contrasts between their lives. Butt was already involved in politics during the pre-Famine era and, as a Tory member of the Dublin Corporation, famously opposed Daniel O'Connell, the leader of the Repeal movement, during a three-day debate on the issue of the Union in 1843.⁷ Redmond entered Parliament in 1881, that is to say two years after Isaac Butt's death. He became one of the key figures of the Irish Parliamentary Party — first as the leader of the Parnellite minority after Parnell's death from 1891 to 1900, then as the elected chairman of a reunited Party from 1900 to his death in 1918. Despite the gap in time, there is a personal connection between Isaac Butt and John Redmond in so far as Redmond's father, William Archer Redmond, was a Home Rule MP in the 1870s. He was elected to represent Wexford at a by-election in April 1872 and had declared in his election address:

Under the name of Home Rule, I will at once declare my conviction that Ireland possesses the indefeasible right to be governed by an Irish Parliament. That right has never been forfeited or surrendered, and I hold that the restoration of Home Rule is absolutely essential to the good government of the country, to the development of its resources, to the removal of the wasting curse of absenteeism and to the final establishment in peace and liberty of the Irish race upon Irish soil, I am convinced that ample means exist to achieve this result within the limits of the Constitution, and without infringing upon our loyalty to the throne [...].⁸

William Archer Redmond also attended the Dublin Home Rule Conference of November 1873, which gave birth to the Home Rule League and remained a Home Rule MP for Wexford until November 1880.⁹

John Redmond may have obtained a seat in Westminster only from 1881 onwards but he acted as his father's parliamentary assistant from 1876 to 1880, working as a salaried clerk in the House of Commons. In other words, he attended the debates in the House and may even have crossed paths with Butt when the latter was still the leader of the Irish Home

⁷ *A Full and Revised Report of the Three Days' Discussion in the Corporation of Dublin on the Repeal of the Union* (Dublin: John Levy, 1843).

⁸ Quoted by Louis Redmond-Howard, *John Redmond: The Man and the Demand, a Biographical Study on Irish Politics* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1910), 8-9.

⁹ See Colm Kiernan, 'Home Rule for Ireland and the Formation of the Australian Labor Party, 1883 to 1891', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 38.1(April, 1992): 2.

Rule MPs but was faced with increasing discontent and criticism over his style of leadership and his choice of strategies.

The Redmonds actually held divergent political views at this stage. Scholar Paul Bew identifies William Archer Redmond as a man who ‘generally supported the moderate views of Isaac Butt’¹⁰ and his fellow-historian David Thornley indicates that, following the general elections of 1874, which witnessed the election of 59 alleged Home Rule MPs, he belonged to a ‘nucleus of twenty members of theoretically proven loyalty’.¹¹ John Redmond, however, does not seem to have shared his father’s views regarding Isaac Butt and the early Home Rule movement. Paul Bew again notes that ‘the young Redmond — setting aside perhaps a certain conservatism — was highly impressed by the style and effectiveness’ of Charles Stewart Parnell who, at the time, was amongst those who strongly challenged Butt’s leadership. John Redmond even supported Parnell during a heated political meeting, which took place in Enniscorthy in the spring of 1880.¹²

From a religious point of view, Redmond and Butt came from a different background. Butt was the son of a Church of Ireland clergyman while Redmond’s family belonged to the Catholic gentry. Nevertheless, Redmond’s mother came from a Protestant and unionist background; she had converted upon her marriage with William Archer Redmond but Paul Bew stresses that ‘she never converted to nationalism’.¹³

Despite his Catholic background and secondary education at the Jesuit college of Clongowes Wood, Redmond then went to Trinity College Dublin, a Protestant university and a Protestant stronghold. As is underlined by Paul Bew, such a choice was ‘an unusual step to take for a Catholic’.¹⁴ Redmond left Trinity College without a degree but later qualified as a barrister and worked as such on the Leinster circuit in the 1880s.

Isaac Butt also attended Trinity College, albeit far more successfully than Redmond. He entered at the age of 15 and ended up lecturing in political economy. He also co-founded a university periodical, the *Dublin University Magazine*, of which he was the editor between 1834 and 1838. Butt was also a barrister and contrary to Redmond, used his legal work to boost his political career. He was called to the bar in 1838 and is remembered as a more successful lawyer than Redmond. Not only was he already a well-known lawyer before the Great Famine broke out in 1845, but after briefly giving up his legal career for politics between 1852 and 1865, an electoral defeat in 1865 forced him to turn back to the law and ‘rebuild a once great legal career’.¹⁵ This was a significant moment in Butt’s career since he ended up defending Fenian prisoners with a fair share of success and rose to political prominence because of the amnesty campaign he launched and led in their favour. David Thornley notes that ‘[w]hen Butt took the fenian brief [...], he took the first step back upon the path which years before had brought him to the forefront of an earlier generation of

¹⁰ Paul Bew, *John Redmond* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1996), 6.

¹¹ David Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1964), 195-96.

¹² Bew 8.

¹³ Bew 6.

¹⁴ Bew 7.

¹⁵ Thornley 15.

Irish tribunes, and which was now to take him to the leadership of home rule'.¹⁶ Butt's ground-breaking role during the Fenian amnesty campaign and the early days of the Home Rule movement is highlighted by Alvin Jackson, who notes:

Butt had made himself the hero of Fenianism through his courtroom efforts on their behalf, and he pioneered the effort to 'constitutionalise' the Brotherhood. His truce with the Fenians in 1873 bears resemblance to the 'New Departure' of 1878-1879, through which Parnell and the militants loosely accepted a shared strategy of agrarian agitation together with the goal of self-government.¹⁷

Yet, despite this trailblazing legacy, it seems that Isaac Butt was for a long time neglected by the historians of Ireland. So was John Redmond, to a certain extent.

History Writing: Images of Isaac Butt and John Redmond

In the preface to his *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* published in 1964, David Thornley writes:

Of all of the men who claimed tribuneship of Irish nationality perhaps none has suffered such neglect as Isaac Butt. His greatest successor in the leadership of the Home Rule movement, Charles Stewart Parnell, has been the subject not merely of generations of romantic adulation, a multitude of biographies, and at least one motion picture, but also of two first-rate modern studies [...]. The post-Parnellite party has received equally scholarly treatment [...]. By comparison the career of Isaac Butt has been virtually ignored.¹⁸

A quick check in the Bibliography of Irish and British History database confirms Thornley's assessment of 1964. Little was written about Butt before the 1960s. Except an article entitled 'Isaac Butt: the Father of the Home Rule', published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1913 by Protestant Home Rule MP John Gordon Swift MacNeill,¹⁹ the first biography of Isaac Butt — *The Road to Excess* by Terence de Vere White — did not come out until 1946 and portrayed Butt as a man who converted from Orangeism to the nationalist cause — a theory which has since been put into question.²⁰ Thornley's work did fill a gap, together with Lawrence McCaffrey's studies of both Isaac Butt himself and the whole Home Rule movement in the 1870s.²¹

It was not until 1989, the year when Brendan Bradshaw launched his attack on Irish revisionism in *Irish Historical Studies*,²² that an article devoted to Isaac Butt was published by William J. McCormack in a volume edited by Ciaran Brady entitled *Worsted in the Game*:

¹⁶ Thornley 15.

¹⁷ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), 34.

¹⁸ Thornley 9.

¹⁹ John Gordon Swift MacNeill, 'Isaac Butt: The Father of the Home Rule', *Fortnightly Review* 94 (1913): 448-59.

²⁰ Terence De Vere White, *The Road to Excess* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1946).

²¹ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, 'Home Rule and the General Election of 1874 in Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies* 9.34 (1954): 190-212; 'The Home Rule Party and Irish Nationalist Opinion, 1874-76', *Catholic Historical Review* 43.2 (1957): 160-77; 'Isaac Butt and the Home Rule Movement: A Study in Conservative Nationalism', *Review of Politics* (1960): 72-95; *Irish federalism in the 1870s: A Study in Conservative Nationalism*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 52.6 (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1962).

²² Brendan Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies* 26.104 (1989): 329-351.

Losers in Irish History. As this title suggests and as will be shown in the next section of this paper, McCormack's study was a rather negative interpretation of Isaac Butt's contribution to Irish national politics.²³

In keeping with the evolution of Irish historiography and, more specifically, history-writing on the subject of Irish nationalism, the mid- and late-1990s inaugurated a phase during which Isaac Butt was rediscovered and his case more extensively studied. Publications by Joseph Spence, Alan O'Day, David George Boyce, Philip Bull, as well as by French scholar Ghislaine Saison, contributed to highlight that Butt had been a neglected and misunderstood figure of Irish history. They also launched vivid debates concerning the way his career and political choices may be interpreted. Amongst the questions that seem to have puzzled the community of historians is the political label that would fit Isaac Butt best. Butt has been perceived and examined so far either as a 'nationalist',²⁴ or a 'tory',²⁵ or again as a 'unionist'.²⁶ To add to the confusion, other phrases have been used to refer to Butt such as 'Orange Young Ireland',²⁷ 'imperial nationalism'²⁸ and 'colonial patriotism'.²⁹ Another point of debate has been whether one should identify a change or a rupture in Butt's political thinking before and after the Great Famine. While Thornley, Bull and even Ghislaine Saison have all emphasised the impact of the Famine on Butt,³⁰ more recent assessments by Joseph Spence and Alvin Jackson have contested the idea that his career might be divided into two distinct phases and have argued instead in favour of a form of continuity between his pre-Famine and post-Famine stance. Jackson thus states:

The horrors of the Great Irish Famine of 1845-51, combined with the tardiness of British relief policy, have traditionally been defined as a turning point in Butt's political evolution. [...] [T]he distance between Butt the Orangeman and Butt the Home Rule leader was perhaps not so very great.³¹

As a historical figure and Home Rule leader, John Redmond suffered a similar fate as Isaac Butt, albeit with some minor differences.

In the early decades of the 20th century, Redmond was not as forgotten as Butt but the books centred on him were relatively few. They were usually written by authors

²³ William J. McCormack, 'Isaac Butt (1813-1879) and the Inner Failure of Protestant Home Rule', *Worsted in the Game, Losers in Irish History*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1989), 121-32.

²⁴ See for instance Alan O'Day, 'Max Weber and Leadership, Butt, Parnell and Dillon: Nationalism in Transition', *Ireland in Transition, 1867-1921*, eds. David George Boyce and Alan O'Day (London: Routledge, 2004), 17-34; or Philip Bull, 'Isaac Butt, British Liberalism and an Alternative Nationalist Tradition', *Problems and Perspectives in Irish History since 1800*, eds. David George Boyce and Roger Swift (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004), 147-163.

²⁵ Joseph Spence, 'Isaac Butt and Irish Toryism', *Bullán: An Irish Studies Review* 2.1 (1995): 45-60; Philip Bull, 'Isaac Butt and the Politics of Accommodation', *Australian Journal of Irish Studies* 1 (2001): 158-66.

²⁶ See for instance Ghislaine Saison, 'Isaac Butt: Itinéraire d'un unioniste déçu', *Penseurs conservateurs au Royaume-Uni: De Burke au thatchérisme*, ed. Maurice Chrétien (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2008), 126-151; Reid 332-61.

²⁷ Terence McNevin quoted by Thornley 17.

²⁸ The phrase is used by Thornley 20.

²⁹ Alan O'Day, 'Isaac Butt and Irish Nationality', *The Historian*, 58 (1998): 18.

³⁰ Thornley 17. Bull, 'Butt and the Politics of Accommodation', 161; Saison 15-6.

³¹ Jackson, *Home Rule*, 25-6. See also Joseph Spence, 'Isaac Butt, Irish Nationality and the Conditional Defence of the Union, 1833-70', *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801*, eds. David George Boyce and Alan O'Day (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 65-89.

generally sympathetic to the Home Rule cause³² but are still acknowledged as testimonies of great value to the historian of Irish nationalism.³³ Redmond was also extensively mentioned in some of the major works devoted to the Irish Parliamentary Party and its major figures and produced between the 1940s and 1980s — Conor Cruise O'Brien's *Parnell and his Party*, F.S.L. Lyons's biography of John Dillon and his *Irish Parliamentary Party*.³⁴ Interestingly though, it must be noted that none of the great historians of the period wrote a biography specifically devoted to Redmond, contrary to what happened in the case of Charles Stewart Parnell or John Dillon.

Again it was not until 1989 that the case of Redmond was re-examined: the volume edited by Ciaran Brady included not only the aforementioned chapter on Isaac Butt but also a study of Redmond by Michael Laffan.³⁵ The first modern biography devoted to Redmond was published by Paul Bew in 1996 and Redmondite politics were also the focus of Patrick Maume's study of early 20th century Irish nationalism entitled *The Long Gestation*.³⁶ The fact that his biography was written by a historian from Northern Ireland and was published two years before the Good Friday Agreement was highly significant. Redmond was being rediscovered as a useful analogy or exemplar for contemporary Ireland at a time when peace negotiations were taking place. And yet, the comment published by Kevin Myers in *The Irish Times* in April the same year shows that, in a context that was highly politically charged, Redmond remained a source of controversy:

The battered old shade of John Redmond was probably not in the least surprised to be traduced yet again at Arbour Hill last Sunday, when the Fianna Fail leader, Bertie Ahern, implied that enthusiasm for the once leader of the Irish party was inappropriate for the elected Taoiseach of the Irish nation.³⁷

It is therefore not surprising that Joseph Finnan still wrote in 2004: '[s]ympathetic but dismissive best describes the attitude of present-day Ireland towards the memory of John Redmond'.³⁸ And yet the early 21st century has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of books and papers devoted to Redmond, clearly stimulated by the development of a post-nationalist and post-revisionist historiography since 1998 and the recent phase of commemoration started in 2012. The re-examination of the third Home Rule crisis of 1912-

³² Louis Redmond-Howard, *John Redmond: The Man and the Demand, a Biographical Study on Irish Politics* (London, 1910); Robert O'Loughran, *Redmond's Vindication* (London: Talbot, 1919); Stephen Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years* (London: E. Arnold, 1919); Warre B. Wells, *John Redmond: A Biography* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1919); Denis Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (London: George G. Harrap, 1932).

³³ Mulvagh 17.

³⁴ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Parnell and His Party, 1880-1890* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957). F. S. L. Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1890-1910* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), and *John Dillon: A Biography* (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press, 1968).

³⁵ Michael Laffan, 'John Redmond (1856-1918) and Home Rule' in Brady 133-41.

³⁶ See footnote 10. See also the bibliography for the two references.

³⁷ Kevin Myers, 'A Great Reconciler is Traduced Again', *The Irish Times*, 23 April 1996.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/a-great-reconciler-is-traduced-again-1.42294>. Accessed 15 June 2019.

³⁸ Joseph P. Finnan, *John Redmond and Irish Unity, 1912-1918* (Syracuse, NJ: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 1-2.

14 and the centenary of Redmond's death have led to the publication of new biographies³⁹ as well as works dealing with the history of the Irish Parliamentary Party under Redmond's leadership.⁴⁰ Scholarly studies have also reassessed Redmond's role and activities during the First World War,⁴¹ his approach to federalism⁴² and his links with the colonies.⁴³ A selection of some of Redmond's private papers, which had never been published as opposed to some of those of Daniel O'Connell or Charles Stewart Parnell, was also recently made available.⁴⁴ As in the case of Isaac Butt, historians have lately been concerned with rediscovering and reinterpreting Redmond's life and legacy.⁴⁵

The Question of Leadership: Butt's and Redmond's Respective Positions within the Home Rule Movement

Re-examining Isaac Butt's and John Redmond's respective legacies involves necessarily raising the question of their leadership at the head of the Home Rule movement. Isaac Butt may be regarded as the founder of the Home Rule movement in 1870 — a year during which he published his seminal pamphlet *Irish Federalism: Its Meaning, Its Objects and Its Hopes* and participated with others in the creation of the Home Government Association — and yet, he was never the head of a fully united, pledge-bound Home Rule parliamentary party. The idea of imposing a pledge to future Home Rule candidates had been discarded at the Home Rule Conference of November 1873.⁴⁶ As a result, despite the election of 59 alleged Home Rule MPs the following year, only 19 were actually genuine and loyal supporters of the cause.⁴⁷ Lack of discipline, absenteeism and inefficiency in the House of Commons plagued the Home Rule group within the House, which led Butt's leadership to be more and more contested in the second half of the 1870s.⁴⁸ Butt was notably challenged by Charles Stewart Parnell, who rose to the attention of his fellow nationalist MPs as part of a

³⁹ Dermot Meleady, *Redmond: the Parnellite* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008) and *John Redmond: the National Leader* (Dublin: Merrion, 2014); Christopher Dooley, *Redmond: A Life Undone* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2015).

⁴⁰ Besides the book by Conor Mulvagh referenced in footnote 4 and in the bibliography, there is also James R. R. McConnell, *The Irish Parliamentary Party and the Third Home Rule Crisis* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2013).

⁴¹ For instance, John Bruton, 'September 1914: John Redmond at Woodenbridge', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 101.402 (Summer, 2012): 237-241; James R. R. McConnell, "'Après la guerre": John Redmond, the Irish Volunteers and Armed Constitutionalism, 1913-1915', *English Historical Review* 131.553 (2016): 1445-470.

⁴² Michael Wheatley, 'John Redmond and Federalism in 1910', *Irish Historical Studies* 32.127 (2001): 343-64.

⁴³ Malcolm Campbell, 'John Redmond and the Irish National League in Australia and New Zealand, 1883', *History* 86.283 (2001): 348-62; Patrick Walsh, *The Rise and Fall of Imperial Ireland: Redmondism in the Context of Britain's Conquest of South Africa and Its Great War on Germany, 1899-1916* (Belfast: Athol, 2003).

⁴⁴ Dermot Meleady, *John Redmond: Selected Letters and Memoranda, 1880-1918* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2018).

⁴⁵ See for instance Stephen Collins, 'John Redmond: Discarded Leader', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 98.390 (2009): 123-133. For Butt, see for example Alan O'Day, 'Political Economy and Nationality: Isaac Butt, Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt Reassessed', *Michael Davitt: New Perspectives*, eds. Fintan Lane and Andrew G. Newby (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 48-61 and David George Boyce, 'Isaac Butt and Charles Stewart Parnell: The History of Politics and the Politics of History', *Ireland's Polemical Past: Views of Irish history in Honour of R.V. Comerford*, ed. Terence A. M. Dooley (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2010), 123-40.

⁴⁶ *Proceedings of the Home Rule Conference at the Rotunda, Dublin, on the 18th, 19th, 20th & 21st November 1873* (Dublin: The Home Rule League, 1873), 172.

⁴⁷ Thornley, 195-202.

⁴⁸ This is described by Thornley, 228, 230, 254 & 277 as well as by McCaffrey in *Irish Federalism in the 1870s*, 29-31.

small number of obstructionist MPs and was elected at the head of the Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain in August 1877.⁴⁹ Isaac Butt ended up being perceived as an inefficient leader even by some of his contemporaries. In the *Freeman's Journal* in February 1879, John Dillon, who was then in the early stages of his political career, complained both about Butt's introducing motions simply asking for inquiries into the impact of the union for Ireland and the possibility of Home Rule; he also condemned his subsequent failure to demand Home Rule from the Commons:

Instead of demanding our national rights as rights unquestionable, all that was sought for was an inquiry, as if any inquiry was needed. Good God! Is not the very fact of asking the English Parliament a very lowering of the national flag? But even that motion for an inquiry is thrust into the background and the whole attention of the party is turned to the redress of grievances, and in the redress of grievances, there are always compromises to be made between the demands of the Irish people and the prejudices of the English nation. But is that not a selling of the principle of Home Rule?⁵⁰

Amongst the scholars who have written about Butt, some have not questioned this idea that Butt failed at leading the Home Rule movement to greatness. Richard Comerford thus remarks that Butt 'had neither the ambition nor the means to impose strict parliamentary discipline on followers whose only common bond was the slogan which so many of them had adopted only belatedly and opportunistically'.⁵¹ William McCormack is even more scathing in his assessment of Butt:

[T]hough one could argue that the later Butt was a more moderate man — politically — than the incendiary of 1840, he can hardly be said to have been successful — unless a swivel bridge is the proper reward for success. Nor can one see in Butt's House of Commons performance in the years before party rivals engineered his fall anything quite like wisdom.⁵²

One could argue that, since the Irish Reform Act of 1868 had certainly not had the same impact as the 1867 legislation on the rest of Britain,⁵³ there was little incentive for a disciplined and united Irish party to form itself. More generally, lack of discipline remained an issue that was not specific to the Irish Home Rule MPs. As Andrew Hawkins reminds us, '[a]fter [1867] party discipline in division votes increased, but it was not absolute'.⁵⁴ Colin Reid's recent paper on Isaac Butt introduces more nuances in the overall assessment of Butt's political career as a Home Ruler. Reid not only emphasises the 'success' of the whole Irish Home Rule movement from an electoral point of view but also identifies some factors that help explain the difficulties met by Isaac Butt at the head of the movement and in the House of Commons. First, the nature of Butt's political project is deemed problematic by Reid in so far as it was an attempt at compromise and was therefore 'too cautious from an

⁴⁹ See *The Times* 30 July 1877 for a letter by Parnell justifying the use of obstruction. Parnell was elected chairman of the Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain on 27 August 1877. See *Freeman's Journal* 28 August 1877.

⁵⁰ John Dillon, *Freeman's Journal* 5 February 1879.

⁵¹ Richard V. Comerford, *The Fenians in Context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-82* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1998), 202.

⁵² McCormack 123.

⁵³ K. Theodore Hoppen, 'The Franchise and Electoral Politics in England and Ireland 1832-1885', *History* 70 (1985): 209 and 214-5.

⁵⁴ Andrew Hawkins, *British Party Politics 1852-1886* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 280.

Irish nationalist perspective, and too radical from a conservative vantage-point'; the Home Rule movement was also a motley group involving former Repealers, former Young Irelanders and Fenians, which meant that there was 'little consensus as to what Irish self-government might entail'.⁵⁵

John Redmond was the chairman of the Irish Parliamentary Party between 1900 and 1918 and died in March 1918, a few months before the party suffered a major electoral defeat at the general election of December. Despite this rise to power, Redmond, like Butt, ended up being perceived as a failure. First his contemporaries blamed him for a variety of reasons: most notably, the fact that he reluctantly accepted the principle of a partition of Ireland (March 1914); the fact that Home Rule was voted by the British Parliament but suspended in September 1914 in a context of increasing tensions between Irish unionists, members of the Irish Parliamentary Party and more advanced nationalists; the fact that Redmond called upon the Irish Volunteers to support the British war effort (September 1914).

This idea that Redmond failed in his endeavours to see Ireland obtain self-rule has proven persistent, as is illustrated by this 2009 comment from the political correspondent of *The Irish Times* Stephen Collins: '[o]n the face of it, Redmond exemplifies the dictum that all political careers end in failure. He has to take some of the blame for that failure, for mistakes at various stages of his political career.' As is the case of Isaac Butt, recent scholarly work provides us with a more complex and nuanced picture of the situation of both Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party in the early twentieth century. While the party remained divided into factions after 1900 and excluded dissidents (most notably William O'Brien and Timothy Healy), it was also a heavily centralised structure where discipline and loyalty were paramount.⁵⁶ Despite the fact that Redmond was elected chairman of that structure, Conor Mulvagh and Michael Wheatley have both shown that the party was in fact under the control of four men — John Redmond, John Dillon, T. P. O'Connor and Joseph Devlin.⁵⁷ Alvin Jackson actually argues that Redmond was a 'marginal' figure within the party not only because he had been the leader of a minority faction before presiding over the reunited party but also because of his gentry status, his strong family connections with Protestantism and his family's tradition of service to the crown.⁵⁸ And according to Conor Mulvagh, Dillon was in fact the key figure of the party while Redmond was merely 'its public face', which minimises his role and, in turn, the degree to which he may have failed. Mulvagh also contends that Redmond was 'a compromiser by nature'.⁵⁹ One could argue that this was also the position of Isaac Butt since a young John Dillon

⁵⁵ Reid 351-52.

⁵⁶ Mulvagh 260.

⁵⁷ Mulvagh 261 and Wheatley 343.

⁵⁸ Jackson, *Redmond and Carson*, 75. Walter Redmond was amongst the few Catholics employed in the loyalist Wexford yeomanry used to crush the 1798 rebellion. John Redmond's uncle, General John Patrick Redmond, served as a British soldier in India: he took part in the Punjab campaign (1848-9) and in the repression of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. He later served in Ireland in 1865, the West Indies in 1866, and Canada in 1870 (James McConnell, 'A Soldier of the Queen: General J. P. Redmond', *History Ireland* 21.6 (November-December, 2013). <https://www.historyireland.com/home-rule/soldier-queen-general-j-p-redmond/>. Accessed 30 September 2019).

⁵⁹ Mulvagh 9.

berated him for ‘selling the principle of Home Rule’ through the ‘reaching of compromises [...] between the demands of the Irish people and the prejudices of the English nation’.⁶⁰

Home Rule, Federalism and the Empire: How John Redmond Visibly Claimed the Legacy of Isaac Butt

There are obvious parallels to be made between Butt’s and Redmond’s political careers. The browsing of the pamphlets, speeches and archives left by John Redmond shows that the comparison can be taken further. Butt was far from ignored in Redmond’s discourse and may be regarded as a fairly important mentor and source of inspiration for Redmond, notably on the subjects of federalism and the Empire.

Redmond himself confessed that he had the deepest sympathy for Isaac Butt, whom he regarded as a man ‘whose name he in common with large masses of the Irish people would ever recall with reverence and affection’.⁶¹ To Redmond, Butt belonged to a long line of leading figures who had chosen to take the national struggle to Westminster and were committed to the use of law-abiding and moderate strategies. Contesting the views of Sinn Féin in 1907, Redmond warned that the Irish political tradition in the nineteenth century had always been predominantly constitutional — a tradition in which Butt fitted perfectly:

They maintain that the only way to gain Irish reforms is by withdrawing Irish members from Westminster. They give the teaching of history the go by, in face of the fact that it was the secession of Grattan and the Patriot Party from the Irish Parliament in 1797, that smoothed the way for the passage of the Act of Union. [...] They brush aside as absolutely worthless the policy of O’Connell, the policy of Smith O’Brien [...]. They put aside the policy of Butt, of Charles Stewart Parnell, and they put aside the policy of every leader of public opinion, lay or clerical, whose voice has been listened to by Ireland from that day to this.⁶²

Redmond was not simply an admirer of Isaac Butt; he also reactivated some of ideas and arguments defended by the former Irish leader in the 1870s.

The solution advocated by Isaac Butt to solve the Irish issue involved the implementation of what he called a ‘Federal Union’, which would give an Irish Parliament control over all the domestic affairs of Ireland, while an Imperial Parliament would ‘preserv[e] the unity and integrity of the United Kingdom as a great power among the nations of the world’.⁶³ Butt’s project was conservative in its nature since it aimed at keeping the ‘Imperial Parliament in its present form’⁶⁴ and proposed not to repeal the Union but to redefine it along new lines: ‘[T]he time is come when it is essential to the interests of both countries that there should be a re-adjustment or modification of the Union arrangement’. Butt proposed to ‘perpetuate and consolidate the connection’ between Ireland and Britain because he believed both shared ‘ties of kindred and ties of self-

⁶⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 5 February 1879.

⁶¹ John Redmond, House of Commons, 13 April 1893 in Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 11, col. 251.

⁶² John Redmond, *The Irish Party and its Assailants, Its Policy Vindicated: A Record of Its Achievements* (1907), 8-9.

⁶³ Isaac Butt, *Irish Federalism: Its Meaning, Its Objects and Its Hopes* (Dublin: J. Falconer, 1870), 11.

⁶⁴ Isaac Butt, *Irish Federalism*, 46.

interest'. And the existence of local assemblies taking care of local affairs was not incompatible with the existence of a central administration, government and parliament, with which power would be shared:

The principle has been at all times recognised by mankind that there may be countries so united by circumstances and position as to make it their common interest to be joined in one common state — yet so separate as to make it necessary for the domestic affairs of each of them to be managed by an administration of its own.⁶⁵

John Redmond also used the phrase 'federal union' instead of Home Rule and even explicitly referred to Isaac Butt: 'Isaac Butt, in 1873, proposed a Federal Union. This was in substance accepted by Parnell and Gladstone in 1886, and remains the demand of the Irish National Party to this moment'.⁶⁶ As in the case of Isaac Butt, Redmond did not envisage Home Rule as a first step towards separation; it was a solution destined to preserve the British Union and Empire, whose terms would simply be modified or readjusted, as the terms 'federal union' implied:

All reasonable men must admit that Home Rule, whatever else it might be, was not a proposal for separation. [...] On the contrary, it was a demand for a Federal Union, one of the essential constituents of which was the preservation of the unity and integrity of the Empire.⁶⁷

One could argue that Redmond was rewriting the entire history of the Irish Home Rule movement by connecting the demands voiced by Butt in 1873 to Parnell's and to the Irish Parliamentary Party's in the early twentieth century. This teleological approach to the history of parliamentary nationalism in Ireland is questionable: contrary to what Redmond might have suggested, Parnell and Butt did not share the same vision. Colin Reid reminds us that 'Parnell abandoned the last vestiges of federalism in favour of a 'simpler' Home Rule scheme on assuming the leadership of the Irish party in 1880'.⁶⁸ Redmond, however, did present himself as a genuine federalist when he debated the third Home Government for Ireland Bill and as such, he claimed that he was Isaac Butt's heir:

For myself, I have been a federalist all my life. Up to the year 1873 Irish Nationalists had been clamouring for repeal. Mr. Butt, in 1873, raised the question of federalism and established the present Home Rule movement. I then was a lad, quite a young lad, but from that day to this I have repeatedly, and in many lands, as well as in this House of Commons and in Ireland, advocated federalism as the solvent of this problem.⁶⁹

Redmond's adoption of the federal idea connected him with Butt but also marginalised him within his own party. Examining the outcry that welcomed some of Redmond's statements

⁶⁵ Isaac Butt, *Irish Federalism*, 16.

⁶⁶ John Redmond, *What Ireland Wants* (London: Irish Press Agency, 1910), 11. See also 'Home Rule — Its Real Meaning', Melbourne, July 1883 in J. Redmond, *Historical and Political Addresses* (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers & Walker, 1898), 184-5.

⁶⁷ John Redmond, speech at Cambridge, 27 February 1895 in National Library of Ireland, Ms. 7,421, 20. See also *Historical and Political Addresses*, 184-5 & Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, vol. 32, c. 538 (29 March 1895).

⁶⁸ Reid 354.

⁶⁹ John Redmond, *The Home Rule Bill* (London: Cassell & Co., 1912), 67.

in favour of a federal solution to the Irish issue in 1910, Michael Wheatley concludes that 'Redmond's conciliationist and imperialist beliefs were atypical [...]'.⁷⁰ Butt's federalist approach also distinguished him from other members of the Home Government Association or the Home Rule League, which both included Fenians as well as former Repealers. And while Butt called his project 'federal', whether it was a genuine federal proposal or rather a solution based on a mere devolution of powers has been a source of debates amongst scholars. While Richard Jay has argued that Butt can certainly not be considered a federalist,⁷¹ others like Alan J. Ward, John Kendle and Colin Reid have argued that the pamphlet *Irish Federalism* may be regarded as a genuine federalist project whereas Butt's parliamentary speeches in 1874 and 1876 were far more moderate.⁷²

Despite calling his pamphlet *Irish Federalism*, Isaac Butt envisaged a restructuring of the entire Union. Irish Home Rule remained a priority but home rule all round was not excluded, especially as it might offer a solution to the issue raised by the presence of Irish MPs at Westminster, who might continue to discuss Scottish or English affairs while Scottish and English MPs would no longer have a say in Irish affairs:

It is enough to say that I intend to propose a system under which England, Scotland, and Ireland, united as they are under one sovereign, should have a common executive and a common national council for all purposes necessary to constitute them, to other nations, as one state, while each of them should have its own domestic administration, and its own domestic Parliament for its internal affairs. I say each of them, because, although my immediate concern is only with Ireland, I do not suppose that if Irishmen obtain the separate management of Irish affairs it is at all likely that English or Scotchmen would consent to the management of their domestic concerns by a Parliament in which Irish members had still a voice. Whether England and Scotland would still desire to have the internal affairs of Great Britain managed by one common Parliament is a matter entirely for themselves to decide.⁷³

Redmond did not object to Scotland, Wales or England getting their own parliaments either but, like Butt, he estimated that Ireland was to have its own parliament first, before any of her sister nations within the United Kingdom. Therefore, he promised in 1912:

when this measure of Home Rule for Ireland is passed, it will be there ready to be fitted into a system later of Home Rule all round. A beginning in federation must be made, and Ireland is entitled from her whole history to have the first place.⁷⁴

Both men were aware of the existence of a sizeable Irish diaspora beyond the shores of the British Isles. Isaac Butt resolutely underlined the glorious fate of such a diaspora and its resilience as proof that the Irish people were worthy of self-government and worthy of being considered a nation. In his eyes, the Irish people were not a people driven abroad by

⁷⁰ Wheatley 363.

⁷¹ Richard Jay, 'Nationalism, Federalism and Ireland', *Federalism and Nationalism*, ed. M. Forsyth (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), 218.

⁷² John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution: The Debate over the United Kingdom Constitution, 1870-1920* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 13; Alan J. Ward, *The Irish Constitutional Tradition: Responsible Government and Modern Ireland, 1782-1922* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), 56; Reid 336.

⁷³ Butt, *Irish Federalism*, 15-6.

⁷⁴ Hansard, *House of Commons Debates*, 5th series, vol. 38, col. 600.

despair but a chosen nation, whose size and successful participation in the imperial project might impress the British into granting Home Rule:

The increase of the Irish race and its diffusion through all the regions of the globe to which enterprise is carrying colonization are among the most marvellous facts in the history of man. By how many remorseless wars, by how many merciless slaughters have their oppressors sought to exterminate that race! Too often English rule in Ireland has been one bloody and pitiless attempt to drive them from the earth. [...] Yet the Irish people are still numerous and great [...]. The Irish are still the strongest in their own land — while millions of Irishmen scattered over the globe, are banded as one man in love of their old country, and in remembrance of her wrongs! [...] This people, 'scattered and peeled' as they are, have preserved their nationality in all the lands into which they have been driven. Like the chosen people of God, they are among the nations but not of them.⁷⁵

The Irish diaspora held a particularly special place for John Redmond, who had personal ties to the Empire. His tour to Australia and New Zealand in 1883 had helped him rise to prominence in the Irish Parliamentary Party because of the amount of money that was successfully collected.⁷⁶ It was also when Redmond met his first wife, who was Irish-Australian.⁷⁷ So to Redmond, the story of the Irish diaspora was not necessarily one of despair; like Butt before him, he would turn the many stories of exiles abroad into rags-to-riches narratives proving the resilience of the Irish people:

The history of the Irish race in America is one of the most remarkable things in the story of the world. They went to America to compete against colonists and emigrants who came there from every land in the universe [...]. They went untutored. [...] [T]oday the Irish race in America has risen from the low plane, and those poor, uncultured, untutored Irishmen, torn from the mountainsides of Kerry and Mayo and Galway, have by their own grit and ability, courage and talent, lifted themselves to a higher plane, and now occupy a position of which any nation in the world might be proud.⁷⁸

Redmond also believed that some form of long-distance nationalism existed within the Irish diaspora and therefore that the Irish diaspora and the Irish people at home formed one nation bound by the same memories and aspirations and capable of being in spiritual communion with one another, notably on days like the national day:

Today in every part of the world Irishmen are assembled to celebrate the National anniversary, and whether they come together upon the soil of Ireland itself or here in the great centres of population in Great Britain, or across the ocean in the Great Republic of the West, or in Canada, or Australia, or South Africa — wherever they come today their hearts are filled with the same thoughts, the same sweet and tender memories, the same holy ideas and hopes and aspirations.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Butt, *Irish Federalism*, 94-5.

⁷⁶ In Australia alone, Redmond and two colleagues collected £15,000 pounds in a context that was difficult since the tour followed the Phoenix Park Murders of 1882 (Kiernan 1).

⁷⁷ Redmond-Howard 40. Her name was Johanna Dalton.

⁷⁸ John Redmond, speech at Waterford, 23 April 1900 in National Library of Ireland, *Ms. 7,427*, 17.

⁷⁹ John Redmond, speech in Liverpool, March 1903, in *ibid.*, *Ms. 7,433*, 11.

The fact that white settlement colonies had been granted self-rule, especially Canada with the North America Acts of 1867, was regarded as a model and an inspiration for Ireland. While Butt was clearly inspired by federal models outside the British sphere such as the United States and the Austro-Hungarian empire, Butt in particular resorted to the colonial precedent of Canada to argue that what had been granted to other parts of the Empire could be given to Ireland without the least concern regarding the integrity of the Empire. As has been shown by Conor Neville, '[t]he Canadian comparison was trotted out a great deal in the early days of the movement. Butt, as the founder of the movement laid out its philosophy most cogently, frequently relying on the imperial precedents to make his arguments'.⁸⁰ Like Butt, Redmond was prone to resort to colonial precedents to justify the demand for Irish Home Rule. While many passages from Redmond's speeches or writings could be quoted, one is more particularly interesting because it refers to Isaac Butt's own use of the Canadian precedent and then further explores the Canadian situation to plead for self-rule for Ireland and alleviate unionist fears of 'Rome Rule':

He (Mr. J. Redmond) would, however, quote another passage from a speech of Mr. Butt, in which speaking of Canada, he said — 'In 1839 Canada was with difficulty held by force of arms for the British Crown. Canada was in open rebellion. Canada was at a distance from England — close to a great republic, which was certainly not unwilling to incorporate the Canadian Provinces with their States. The experiment was tried of giving Canada Home Rule. It has not disintegrated the Empire'. But it was argued the cases were different because in Ireland there were two nations. Well, he might say, by way of parenthesis, that they (the Nationalists) detested the idea of there being two nations in Ireland. There had been too much bitterness between Irishmen, and they had always looked forward with hope and some confidence to the days when these bitter feelings would cease, and men of all creeds in Ireland would be able to join in a common effort for the elevation of their common country. But were there no two nations in Canada? On the contrary.⁸¹

Once again, Redmond's frequent references to the fate of self-governing colonies as models for Ireland distinguished him from the rest of his party and marginalised him. Conor Neville thus asserts that '[t]he Redmondite clique which governed the direction of the party in the early twentieth century showed a greater inclination to allude to the colonial precedents of Home Rule than any other incarnation of the movement throughout its existence'.⁸² This corroborates what Michael Wheatley has established about the position of moderate Redmondite politicians, who did not dominate the Irish parliamentary party.⁸³ Similarly, Butt's use of colonial analogies made him an atypical figure in the early Home Rule movement:

The colonial analogy was not uppermost in the thoughts of the Home Rule M.P.s. Of those parliamentarians who were committed to Home Rule, the simple repeal programme of Daniel O'Connell and the legacy of Grattan's Parliament seemed to stir them more so than the example of federalism in operation in Canada [...].⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Conor Neville, 'Imperial Precedents in the Home Rule Debates, 1867-1914', MLitt, NUI Maynooth, 2011, 29.

⁸¹ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates* (House of Commons), 3rd series, 13 May 1886, vol. 305, c. 966-67

⁸² Neville 148.

⁸³ Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland, 1910-1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁸⁴ Neville 58.

The links between Redmond and Butt are many and more could certainly be found.⁸⁵ They shed light on the way to understand both men as politicians. Conor Mulvagh claims that Redmond was at heart a ‘compromiser’.⁸⁶ As the successor of both Charles Stewart Parnell and Isaac Butt, Redmond the compromiser may have seen no issue in combining their respective definitions and approaches to the question of Home Rule.

Like Redmond, Butt was a compromiser. His Home Rule project was an attempt at reconciling self-governance, empire and union; his reverence towards the British Parliament and Empire was linked to his deep-seated conviction that conciliating the British government was the only way forward. It was in the same spirit of conciliation and with the same hope for the future of Irish Home Rule that John Redmond encouraged the Irish Volunteers to fight alongside the British at the beginning of the First World War.

This attachment to compromise cannot be seen as what caused Butt’s or Redmond’s respective failures to achieve self-government for Ireland. Both men eventually became contested leaders because they were confronted with circumstances which they had not anticipated and had no control over: in Butt’s case, it was a dramatic failure of the agrarian economy in the late 1870s; in Redmond’s, it was the beginning of a large scale conflict, the duration and intensity of which no one in 1914 — Redmond included — was in a position to surmise.

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⁸⁵ The ambivalent relationship of both men to militant nationalism, for instance, could be further investigated.

⁸⁶ Mulvagh 9.

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