

Select documents

XI. DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE IRISH 'CENTRAL BOARD SCHEME, 1884-5

In the two chapters of the *Life of Joseph Chamberlain* which he devoted to the 'central board' or 'national councils' scheme (i. 575-624 and ii. 3-30), the late J. L. Garvin printed several documents *in extenso* and quoted many others. Unfortunately, the extracts quoted are often all too brief and some important documents are omitted altogether. The documents printed below supplement those given by Garvin and help to clarify the nature of the scheme and the history of the negotiations in connexion with it.

Documents nos 1-8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18 and 20 are among the papers of Joseph Chamberlain; no. 9 is among the papers of the fifth Earl Spencer at Althorp; nos 12, 15 and 19 are among the papers of Cardinal Manning. I am deeply indebted to the Chamberlain trustees, to Earl Spencer and to the Father Superior of the Oblates of St Charles for their kind permission to publish these documents, which comprise:

1. Notes in Chamberlain's hand-writing of W. H. O'Shea's mutilated copy of the Prevention of Crimes (Ireland) Act, 45 and 46 Vict., ch. 25, and of O'Shea's statements concerning its renewal (November 1884).
2. Chamberlain to W. H. Duignan, 17 December 1884. The text given here is of the original letter, which came on to the market, together with other MSS formerly belonging to Duignan, in 1938. These MSS are now among the Chamberlain papers. This letter was published in *The Times*, 6 July 1893.
3. Parnell to O'Shea, 5 January 1885. This letter, together with nos 4, 6 and 14, was probably given to Chamberlain by O'Shea at the time of their controversy with Parnell in August 1888.

4. O'Shea to Parnell, 6 January 1885 (copy).
5. T. M. Healy to Duignan, 11 January 1885. The original letter was forwarded to Chamberlain on 4 February 1885. Unfortunately, it has apparently been lost. The text given here is that of a copy, evidently made at Duignan's orders when the original letter was sent to Chamberlain. It was among the Duignan MSS sold in 1938.
6. Parnell to O'Shea, 13 January 1885.
7. O'Shea to Parnell, 19 January 1885; copy (probably first draft) sent by O'Shea to Chamberlain on or soon after posting the original letter to Parnell. (Garvin, *op. cit.*, i. 586.) Garvin prints part of this letter (*op. cit.*, i. 584-5), but mis-dates it.
8. Chamberlain to John Morley, 21 January 1885; type-written copy, probably taken from the original in Morley's possession and supplied by him to Chamberlain's literary executors; Chamberlain's draft has not apparently been preserved, but the extract from this letter given in Chamberlain's *A political memoir* (1953), pp. 141-3, was evidently based on it; there are a few verbal differences between the two versions.
9. Chamberlain to Earl Spencer, 10 March 1885.
10. Earl Spencer to Chamberlain, 12 March 1885. A copy is among the Spencer papers.
11. Chamberlain's minute of 11 April 1885 on Spencer's memorandum of 25 March 1885. The copy in the Chamberlain papers is not dated, but another copy, headed '*Secret*' and dated 11 April 1885 is among the Spencer papers. Spencer's memorandum of 25 March 1885 is among the Gladstone papers (B.M., Add. MS 44312, ff. 38-43).
12. Chamberlain's memorandum on 'Local government in Ireland', 25 April 1885, circulated to the cabinet and also sent to Cardinal Manning. It is in the hand-writing of Chamberlain's secretary and bears Chamberlain's initials. A copy is among the Chamberlain papers.
13. Earl Spencer to Chamberlain, 26 April 1885. A copy is among the Spencer papers. The first part of the letter,

here omitted, refers to the prince of Wales's visit to Ireland and repeats what Spencer had already stated concerning the renewal of the crimes act in his letter of March 12 and his memorandum of 25 March.

14. Extracts from O'Shea's diary. This document, in O'Shea's hand-writing, deals with his activities in connexion with the 'central board' and crimes bill negotiations from 28 April to 11 May 1885. Garvin (*op. cit.*, i. 605) describes this document as 'scribbled notes, made at the moment in diary form'. The MS is not scribbled and appears to be a careful, although not necessarily accurate, copy of entries in a diary.
15. Parnell to Cardinal Manning, dated 'Wednesday', promising to call the following day. Parnell did in fact call on Manning on 30 April 1885 (S. Gwynn and G. M. Tuckwell, *Life of Sir Charles Dilke*, ii. 131). The date of this note was presumably, therefore, Wednesday, 29 April 1885.
16. O'Shea to Chamberlain, 30 April 1885.
17. Minute by G. O. Trevelyan, 30 April 1885, on Chamberlain's memorandum of 25 April 1885.
18. Manning to Chamberlain, 4 May 1885. A copy, sent by Chamberlain on 22 June 1886, is among the Manning papers. The version of this letter printed in Sir Shane Leslie's *Henry Edward Manning*, p. 395, is mis-dated and contains an error of transcription which obscures its meaning.
19. Parnell to Manning, dated 'Tuesday evening'. This note is contained in an envelope post-marked 5 May 1885, which was a Tuesday.
20. Trevelyan to Chamberlain, 6 May 1885.

All the documents are printed as in the originals except that the use of capitals has been standardised and abbreviations expanded according to the practice of this journal.

C. H. D. HOWARD

1. *Notes in Chamberlain's hand-writing of the copy of the Prevention of Crimes (Ireland) Act, 45 and 46 Vict., ch. 25, brought to him by W. H. O'Shea with certain clauses excised and deleted, Nov. 1884*

Dele		Stent
Special commission cl.	1/3-25/28	Special juries and venue,
Boycotting	cl. 7	save treason and treason
Riots and	} 21-22	felony
unlawful assembly		cl. 4/6
Unlawful associations	8	Alien act
Meetings, proclamation	9	Private investigation
of	10	Blood tax
Curfew clause	11	
Strangers in proclaimed		For one year
district	12	
Newspapers	13	
Search for arms etc.	14	
Additional police	18	

This copy of crimes act was brought me by Mr O'Shea who said that as marked Mr Parnell would not seriously oppose its re-enactment.

November 1884

2. *Chamberlain to William Henry Duignan, 17 Dec. 1884*

Highbury

Moor Green

Birmingham

December 17, 1884

My dear Sir,

Having at last a little spare time I propose to reply more fully to the letter you were kind enough to send me in October last relating your experience in connection with Ireland.

I have again read your account with much interest. It is on the whole a brighter picture than any that I have yet seen. You seem to have found a general absence of anything like painful poverty; and a hopeful spirit with regard to the future. At the same time you remark on the absence of the bitterness which prevailed a few years ago, so that altogether I might, were I so inclined, found on your letter an argument as to the complete success of recent legislation and the inexpediency of

attempting any further changes. I imagine, however, that this would be a conclusion foreign to your intention, and it does not satisfy my own estimate of the situation. In spite of the great improvement that has taken place and the advantages recently obtained from the English parliament you have convinced yourself that the large majority of the people are still nationalist in their aspirations.

I should like to know exactly what this word means, and what the people really want. But before entering on this inquiry I ought to say that the answer to it will not necessarily be conclusive in my mind as to the policy to be adopted. I do not consider that wishes and rights are always identical, or that it is sufficient to find out what the majority of the Irish people desire in order at once to grant their demands. I can never consent to regard Ireland as a separate people with the inherent rights of an absolutely independent community. I should not do this in the case of Scotland, or of Wales, or, to take still more extreme instances of Sussex, or of London. In every case the rights of the country or district must be subordinated to the rights of the whole community of which it forms only a portion. Ireland by its geographical position, and by its history is a part of the United Kingdom, and it cannot divest itself of the obligations or be denied the advantages which this condition involves.

Accordingly, if nationalism means separation, I for one am prepared to resist it. I see in it the probability, almost the certainty, of dangerous complications and an antagonism which would be injurious to the interests of the larger country and fatal to the prosperity of the smaller. Sooner than yield on this point I would govern Ireland by force to the end of the chapter.

But if nationalism means home rule I have no objection to make in principle, and am only anxious to find out exactly what it means.

I object to the home rule proposed by the late Mr Butt, because I believe it would not work, but would infallibly lead to a demand for entire separation.

On the other hand I consider that Ireland has a right to a local government more complete, more popular, more thoroughly representative, and more far-reaching than anything that has hitherto been suggested; and I hope that the first session of a reformed parliament will settle this question, so far at least as what is generally called county government is concerned.

But for myself I am willing to go even further. I believe that there are questions, not local in any narrow sense, but which require local and exceptional treatment in Ireland and which cannot be dealt with to the satisfaction of the Irish people by an imperial parliament.

Chief among them are the education question and the land question, and I would not hesitate to transfer their consideration and solution to an Irish board altogether independent of English government influence.

Such a board might also deal with railways and other communications and would, of course, be invested with powers of taxation in Ireland for these strictly Irish purposes.

I doubt if it would be wise or possible to go any further, and I do not know if public opinion would at present support so great a change; but if I were entirely free I should be greatly inclined to make a speech or two in Ireland submitting these proposals. If they were carried out the Irish people would have entire independence as regards all local work and local expenditure. Irish newspapers and politicians would find occupation, I hope more congenial than that of bullying English officials and the English house of commons, while the imperial parliament would continue to regulate for the common good the national policy of the three kingdoms.

I am

Yours very truly

J. Chamberlain

W. H. Duignan Esq.
Rushall Hall
near Walsall

3. *Parnell to W. H. O'Shea, 5 Jan. 1885*

Irish Parliamentary Offices

Palace Chambers

9 Bridge Street

London, S.W., January 5 1885

My dear O'Shea

I have asked Eyre and Spottiswoode to send the acts direct to you as soon as they get them together, and I hope you will receive them in time. In talking to our friend you must give him clearly to understand that we do *not* propose this local self government plank as a substitute for the restitution of our Irish parliament but solely as an improvement of the present system of local government in Ireland. The claim for restitution of parliament would still remain. Some people think it would be weakened, others, strengthened by the concession. I myself think that this improvement of local government in Ireland if carried out would have very little effect one way or other upon the larger question.

Yours very truly

Chas. S. Parnell

P.S. I will send you over a Thom from Dublin. Could not get one of this year anywhere in London.

4. *W. H. O'Shea to Parnell (copy), 6 Jan. 1885*

1 Albert Mansions

London, S.W.

January 6, 1885

My dear Parnell,

I have received your letter of yesterday which either really or apparently complicates matters.

Here is the business as I understand it:

The basis of the communications was the possibility of a fair compromise and arrangement between the advanced liberal party and yourself.

This having been accepted in principle by our friend, you and I had further conversations in one of which I suggested that it would be advisable to formulate what you might consider the practicable maximum.

You very properly took ample time for reflection on the whole situation, the result of which was that you indicated verbally the wide system of administrative self-government now under confidential discussion as the solution which, for reasons which appeared to me very sound, would be sufficient 'to satisfy the Irish people'.

I have kept our friend fairly informed, and I now scarcely know how to act, inasmuch as your letter would appear to convey, on the eve of coming to close quarters in the negotiations, that I am still to demand one of the widest extensions of political and popular administration imaginable, at the same time withdrawing any offer of party advantage or parliamentary peace.

I am afraid that this would be a proposal too Dutch to deserve success. Please let me have your further views. Time is short.

Yours very truly

W. H. O'Shea

5. *T. M. Healy to W. H. Duignan (copy), 11 Jan. 1885*

50 Great Charles St

Dublin

11th January 1885

My dear Sir

I am much obliged for your letter of the 30th December, and apologise for the delay in replying. I hardly ever get leisure to sit down to a regular letter, and, moreover, detest correspondence as the main curse of a politician's existence. I have however given careful

consideration to Mr Chamberlain's views in the interval, although I find it somewhat difficult to speak my mind about them. I do not wish to appear discourteous, especially to one like yourself, but I must say we have reason to regard these communications with great suspicion. Mr Parnell was betrayed by the government when he entered into correspondence with them in '82 in order to save the country from the horrors that a continuance of their atrocious policy would have involved. On the day after his release, and before he had time to arrive in the house, the premier announced the existence of certain documents, or 'documentary evidence' (and it was so arranged that these had afterwards to be confessed to by Mr Parnell) in order if possible to ruin him in the eyes of the Irish people—I don't say that Mr Chamberlain was concerned in this conspiracy, or that it was got up by any particular member of the cabinet, and moreover I have never heard Mr Parnell refer to it or make any such charge as I believe can be founded on the transaction—I merely express my own opinion, as an observer, of what took place. I therefore believe that if at any time relations were opened up between us and any member of the cabinet, our confidence would be unhesitatingly and unscrupulously betrayed the moment betrayal became necessary for English purposes. Moreover, living in a country where my house can be rifled at any moment for the information of the government, I make it a rule never to put anything on paper, or to have anything of a confidential character in my possession, which I would care about were it published to all the world. I do not therefore feel at liberty to discuss, by letter, the proposals which Mr Chamberlain makes. One thing, however, I feel convinced of—that neither he nor his party will give us anything which they can withhold, and that they will withhold, as long as possible, anything they are compelled to give us. If it becomes a convenience to England, or accords with her general policy, to grant home rule it will be granted; but not otherwise—unless we can enforce it. Then, whatever is given, will be given in the most grudging and churlish manner; and nobody in this island will feel the smallest sentiment of thanks or gratitude on that account. It is not in the nature of the English to do anything of this kind well, or handsomely, and, in anything that concerns this country they are too ignorant, or too stupid, to discover how to handle our people. This may not be the fault of individual statesmen, who are of course restricted in their policy by the enlightenment of the hogs who mostly compose the house of commons; but Irishmen cannot afford to make any allowances, or draw any nice distinctions. We are fighting for our own country, it is none of our business to find excuses for those who represent the enemy. I regard it as even a humiliation that we should have to explain ourselves to them, or render them any account whatever of our thoughts, words, actions, feelings or desires. The supremacy [*sic*] of most of them that I have been acquainted with is worse than a tyranny—it is an impertinence.

When the new parliament assembles we shall be far better able, on each side, to consider proposals and put forward demands, and I say

this merely because of the increased influence we shall be able to wield, and not that I have any high expectations that the class of English returned will be any improvement. If the democracy can produce nothing sterner than your Burts and Broadhursts, may the Lord restore to us the £50 freeholder. Anyhow we should be fools to treat until we know whom we had to deal with; while of course statesmen on the other side, who can afford to be less calculating, are wise in making suggestions in advance. There is far too much blood, effort and sacrifice, invested in this Irish struggle, for us to be warranted in compounding lightly with the English. If we fail to get a satisfactory and honourable settlement we have full confidence that the fight will be carried on after us, as it was before, and it will be no disgrace in us to fail where so many brilliant and heroic men have not succeeded. Should we then snap greedily at the first bait that is thrown to us? Whatever my private convictions may be, I shall abide by the decision of my own people. If they will accept a board, when they are entitled to a parliament, that is their affair, and I have not such an appetite for battle that I should do anything to prevent the close of the struggle, but of this the English may be assured that they will hold out for the last fractional right which it is possible for them to attain. The community of interest with England, which Mr Chamberlain refers to, is one of those pieces of humour daily dished up in the articles of the London papers, which I do not think any serious person, not compelled to fill up so many columns of matter, would have referred to. And as for, in the alternative, 'governing us by force to the end of the chapter', I say 'all right', we are prepared to wait the end of the chapter and to hasten the publication of the volumes.

Faithfully yours
T. M. Healy

W. H. Duignan Esq.
Rushall Hall
Walsall

6. Parnell to W. H. O'Shea, 13 Jan. 1885

Private

St Mary's and Peter's
Arklow

January 13, 1885

My dear O'Shea

The two questions of the reform of local government and the restitution of an Irish parliament must, as I explained to you from the first, be left absolutely separate. I have not gone into the latter question at all in the communications with you. The central local government body which I propose will not have legislative functions, only administrative. I could not put it forward as a substitute for a parliament,

nor would it be advisable for your friend to do so. A clear statement from me on this point at this stage is the more necessary because your friend has recently written a letter to a friend of his, and this letter advances a proposition for the establishment of a central board, with more extensive powers than I have claimed, as a substitute for an Irish parliament.

Copies of this letter have been sent by the gentleman to whom it was addressed to several prominent politicians in Ireland who have communicated its contents pretty freely to others.

The letter proposes that the central board should be empowered to legislate regarding the settlement and solution of the land question and should have full control over this matter. This is a power I have not claimed as it would cross the border-line between legislative and administrative functions which I have endeavoured to follow in all important particulars.

Yours very truly

Chas. S. Parnell

7. *W. H. O'Shea to Parnell (copy), 19 Jan. 1885*

1 Albert Mansions

London, S.W.

January 19, 1885

My dear Parnell,

I had a conversation with Chamberlain yesterday in the course of which I put before him in detail our views and wishes.

The Man on a Tricycle (a person of the name of Dignum [*sic*]) has been careering a little too fast. After his tour through Ireland he wrote Chamberlain a letter which the latter considered interesting. To this letter Chamberlain replied very much in the spirit of many conversations which had taken place between him and myself. *Nemo mortalium* etc. etc. Let me offer you myrrh and frankincense; you are fortunately much too lazy ever to make such a mistake. Chamberlain acknowledged to me that he 'wasn't quite sure that he wasn't rather sorry' that he had answered Dignum. This is the formula for a cabinet minister who thinks fit to acknowledge that he has made an ass of himself. However, Chamberlain does not do this very often and the best generals are those who make the fewest mistakes.

Dignum saw and seized a chance of making himself *dignior*; he wrote to Chamberlain for permission to publish. Chamberlain had partially recovered his presence of mind. He refused, but unfortunately not point-blank. To his refusal he added that Dignum might show the expression of his opinions (of which he was in no way ashamed etc. etc.) to Dignum's friends.

Thenceforth Dignum's friends were as numerous as the Hare's. Dignum became *l'ami du peuple*. And the people were premature folk and anticipated history: they troubled and worried Chamberlain. They wrote to him, suggesting difficulties, offering solutions. Chamberlain had completely recovered his presence of mind; he sent them all to the devil.

But he is really anxious that you should understand that he had no intention of flirting with the Irish question behind your back. You may take him to be sincere, for he wouldn't have taken Dignum to sit out the dance with. I shall send you the correspondence.

I explained the position in which you are placed, and as long as you are practical for the time being, Chamberlain does not appear to mind the determination which you are expressing in your speeches of recovering Grattan's Parliament. In the course of business I handed him a copy of the famous resolution of 1782, and he didn't ask any impertinent questions about the Lords of Ireland therein mentioned—civil of him, wasn't it?

I then read and explained to him your system of Irish administration and left the papers with him. Annexed was a list of the acts of parliament respecting grand juries, the local government board, etc. etc., with a precis of the provisions of these acts rendering it comparatively easy to grasp the requirements of the case.

Chamberlain observed that all this might be premature, that I was proceeding somewhat as if he were already prime minister and I chief secretary. After a little conversation as to the propositions of local taxation and the proposed representation of landlord and tenant, he explained the situation as it appears to him.

Gladstone says he will retire before the dissolution. The first men Hartington will send for will be Chamberlain and Dilke, to whom he will offer a choice of places. They will, in return for the civility, demand powers not only of selection but of rejection. Certain ambitions must unfortunately be thwarted. Forster, for instance, must die of political thirst in a corner seat. Divine justice and Chamberlain's sense of public duty combine against him.

But at the same time Chamberlain and Dilke must formulate some scheme of general policy. To do so now with regard to Ireland is impossible; there are too many whigs about. But even when the psychological moment arrives Chamberlain thinks the enunciation must be somewhat vague. 'The reform of administrative local government in Ireland' covers the question. It would be impossible to make Lord Hartington, a slow-minded man at the best, understand the subject in all its bearings, when in the throes of cabinet-making. Chamberlain does not seem to think that Campbell-Bannerman could help him much; Campbell-Bannerman, the *reductio ad absurdum* of Anglo-Irish government. It will take nothing less than half a dozen sentences in two speeches of Chamberlain's at public meetings to convince Lord Hartington.

But there is nothing to prevent an honourable understanding between the English democracy in the person of its acknowledged leader, and yourself. Your mutual esteem, and a former occurrence, render it unnecessary to commit it to writing. Like the British merchant's, your word is your bond.

Chamberlain says, and as I entertain the same opinion myself, I think he believes, that the democracy will assert itself from the first. This assumption seems to me a great reason, amongst many, why you ought to close with him. If you do not, the advanced liberals and the whigs must coalesce against you. They would represent in such a case the big battalions favoured by providence, and not even Biggar and young Redmond can contend against them.

The following terms are suggested for your approval :

1. Chamberlain to accept generally your programme of administrative reform in Ireland and to endeavour to carry it out in the first session of the new parliament. This, subject to consideration as to treasury loans in future, outside the spheres sanctioned in England and Scotland.
2. Chamberlain to prevent the renewal of the crimes act for more than one year.
3. You, on the other hand, to suggest that you are willing to give the new English democratic power a chance, and where and when you consider it advisable to establish a distinction between your friends and foes in the government. (Harcourt and those who think like him never lose an opportunity of pointing out that those who have constantly supported the measures you advocate are abused as roundly as those who hate the principles and persecute the persons.)
- 4 You to call heaven to witness that you and yours will die on the floor of the house rather than allow the crimes act to be re-enacted for more than one year.

Chamberlain believes, and I go with him, that personally he could do better by devoting himself to English reforms; that this would better please his merry men; that he could drag the whigs with him and against the common foe, the Irish enemy. But he is anxious to settle Ireland and will work steadily and fairly with us if you will put him in a position to overcome objections by the argument of 80 votes.

Now, all this seems to be exactly what will suit you and what can be made to suit the clever folk. When the centurions give the word 'right about turn', the rank and file will, like true men and devoted soldiers, show their excellent discipline by immediate obedience. Besides, there will be a good many appointments to distribute.

Yours very truly

W H. O'Shea

8. *Chamberlain to John Morley (copy), 21 Jan. 1885*

January 21, 1885

My dear Morley,

Referring to my recent conversation with you on Irish affairs I am beginning to be a little uneasy on the subject of Captain O'Shea's volunteered communications.

I believe him to be perfectly honourable and sincere but he has a perfect mania for diplomacy and seems inclined to press matters forward as if he were actually negotiating a treaty between two high contracting parties. Now I do not believe that any treaty is either possible or desirable although I think the force of circumstances and the interests of all true friends of Ireland would naturally point in the direction of co-operation between the leaders of the national party and the English democracy. The former profess to desire independent government and possibly separation. I sometimes think that they would themselves be disappointed if they succeeded.

In any case even English radical opinion is not prepared for that contingency, to which I personally have the strongest possible objection, as I believe it would be dangerous to England and disastrous to Ireland. On the other hand I see no outcome from the perpetual difficulties of the situation short of interesting the Irish people, their press, and their leaders in Irish local affairs and in this way diverting their attention from their present pastime of worrying and bullying the English administration.

On grounds of equal justice also I am prepared to give them as a separate nation independent control over those portions of their national administration which are strictly Irish in their character and do not affect English or Scotch interests. The Scotch in a roundabout way have already secured this independence; I see no harm in conceding it more formally in the case of Ireland. The plan which has been forming itself in my mind for some time past is to have a thoroughly effective popular county government on the same lines and with the same powers as that proposed for England and Scotland, and then to complete the work by establishing a central board consisting either of delegates from the county boards or of separately elected representatives to whom might be entrusted the full control of such questions as are dealt with now in Ireland by the local government board, the board of works, the board of education and other similar bodies.

This body would have independent powers of taxation and rating in Ireland and would receive and administer Ireland's fair share of any imperial grant made for similar purposes to the other two countries. You will observe of course that this would exclude all questions affecting judicial administration, military organization or general finance.

I have talked this scheme over with many people, including Lord Spencer and Mr Trevelyan, and although objections have been taken they have not been absolute and might, I think, be overcome.

The establishment of such a board would at once find work for the most active men in the national party. It would be a good education and political training for them, while the questions which would infallibly arise in regard to the incidence of taxation, the character of education, the nature and extent of public works etc. etc. would occupy and divide Irish parties and give them plenty to do in discussion among themselves without involving any conflict with the external British authority. The newspapers must report its discussions and would have no space for the harangues of Irish patriots in the British house of commons. In fact it seems to me almost necessary that practical work and all the conditions to which it gives rise would take the place of the somewhat windy and always violent and ill-regulated agitation, the sole object of which has been to annoy the British government and to make it unpopular with the people.

I confess that I was pleased and perhaps a little astonished to receive from O'Shea a scheme which he declares has the approval of Mr Parnell and which embodies most of my propositions. In one respect it goes much farther than I should have thought possible in the direction of a conservative policy since it proposes a separate representation of land-owners both on the county boards and on the central board in proportion to their rateable contributions.

I told Mr O'Shea, however, that this was not the time to discuss the details of such a measure nor was I in a position to enter into any negotiations. I saw nothing in it to which in principle I objected, and if I ever had the power to give effect to my opinions I should be prepared to press forward some such scheme and to endeavour to recommend it to the English and Scotch people. I pointed out that the policy of Mr Parnell and his party—less perhaps of Parnell than of those immediately under him—was to embitter English liberals and to make even measures of this kind distasteful as they would be represented as concessions to an insatiable agitation. The only way to facilitate their progress was for Mr Parnell to bring his people round to more constitutional methods of agitation and to show both by his speeches and his action a sincere desire for co-operation with the English democracy. The present was a good time for such a change of front as Mr Parnell could point out the alterations effected by recent reforms and urge his followers to give a trial to the new system before finally abandoning the hope of concert with the people of England or even with the liberal majority of them.

Yesterday I received from O'Shea in the shape of a letter from him to Mr Parnell which he asks me to approve, a somewhat cynical account of our conversation distorted to suit his own views. If such a representation were published it would be fatal to the work of reconciliation for it would degrade the whole matter into a mere partisan bargaining in which a bribe for Mr Parnell's support was to be offered by the radical party.

I have long since ceased to care from a party point of view whether the Irish support us or not, as I believe the English and Scotch democracy will shortly be strong enough to hold their own against all other sections.

My interest in the question arises entirely from a sense of the enormous difficulties interposed to the good working of our parliamentary system by the present exasperation of feeling between the two countries and by my firm belief that whatever the leaders may do or say the people might be brought round to take a kindly view of the British connection if their natural ambition for local work and local legislation were fully responded to.

I have told O'Shea that I cannot accept his account of the conversation as accurate but that I decline to enter on the matter in correspondence.

If he should speak to you you will now be in possession of the whole state of the case but at present my impression is that a solution of Irish difficulties will be rather delayed than hastened by his officious but well-meant interference.

Yours very truly

J. Chamberlain

9. Chamberlain to Earl Spencer, 10 Mar. 1885

Secret

House of Commons

March 10, 1885

Dear Lord Spencer,

Are you in a position to say what clauses in the crimes act you are able to dispense with and what clauses you must insist on?

I should be very glad to know your opinion as far as you are at liberty to give it, as I have some private opportunity of learning the extent of the concessions which Mr Parnell is prepared to make.

Thus I have reason to believe that no serious exception will be taken to renewal of clauses as to investigations before a magistrate, special juries, changes of venue and compensation for murder and outrage.

If you can give me any indication of your views, I will take care not to commit you, or the government, in any way; but the information would enable me to shape my own course, and might possibly lead to some acceleration of public business.

I am

Yours very truly

J. Chamberlain

10. *Earl Spencer to Chamberlain, 12 Mar. 1885*

The Castle

Secret

Dublin

March 12, 1885

My dear Chamberlain

Your letter of the 10th just received. You will recollect our conversation at Spencer House about the crimes act.

I am not in a position to give you a more definite decision as to the clauses of the act which ought to be kept or abandoned.

I have of course my opinion upon these details, but Mr Gladstone has been very anxious that we should not until the time for decision has arrived commit ourselves absolutely.

I should be disposed to consider essential the clauses as to change of venue, special juries, investigation before a magistrate, search, and meetings, and also as to intimidation (clause 7).

I should attach great importance to a workable press clause, but I know the difficulties as to this.

I think it probable that I should be ready to abandon all the rest of the act, but even as to this as time goes on there may be some strong reasons for retaining clauses which I now think may go.

All this I told you in London, and I have nothing new to add.

I should not wish to be considered as a party to anything like a negotiation with Parnell on these points, but I do not know that you propose to do that.

Any action of that sort seems to me extremely dangerous and liable to misconception, and if followed should only be with the concurrence and acquiescence if not of the cabinet of Mr Gladstone himself.

My greatest wish would be so to shape the bill that it might be general and not applied only to Ireland, but I fear this will be very difficult to do, probably impossible.

Very truly yours

Spencer

11. *Chamberlain's minute on Spencer's memorandum of 25 Mar. 1885*
[11 Apr. 1885]

I very much regret that the Irish government find themselves unable to dispense with a renewal of the crimes act, although it is to be amended by the omission of many of its most objectionable provisions. But in any case it will lead to a bitter and prolonged parliamentary conflict and will prejudice the liberal party at the general election. I anticipate that there will be an increased vote of English liberal members against its re-enactment.

Assuming, however, that it cannot be dispensed with I should personally be in favour of the general application of its provisions to the three kingdoms; but I doubt whether this would assist its progress through the house of commons. The effect would of course depend largely on the character of the provisions which it is decided to retain. English and Scotch members would certainly object strongly to the clauses which deal with the suppression of public meetings, with search, and with the liberty of the press. I find that there would also be very serious objection to the power to summon witnesses; but I fancy this would be largely removed if, as I suppose is intended, the power is confined to stipendiary magistrates and not vested in ordinary J.P.'s.

I am glad that the Irish government recognize the absolute necessity of proposing remedial legislation concurrently with any measure of repression. At one time I had hoped that if satisfactory assurances could be given as to the introduction of a liberal measure of local government, the Irish opposition to a renewal of the crimes act would be materially lessened and the passage of this bill quickened so as to leave time for the remedial measure. I am, however, now less sanguine. The temper of the nationalist party is worse than it was and I fear that in any case a fierce and protracted opposition to the renewal of the crimes act must be anticipated. The nature and character of this opposition must, however, be to a large extent dependent on the amendments which the government may ultimately be prepared to accept in the crimes act, and also on the extent to which they are prepared to go in their proposals for local government.

As regards the first of these points I have reason to believe that the Irish members would offer no serious opposition to the clause providing for special juries and change of venue provided that the offences to which this clause applies were defined as in the 1st clause, sub-section 1 of the present act, (b) to (f), and omitting (a) treason, or treason felony. There would also have been no objection to the renewal of the alien clause, 15, of clause 16 giving power to summon witnesses, and of clause 19, commonly known as the 'blood tax'. I observe, however, that this clause, as well as the alien clause, will probably be dropped. There will be strenuous objection to clause 7, the boycotting clause, but it is clearly impossible to introduce any repressive measure which does not deal with this subject. Possibly the wording might be open to amendment, but I assume that the principle of the clause must in any case be maintained. There will probably be the strongest opposition to clause 10 dealing with meetings, and clause 14 dealing with search.

It is possible that these objections might be removed or modified if the new bill is limited in its operation to a period of 12 months, and the whole subject is thus remitted for further consideration by the new parliament.

As regards the remedial legislation suggested by the Irish government, I attach no importance whatever to the purchase of holdings bill. I doubt if Irishmen any longer care for it, as the security afforded by the land act really gives them all they want, and purchase would not improve

their position. The Irish members are also I believe indifferent to the abolition of the viceroyalty. English members would probably approve the change, but the nationalists although they make a grievance of the existing system are not keen for its removal. I am convinced that they would not accept either of these reforms as a reason for relaxing the expression of their hostility to the crimes act.

The question of local government stands altogether on a different footing. It is of the highest importance in itself, and it would stir public opinion in Ireland as well as in this country. It affords in my opinion the only hope of ultimately securing better relations between the two countries.

Everything depends on the nature of the reform proposed and on its being large enough to satisfy all except the extreme section, and to deprive them of the power of successfully resisting it. County government as understood in England will be necessary and beneficial in Ireland; but it is not enough. It is essential that there should be established some central board, such as that suggested in the memorandum recently communicated by me to Lord Spencer, which would deal with what may be called local national questions; as, for instance, education in all its forms including endowed schools;—public works;—lunatic asylums etc. etc.

Any proposal which did not include such a central board would lack all elements of finality and would only be accepted grudgingly as an instalment of larger demands. I hope that the creation of some such body forms a part of the proposed legislation.

I note, however, the introduction into the house of commons of a bill for national education in Ireland, which proceeds on the assumption that it is the business of the English parliament to legislate for Irish education. I believe this to be a fatal mistake. Our ideas of education differ materially from those which are current in Ireland. If we are to be responsible for all that is done, the representatives of protestant England and Scotland will oppose any system which tends to subsidise Roman Catholic education, while of course nothing else than Roman Catholic education will satisfy Irish opinion. The only way out of the difficulty is to leave the responsibility of dealing with what is a purely Irish question with an exclusively Irish representative body. Let them legislate for themselves on this matter and free us from the dilemma of either voting for what we conscientiously disapprove of, or of forcing on Ireland a system repugnant to Irish opinion.

Such a central board as I have referred to with independent powers of taxation would soon draw to itself the interests of the Irish press and public, and would leave little room for the close attention to the proceedings of Irish members in parliament which is at the bottom of Irish obstruction and the chief cause of our parliamentary difficulties.

If the Irish government have a complete scheme of this kind in view I think it possible that the Irish members may find it necessary under pressure from their constituents to shorten the debates on the crimes act in order to leave time for the consideration of these remedial

proposals. In any case their announcement would go far to satisfy the reasonable demands of the Irish people and would place the policy of the government fairly before the country at the general election. If, however, anything less than this is contemplated I believe it would be wiser to do nothing at all, and I should strongly deprecate a provisional and partial reform which would afford no hope of a final settlement, but would leave us with less to offer whenever the time came for further dealing with the subject.

If the Irish government are unprepared to face a radical change at this moment it will be better to postpone the whole question for the present; and it would be impossible for me to support a partial proposal which would seriously prejudice the future position of the liberal party in reference to its Irish policy.

12. Memorandum by Chamberlain, 25 Apr. 1885

Confidential

Local government in Ireland

Assuming as I do that a separation between the two countries or even a separate parliament under the same sovereign would be injurious in the highest degree to the interests of both and could never be granted by any patriotic statesman I am nevertheless impressed with the importance of meeting in the fullest possible way the legitimate aspirations of the Irish people towards entire independence in the management of their local affairs. I would, therefore, give the widest possible interpretation to the term local government; and would include in it not merely local and municipal affairs but also questions which may be described as national although they do not concern imperial interests.

The objects to be kept in view are (1) to relieve England and Scotland of the responsibility of deciding on purely Irish questions: (2) to secure the government of Ireland in regard to all purely Irish questions in accordance with the public opinion of the country: (3) to offer a field for legitimate local ambition & patriotism, & to stimulate the assumption by Irishmen of the work of Irish local administration: (4) by removing English interference from Irish government to diminish the causes of irritation and the opportunity of collision and at the same time to find a natural outlet for the energy and ability of Irish politicians in connection with the unrestricted management of their own affairs: (5) to bring back the attention of the Irish people, now diverted to a barren conflict in the English parliament, to the practical consideration of their own wants and necessities.

With a view to these objects Irish local government must be developed in two directions. In the first place it will be necessary to create county boards enjoying powers similar to those now possessed by the English

municipalities & probably at no distant date to be conferred upon county boards in England. In the second place it will be necessary to establish a central body to deal with all those questions which not being limited by county boundaries are yet local as compared with matters of imperial concern in which all the three countries are jointly interested.

The following will be the rough heads of a complete scheme for the above purposes :—

1. County boards, to be elected in every county, one-third to be renewed annually; the voting to be by ballot.

In the English municipalities the franchise is household or rate-paying suffrage, but in England the whole of the rates are paid by the tenants. As in Ireland a considerable proportion, probably one-third, is paid by the owners of the land it would be fair to give to the latter a proportionate representation, & the boards might accordingly be elected, one-third by the owners of land & two-thirds by the occupiers.

The county boards would have extensive powers of taxation & full authority to deal with all local matters. In defining their functions regard might be had to the precedent above referred to of the English municipalities; but deviations from this might be permitted in those cases in which the circumstances of Ireland & past legislation have made it expedient. These deviations, however, would be in the nature of an extension and not of a limitation of local authority.

2. A central board. This board should have if possible some distinctive title, as for instance, the 'national board of Ireland'. Its members should have an official designation indicated by letters attached to their names; & in every way an effort should be made to give importance & dignity to its proceedings.

It might be elected at the same time as the county boards either by the same constituencies voting in classes & in their several districts, or if preferred it might be returned by second election by the vote of the several county boards each electing delegates according to population. In the latter case the representatives on the county boards of the landlords & of the tenants would vote separately each for their own proportion of members.

The central board would have independent power of direct taxation & it would enjoy legislative as well as executive authority in reference to the matters committed to its decision. The principal of these would be

(1) National education in all its branches, university, secondary, & primary.

(2) Public works including all proposals for reclamation, harbours, drainage, and communications.

All grants of money or guarantees for loans now made by the imperial government for such purposes would be handed over &

administered through the central board, care being taken that the proportion reserved to Ireland in such assistance was on a scale commensurate to its population & contribution in taxes.

The central board would have independent powers of direct taxation in aid of all the objects with which it would be called upon to deal. It would have full power to appoint and pay such administrative & other staff as it might find necessary, & within the limits of its statutory functions would be absolutely independent of the English government. Any question which might arise as to its competence in particular matters would have to be determined as a matter of law by the supreme court in Ireland. The central board would also have power to borrow & to issue consolidated Irish stock. Further, it would be entrusted with power compulsorily to take land for the various public purposes with which it is concerned; and lastly, the same body might be authorised to promote & carry out a scheme for facilitating the purchase of their holdings by tenants and the advance of money on the security of the same.

The establishment of such a body would involve the practical disappearance of what is known as 'Castle' administration. The various boards which now, under government supervision & control, regulate local administration would disappear & every purely Irish question would be dealt with by an exclusively Irish authority without reference or responsibility to any external body.

Although the above proposals do not necessarily involve a further change, I believe that it would be desirable to complete & emphasise the proposed reform by the abolition of the lord lieutenantcy & the appointment of an Irish secretary of state to represent, in the government, Ireland's share in imperial questions.

J.C.

25/4/85

13. *Earl Spencer to Chamberlain, 26 Apr. 1885*

Vice Regal Lodge

Dublin

26 April 1885.

My dear Chamberlain

. I have very carefully studied Mr Parnell's proposals.

I should be prepared to adopt with very little alteration the general principles for the reform of county government.

The great difficulty however exists as to the proposal for a central local government board.

The proposal removes from the hands of the executive government all administrative work, with the exception of that connected with law,

E

justice, prisons, and police. It takes from government all patronage connected with the departments which it absorbs.

Without further discussion I am hardly prepared to agree to this which is a fundamental change in our principle of government.

Are you prepared to give up these duties of government in Scotland and England, duties now performed by various offices like the home office and local government board?

I see further a grave danger in constituting a representative body which may assume to itself the right of speaking for the Irish nation.

To judge from other Irish bodies like boards of guardians and municipal councils, it will be impossible to prevent this central body from taking up general questions and passing resolutions upon them. These may and often will be in direct opposition to decisions of the imperial parliament, and of the executive government in Dublin, and will create serious difficulties.

The influence and pressure from such a representative body will be difficult to resist.

I fear that the experiment will be very great, to trust these large powers of administration to an untried body.

It is very probable that we should find the present Irish parliamentary party, the Healys, and O'Briens and T. P. O'Connors managing and leading this assembly.

The idea of this will create well nigh a panic among the well affected people of Ireland, and I doubt whether Ulster will agree to it.

Many people think that it will be very rash to popularize local government for the same reason that we shall hand over the control of local affairs to men who have shown themselves unfit for government.

I myself am ready and think it necessary to run this risk as to local government, but I hesitate in giving the control of nearly all government in Ireland to the same party.

I would rather build up local government from the bottom, and if local government in counties and towns succeeds then to take a further step.

I should see less objection to the creation of a central board for primary education which should gradually do away with but at once largely reform the present national board.

I think that the introduction of compulsory education in Ireland is a reason for this.

I would create a constituency *ad hoc* for this board.

There would be less and probably no danger of such a board assuming the position of a national convention, as it would be elected by a constituency say of managers and guardians and not by the nation at large.

If this succeeded we might go further, but at present I shrink from a bolder step.

I am sorry that Tuesday has been fixed for the cabinet upon these important subjects, as I should have been glad before the cabinet to

have discussed this very important question with you and others who understand them.

I have not made up my mind conclusively against it, but I feel strongly the objections which I have stated.

Although the central board will be confined to administration it will be difficult to resist its functions becoming legislative hereafter.

I leave out of consideration some glaring defects in the plan such as giving over to an elected board the management of trusts or endowments. No one would seriously hand over to them the funds of Trinity College.

Excuse this untidy letter but I have not time to make a clean copy.

Truly yours

Spencer

14. *Extracts from the diary of W. H. O'Shea, Apr.-May 1885*

1885

April 28

Dilke mentioned Parnell was to see Cardinal Manning and suggested my speaking to former after interview between them. Chamberlain asked me to his room in house to-night. Explained situation. Spencer asks for renewal of crimes act for 3 years and offers an effective local government bill for Ireland. Chamberlain ready to agree to oppose this policy, and to make it on his own behalf and that of Dilke a question of their resignation (which would no doubt influence Shaw Lefevre and Trevelyan to the same course) on condition of my obtaining Parnell's full support for the Irish local government scheme proposed by myself to Chamberlain in January last, and Parnell's engagement to prevent obstruction to renewal of crimes act for 1 year.

April 29

Saw Parnell—made him above offer. He requires time for consideration. To see Manning to-morrow.

April 30

Chamberlain at 11 a.m. He tells me Manning will be able to promise Parnell full support of Catholic Church in case of his accepting local government bill. Urges necessity of Parnell's speedy reply. Telegraphed Parnell. He called at Albert Mansions at 7 p.m. After much conversation accepted proposal. (Had seen Cardinal, who did not go further than that Irish bishops, including Archbishop Croke, had told him they would gladly pledge accept local government proposed by Chamberlain's letter to Duignan.)

11 p.m. Dilke asked me result of interview with Parnell. On my telling him, he observed he thought the cabinet would break up on it.

Chamberlain—I saw him in his room. He expects that at the cabinet committee at Spencer House called for 11 am. May 1st the rupture will be complete. If he triumphs Hartington, Spencer, Carlingford, Lord Chancellor will go.

May 1

Chamberlain told me this evening that Lord Hartington contrary to his expectations did not absolutely reject proposals. The whigs asked for time for consideration. Reported Gladstone strongly in favour. Dilke told me matters in his opinion look hopeful.

May 2

Dilke explained financial proposals in English local government bill. Went over imperial expenditure with Parnell say £1,325,000. Dilke assures me we shall be able to get quite as much or more. Constantly impressing on Chamberlain and Dilke Archbishopric of Dublin.

Friday May 8 1885

On coming here to dress, received note from Cardinal Manning asking me to call. He informed me that although he had received nothing official, he had reason to believe that a personage might possibly have informed Errington that he had failed and that his presence at Rome was inconvenient to the Holy See in view of the comments to which it gave rise. Dined with Gray. Inspired a leader for the *Freeman* in favour of the local self-government scheme.

Saturday 9

J. Sandeman—dined and went to play with him. Leader in *Freeman*.

Sunday 10

Saw Chamberlain at 12.

At cabinet yesterday, local self-government scheme rejected. He tells me he will not agree to the renewal of the summary jurisdiction clauses of crimes act. Expects to resign with Dilke in course of week. Gladstone says he will retire into private life if Dilke and Chamberlain retire. Trevelyan has written to Chamberlain, talked over by Spencer. Chamberlain furious with him.

Monday

Cardinal Manning; informed him of rejection of scheme. He was much distressed. Attributes Lord Granville's opposition to some extent to our action with respect to Archbishopric of Dublin.

Cabinet committee met. Chamberlain tells me fought all day. Saw Dilke. Both consider their resignation inevitable.

Later. About 11.30 Chamberlain spoke to me of compromise.

15. *Parnell to Cardinal Manning [probably 29 Apr. 1885]*

House of Commons Library

Wednesday

Mr Parnell presents his compliments to His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop, and regrets that he was prevented by indisposition from being in his place at the house when His Eminence was enquiring for him.

Mr Parnell will call on His Eminence to-morrow evening at six o'clock, unless he should hear in the meantime that some other hour will be more suitable to His Eminence.

16. *W. H. O'Shea's note of his interview with Parnell, 30 Apr. 1885*

[On envelope:]

Mr Parnell's promise with regard to non-obstruction of renewal of crimes act

April 30 1885

[The note itself reads:]

While strongly opposing the crimes bill, will endeavour to prevent any obstructive opposition, the necessity of voting urgency, or loss of time such as to jeopardize the local government bills.

It is understood that the Irish local government bill will be introduced before the crimes bill.

17. *Minute by G. O. Trevelyan on Chamberlain's memorandum of 25 Apr. 1885, 30 Apr. 1885*

Privy Council Office

I am very desirous not to delay these papers, and shall therefore only put down one or two immediate practical observations.

1. I am absolutely opposed to touching land purchase till it can be carried out under the circumstances outlined in the scheme.

2. I think the same about education, and would drop the bill now before the house.

3. I am, generally speaking, in favour of the scheme as affording the only chance for solving, or seriously investigating, the Irish difficulty. Two conditions occur to me at once, that the money for the exchequer, with which the central board might deal by grant and loan, should be rigorously laid down, and not be capable of being altered except with the full consent, and initiative, of the imperial government. Secondly that the position of existing office holders should be carefully guarded. The means of doing this would have to be carefully thought out.

4. There would be very little difficulty about the details of the crimes act, if the double scheme met with acceptance on all sides. But

I exceedingly object to making it an act for a year, or a brief period, *as part of the great arrangement*. I had much rather have a more limited act, for a longer period.

5. I understand the scheme leaves the police and judicial arrangements in the hands of the imperial government. This for the present,—the long present,—is quite essential; and, if we gave it up, we had better frankly give up Ireland. The difficulties of the session and other considerations, would make me slow to comment on the duty of making this a question for leaving the government. In truth, if we keep Ireland at all, and are responsible for keeping the peace there, in or out of office I should feel bound at the very least to oppose a return to the jury law as it was between 1872 and 1882, which would in my opinion be fatal to the country. It is worth thinking whether a jury law and change of venue, to run for a year, all parties knowing that the state of Ireland would be dealt with at once by the new parliament in the sense of this scheme, might not be a solution for the moment.

G. O. T. 30/4/85

18. *Cardinal Manning to Chamberlain, 4 May 1885*

Archbishop's House,
Westminster,
S.W.

May 4. 1885

Dear Mr Chamberlain

I did not write again to you because I knew that Sir Charles Dilke would communicate the result of my interview last week.

It was satisfactory and as the Irish bishops are of the same mind two conditions of acceptance for the scheme appear to be secure.

I wish I were as sure of the third nearer home, and first at least in order of time. Believe me, always

Faithfully yours

Henry E., Card : Archbishop

19. *Parnell to Cardinal Manning [probably 5 May 1885]*

House of Commons Library

Mr Parnell presents his compliments to the Cardinal Archbishop, and begs to say that he would be glad to have the honor [*sic*] of an interview with His Eminence to-morrow. Mr Parnell would propose to call at the archbishop's house at six o'clock in the evening, if that hour were suitable to His Eminence.

Tuesday Evening

His Eminence
The Cardinal Archbishop

20. *G. O. Trevelyan to Chamberlain, 6 May 1885*

House of Commons Library

May 6 1885

Dear Chamberlain,

I want to expand somewhat the few words I wrote at the end of my minute on the papers which you circulated to me and Lefevre and Campbell-Bannerman. I then reserved my comments on the reference in your note to the question being one which would justify resignation. I am, as I said, in that minute and in the cabinet committee, favourable to the scheme as a whole, and think it the direction in which we should look for a solution. But I regard it as a question of far greater importance not to break up the government before the next general election, and shall use my endeavours to bring about that result, which I think can be accomplished with perfect honour and consistency on the part of all concerned. This is very much what I said to you lately; but, as you referred to the question being one which might lead to resignation in a paper which you sent me, I think it best to say definitely how I look at it. I should regard the breaking up of the government just now as the greatest disaster which could befall the party, the country, and the peace of the world: and I do not think that difference of opinion on this matter is a sufficient reason for bringing it about.

I remain

Yours ever truly

G. O. Trevelyan