The Plan of Campaign on the O'Grady estate, Herbertstown, Co. Limerick, 1886-92

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The background to, and details of, the campaign to obtain rent reductions for tenants from a Co. Limerick landlord are discussed and analysed. The effects of the agitation on the estate and how the response to it casts light on the relationships which existed between landlords themselves are also considered.

The O'Grady estate in Herbertstown was arguably the first estate in Ireland on which the Plan of Campaign was put into effect. According to many contemporary observers it was also one of the estates on which the tenant farmers least deserved the abatements they demanded, their need being far less than that of many tenants living in penury on less salubrious holdings. The O'Grady estate is worthy of consideration for a number of reasons, not least of which are the early adoption of the Plan, the hard line taken by the tenants, the initially conciliatory tone of The O'Grady himself, and the backing he received. The O'Grady Papers in the National Library, containing rentals, correspondence, newspaper cuttings, pamphlets and other ephemera, deal almost exclusively with the period of the Plan of Campaign. The contemporary national press in both Ireland and Britain covered events in Herbertstown, and it is a case much referred to in later treatments of the period.

Not all Irish landlords were rack-renting absentee. Neither did all tenants live in the extreme poverty that characterised many of the holdings in what would be classified as congested districts in 1891. Landlords ranged from the very rich to the more moderately well off, while a great number were heavily in debt. Some tenant farmers were locked in a struggle for mere survival, in marked contrast to others who were more comfortable and could actively pursue opportunities for personal advancement. The conflict between landlords and their tenants, which was such a dominant feature of Irish politics in the second half of the nineteenth century, was subject to various influences. These included the policies of various British governments; uneven levels of support for land agitation within the Irish Party; the position of the Catholic Church, veering from steadfast approval of agitation to outspoken denunciation; market fluctuations, weather patterns and public opinion, both in Ireland and Britain. While the modus operandi of the Plan was the same wherever applied, the conditions and motivating factors for tenant and landlord alike varied from estate to estate.

Colonel Thomas de Courcy O'Grady was known to his contemporaries as 'The O'Grady'. Born on 17 December 1844, he was the son of William de Courcy O'Grady and Anna Grogan de Rienzi. He married Elizabeth Jane Doyne, the daughter of Major Richard Doyne, on 1 September 1877. They had no children. The O'Grady died on 21 March 1898. He was a resident landlord, and lived in Kilballyowen, Bruff, County Limerick in

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1 NLI MS. 22,461.
a 2 storey house of late Georgian appearance, but with an old castle built into it. 5 bay front, with fan-lighted doorway, prolonged by a 2 bay projecting wing at one end. Solid roof parapet. 3 bay side elevation with Wyatt windows under relieving arches in the 2 outer bays of the lower storey. Long garden front with 3 bay breakfront. 3

The house is no longer in existence, having been demolished in the mid-twentieth century, though the O'Grady's descendants still live on the site in a more recent construction. The O'Grady was somewhat unusual among Irish landlords in that he could trace his ancestry in the area to pre-Tudor times, 4 and Burke traces his family roots back to pre-Norman Ireland. 5 Located in east County Limerick, the O'Grady estate consisted of 1,470 acres of good grassland, 400 acres of which made up the landlord's personal demesne. The O'Grady relied on the income from farming this demesne to remain solvent, the rental inadequate to cover his large outgoings. The annual interest on his mortgages was £1,200. He paid head and tithe rents of £174 and drainage charges of £110. The Dowager Madam O'Grady held jointure of £500. The gross rental of the estate was £1,304, according to the agent. 6

The Herbertstown tenants were graziers. Relative to many other tenant farmers in the west of Ireland they resided on adequately-sized holdings. Judicial rents, those that had been adjusted by the courts or an independent valuer in accordance with the 1881 Land Act, 7 had been fixed on all but two of the holdings. The value of the land itself was relatively high. The holdings on the estate had an average value of £1. 3s per acre, the tenants farming on average forty-four acres each. 8 This compares very favourably with land on the much larger Dillon estate in Mayo, for example, valued at only three shillings per acre, the average tenant farming sixteen acres though a great many of them farmed much less. 9 In 1885, at a time of fallen agricultural prices which particularly affected graziers, 10 the O'Grady reduced judicial rents and non-judicial rents by fifteen and twenty-five per cent respectively. He offered to repeat these reductions the following year. The tenants demanded a forty per cent reduction all round, which was rejected. 11

Due to the deteriorating agricultural economy in Ireland in 1885, many tenants fell into arrears with rent. Laurence Geary, author of the definitive study of the Plan of Campaign, states 'the deteriorating economic crisis in Ireland made a renewed agrarian agitation during the winter of 1886 inevitable'. 12 The new form of agrarian agitation to emerge was called the Plan of Campaign. Details of the Plan were published in United Ireland on 23 October 1886, in a document drafted by Tim Harrington. The idea had been put forward in speeches by Tim Healy the previous year. It recommended that tenants come together on individual estates and ask the landlord to grant what they considered to be reasonable reductions to their rents. If this was denied they were to lodge the rent, less

4 The O'Grady Papers (NLI MS. 22,461; located in ten folders. § ii, vii-x). §§ ii, vi.
8 O'Grady Papers, §§ i, ii, v, vi.
9 Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 42.
11 Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 47.
12 Ibid., p. 2.
the abatement, with local trustees, often including the parish priest. The funds thus raised would be used to support evicted tenants. Healy was adamant that in order for this tactic to work it would need to be implemented on a national scale. Geary points out that ‘the Plan of Campaign was not the official policy of either the National League or the Parliamentary Party’. Nonetheless, after the publication of the United Ireland article MPs William O’Brien and John Dillon, among others, became actively involved in advising and helping tenants to put the Plan into action, and this despite Parnell’s steadfast disavowal of it.

The Herbertstown tenants adopted it as early as 9 November 1886. According to Geary they were the first in Ireland to do so. They do not, however, appear to have been the tenants in Ireland most in need of rent reductions. The first among them to pay into the Plan was Thomas Moroney, a man of considerable means. In addition to being a farmer, he also ran a public house and a shop, a forge, and had five other houses, which he let, in the village. He ‘rented the tolls of three annual fairs’ in the village green. The latter was estimated by The O’Grady to have been worth in the region of fifty to sixty pounds annually. The tenants received uncritical support and encouragement from their parish priest Father Matthew Ryan, popularly known as ‘the general’. If the Liberal Unionist is to be believed, Ryan ‘compelled each tenant to pay over to the fund’. On 14 December a Plan of Campaign auction was held at Herbertstown. In order to avoid confiscation, eight tenants against whom The O’Grady had issued writs sold their cattle and the proceeds were lodged with trustees. The Chief Secretary of Ireland at the time, Michael Hicks Beach, felt that the best way to proceed against those who paid into the Plan was to move bankruptcy proceedings against them. Moroney was duly declared bankrupt. The decision was confirmed by Judge Boyd in the Court of Appeal on 11 February 1887. It was a test case to try the legality of the tenants’ action. His tenancy was put up for sale by auction in Dublin on 3 June 1887. While moving bankruptcy proceedings may have been reasonable when dealing with a relatively well-off tenant farmer such as Moroney, the process was far too time consuming and expensive to pursue against large numbers of tenants on smaller, poorer holdings. Arthur Balfour, Hicks Beach’s replacement in March 1887, therefore immediately abandoned the policy and began evicting tenants.

The Herbertstown tenant farmers received mixed messages from the Catholic Church. Throughout the country the clergy on the ground, many of whom were themselves the

13 Ibid., pp 23-4.
14 Ibid., p. 3.
15 Ibid., pp 24-5.
16 Ibid., p. 2.
18 Donnelly claims that the tenants on the Ponsonby estate were first, Land and People, p. 356.
19 O’Grady Papers, § ii.
21 O’Grady Papers, § ii.
22 Ibid., § v.
23 Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 66.
24 The Times, 15 January 1887.
25 The Irish Times, 12 February, 1887.
26 O’Grady Papers, § § iii, v.
27 Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 66.
28 Ibid., p. 73.
sons of shopkeepers and tenant farmers, almost always supported the Plan. Father Ryan was jailed for contempt of court after being questioned with regard to his encouragement of the Herbertstown tenants to withhold rents. The bulk of the Irish hierarchy, too, was supportive. But not so Dr Edward O’Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, who was among the hierarchy’s most outspoken opponents of the Plan. The Vatican became involved, sending Archbishop Persico to Ireland to investigate the situation. He singled out Fr Ryan for criticism, one of only two priests named in his report. His findings helped lead Pope Leo XIII to condemn officially both boycotting and the Plan of Campaign. News of Leo’s decree, however, was leaked to the press, and the bishops in Ireland read of it in the papers before hearing directly from Rome. They therefore had time to consider it and concluded that the decree was not binding, as it was based on what they considered inaccurate evidence.

If this created a problem of conscience for the Herbertstown tenants they did not let it show. It was a measure of their fierce determination that, even in the face of opposition from both their own bishop and the Pope, they carried on relentlessly. Lay and church leaders alike chose to either criticize or ignore the Pope’s decree. Geary argues that this ‘was an impressive display of political maturity’ which showed that ‘in an independent Ireland Home Rule would certainly not mean Rome Rule’. In the light of Church-State relations after the foundation of the Free State, this judgment arguably appears somewhat fanciful. What it may more convincingly have displayed was how far people were willing to go to promote land and money interests.

The secular wing of nationalist Ireland’s leadership also sent out mixed signals. While William O’Brien and John Dillon were vehement in their support of the aims of the Plan and tireless in their efforts on behalf of the National League, others in the Irish Party were more cautious. Most notably, Parnell largely withheld his support. While the National League promised financial support to all tenant farmers who paid into the Plan, it quickly became apparent that the commitment thus made was wildly ambitious and they struggled for funding almost from the outset. Party members also made declarations suggesting that a Home Rule government would soon be in place, under which evicted tenants would be reinstated. Such claims were made though it was obvious that a post-1886 Home Rule Bill would struggle in the House of Commons and stand no chance in the House of Lords. Leading members of the party were clearly divided over the Plan of Campaign. One faction’s enthusiasm for removing the landlord class from Ireland was tempered by the other’s fear of land agitation’s potential for alienating Liberal support in Britain. Many of the pragmatists who worried about British Liberal opinion would later

29 Ibid., p. 28.
31 Ibid., p. 97.
32 Ibid., p. 88.
33 Ibid., p. 128.
34 Ibid., pp 167-71.
36 Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 87.
37 Macaulay, Holy See, British Policy and the Plan of Campaign, pp 201-10.
38 Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 88.
40 Ibid., pp 189-90.
41 Macaulay, Holy See, British Policy and the Plan of Campaign, p. 119.
42 Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 25.
43 Ibid., p. 19.
support Parnell, while it was telling that most of the Plan enthusiasts, including O’Brien and Dillon, joined the anti-Parnellite faction when the party split.44 The Catholic clergy, too, almost to a man aligned themselves with the anti-Parnellites.45

In July, Balfour persuaded the Conservative government to introduce the Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act, 1887, and at the same time a new land act. The former piece of legislation was intended to tackle land agitation; the latter, strongly opposed by landlords and many in Balfour’s own Conservative Party, to ameliorate the tenants’ situation and to extend to a greater number of them the benefits of the 1881 Land Act. The land act also had the power to review existing judicial rents.46 Boycotting was, of course, a very effective weapon in the arsenal of tenant farmers throughout Ireland, and one that the government was eager to eliminate. The O’Grady had been very effectively boycotted. He could not find new tenants to replace evicted ones or labourers to farm his demesne. His agent, Mr Shine, had been forced to resign. Letters from local businesses arrived at Kilballyowen, stating politely but firmly that no dealings either with The O’Grady or his household could be engaged in until the conflict was resolved. On 13 February 1887 Elizabeth O’Grady received a letter from her butcher telling her ‘it would be better not to get things in Bruff for some time until things will quieten down’. The corner of this letter is marked, presumably by Mrs O’Grady, ‘where we have always bought meat for years’. A letter of 19 February refused service ‘fearing any troubles may obstruct this town through which they may hold me to any blame’, though thanking Mrs O’Grady ‘for your kind patronage up to the present’.

T.J. O’Shaughnessy, who had a hardware shop in Bruff, wrote to members of the O’Grady household on 28 February ‘I’d feel thankful by you not coming or sending any of your family to either my grocery or hardware shop … as long as this difference will exist between The O’Grady and his tenantry’. He apologised, saying ‘it is most painful to me to be obliged to have recourse to this proceeding’, but that he was forced to do so by public feeling. Another shopkeeper, M. Carroll of Bruff, wrote to Elizabeth O’Grady on the same day saying ‘I need not tell you that I have my enemies in this village as well as anybody else’. Carroll could not send her any supplies and was ‘extremely sorry for to have to take the above step but I need not tell you that public opinion cannot be ridden over’. On 22 April the tailor J. O’Sullivan saw fit to return to Mrs O’Grady ‘your habit undone owing to present unpleasant circumstances’, and hoped ‘O’Grady will see his way to remove those impediments which prevent me doing everything in my power to oblige you’.

Menacing notices were posted in the area in July and August of 1888 asking ‘will you back O’Brien and Dillon or O’Grady and his backers’, naming one of those ‘backers’ as a grocer in Bruff. They were signed ‘Justice’. The O’Grady himself wrote a letter on 24 November 1888 describing how he had recently been refused service at the bakery in Bruff. He was told that they were only selling bread to ‘regular customers’. The O’Grady noted that he ‘had dealt there largely for many years’.47 The Times reported that his cattle ‘were refused entry … to the pens of Liverpool cattle salesmen’ and could only be sold privately to a local butcher.48 This report may have been responsible for inspiring letters of support sent to The O’Grady from Liverpool, with offers to help him find buyers in the

46 Geary, Plan of Campaign, pp 76-7.
47 O’Grady Papers, § § vii, viii.
48 The Times, 15 January 1889.
future. One James Goggin, native of Bruff and belonging 'to an association of men who are notorious for loyalty and strict Protestantism', offered in the future to arrange cattle buyers 'who will not be intimidated by the moonlighters from Herbertstown or Mr. Parnell or his ... Jesuit Gladstone'. The O'Grady and Goggin appear to have maintained a correspondence after this. Goggin was to send the landlord a poem gushing in his praise and in praise of Kilballyowen in June 1892. A letter came from Mr Bellows at Upton Knoll in Gloucester on 16 March 1888. It sought information on O'Grady's situation. The author wished to use this information to 'beat down the pretensions of the 'League' and the 'Home Rulers'. He regretted that Parnellism had not yet 'been crushed to atoms'.

By the autumn of 1887 the O'Grady's position was desperate. On 13 August he issued an appeal to his tenants, addressing them as 'my friends'. He claimed not to be seeking evictions in a 'vindictive spirit', but that he wished to protect his property 'from unjust and unreasonable demands'. He reminded them that his family had been in the area for centuries, that he knew them all personally, that he had never evicted anybody and that he himself was a farmer. He made an improved offer of rent reduction on the one he had made the previous autumn, from 17.5 per cent to twenty. Though he complained of the unrelenting boycotting he and his household had been subjected to, his servants not even being able to go to Mass, he remained 'faithfully yours'. His predicament being obvious, the tenants felt they could do better and demanded he pay any legal costs which had been incurred. The O'Grady, however, was adamant that he would not pay Moroney's costs. His position may have hardened following instances of violence by some tenants. Hayracks in the area were reported burned and rioting had taken place. Stout resistance was not enough to halt the resumption of evictions in Herbertstown in August. With no agent, nobody to farm his land and no access to provisions from local suppliers he faced collapse; his only hope lay in outside support.

The Land Corporation of Ireland Limited (LC) had been established in July 1882 by Arthur McMurrough Kavanagh. He was also its president. Kavanagh was an important landlord, owning a large estate in Wexford and Carlow. The Corporation aimed to defend property rights in the face of boycotting and land agitation, and to complement existing landlord organisations. Kavanagh wrote to Elizabeth O'Grady, who was his niece, on 16 February 1887 promising to 'recommend my board to take up your farm as a matter of public policy', and that he viewed it as a 'special test case' [Kavanagh's underlining] in opposing the Plan of Campaign. He refers to an attack made on the caretakers of the Moroney farm in which one of them was shot, claiming that all was 'due to weak government'. Kavanagh wrote again on 22 April to say 'I have no hesitation in saying that your wisest course is to hold out ... resist the devils'. He says that a committee had been formed which would surely help them, as their case was 'a very special one'. On 16 June he warned that she 'had better keep all I say', as 'if it got out they would have time to prepare for our reception and give more trouble'.

49 O'Grady Papers, §§ iv, ix.
50 Ibid., §§ i, v, vi.
51 The Irish Times, 5 March 1887.
52 Ibid., 22 March 1887.
53 Ibid., 30 August 1887.
54 Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 103.
55 Ibid., p. 102.
56 Ibid., p. 103.
57 O'Grady Papers, § vii.
The new Anti-Plan of Campaign Committee (APC),\(^{58}\) which Kavanagh had mentioned, duly got involved. They wrote to William Beauchamp, the O’Grady’s solicitor, on 10 February 1888, offering to pay the costs associated with approved evictions, to pay the rates and taxes due on same, and offering to graze their own cattle on evicted holdings. They would pay the O’Grady seventy-five per cent of any net profits gained as rent, less certain deductions. They would not furnish him with cash with which to purchase stock himself. On 8 March the APC wrote to Limerick land agent Arthur White. They requested that he manage the estate as part of the agreement, and required the O’Grady’s signed confirmation of their terms. They wrote that he had already undertaken not to agree terms with his tenants without the approval of the APC. Included was a cheque for £500, an interest free loan with which to purchase cattle and some hay.\(^{59}\) Upon agreeing these terms the O’Grady’s hands were tied.

From this point on, the outcome of the Plan for the Herbertstown tenants was inevitable, though it may not have appeared so at the time. The possibility of planting the evicted holdings with Protestant tenants, most likely drawn from Ulster by attractive terms, was floated,\(^{60}\) but deemed unnecessary. This idea was inspired by Lord Massereene’s partially successful use of the same approach on his estate in Counties Louth and Meath. It is doubtful whether such a scheme would have worked for a small number of tenants on an isolated estate so far from home.\(^{61}\) A conciliatory letter to The O’Grady from Canon Scully, the parish priest in Hospital, on 22 March 1888, requested ‘a peaceful solution to the deplorable situation’.\(^{62}\) It was too late. The cash-strapped National League, stretched to the limit in its support of evicted tenants on numerous Plan of Campaign estates, mainly located in the west and south, simply could not compete financially with wealthy organisations like the LC and APC, who only focused on a small number of estates.\(^{63}\) On 14 September 1888, White reported to Mrs O’Grady that the father-in-law of an evicted tenant had taken over the farm at the old rent. He took great pleasure in informing her that ‘it shows you were right in holding out against the “Plan of Campaign”’.\(^{64}\)

While the establishment of the Tenants’ Defence Association in October 1889 brought with it a temporary respite, its success in fund-raising was quickly neutralised by O’Brien’s ill-fated ‘New Tipperary’ venture. This involved the construction of an artificial town in which shopkeepers evicted by Arthur Smith-Barry were to continue to trade. Though the launch of New Tipperary was accompanied by much fanfare, the project proved abortive and was a massive drain on resources.\(^{65}\) Things went from bad to worse as the divorce case involving Parnell split Nationalist Ireland. It was just a matter of time before the money ran out. By mid-May 1891 O’Grady’s evicted tenants had received no funding in over two months, and thereafter only sporadically.\(^{66}\) The tenants agreed terms at the end of January 1892.\(^{67}\)

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\(^{58}\) Geary refers to the ‘Anti-Plan of Campaign Association’, apparently the same organisation. He says that this group ‘may have been administered as a branch of the Land Corporation’. In any case, both the LC and the APC issued correspondence from 12 Molesworth Street, Dublin.

\(^{59}\) O’Grady Papers, §§ IV, x.

\(^{60}\) O’Grady Papers, §§ vi.

\(^{61}\) Geary, Plan of Campaign, pp 103-5.

\(^{62}\) O’Grady Papers, § vi.

\(^{63}\) Geary, Plan of Campaign, p. 109.

\(^{64}\) O’Grady Papers, § viii.


\(^{66}\) Geary, Plan of Campaign, pp 137-8.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., p. 139.
While the Plan on the O'Grady estate differed in many ways from that on the Ponsonby estate, the two are worthy of a brief comparison. Both were among five cases highlighted by an account published by the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union criticising the Plan as unjust.\(^{68}\) C. W. T. Ponsonby was a retired English naval officer who had inherited his estate in 1868. The estate, located near Yougah in east Cork, was considerable, comprising over 10,000 acres. The Plan was adopted there within a week of its adoption in Herbertstown. Ponsonby had refused to grant significant reductions in rent, unlike his neighbouring landlords and The O'Grady.\(^{69}\) When it became clear that Ponsonby was losing the battle with his tenants, Balfour, in a remarkable instance of state intervention, oversaw the creation of a syndicate to come to Ponsonby's aid. The syndicate of powerful landlords which emerged included the aforementioned Smith-Barry, and its determination and considerable wealth tipped the scales back in Ponsonby's favour.\(^{70}\) It cleared the estate of tenants and began grazing sheep and cattle on their former holdings. The tenants gave in to the syndicate's demands in February 1892,\(^{71}\) and ultimately purchased their holdings early in the twentieth century.\(^{72}\)

Like O'Grady, Ponsonby was saved by an outside association of landlords. Both of their 'victories' are in sharp contrast to the many estates on which there had been the opposite outcome. On the majority of estates where the Plan was adopted it was successful.\(^{73}\) There had been no interventions in these cases by outside associations of landlords, and estates were allowed to give in to tenants' demands right up to the end of the Plan of Campaign. The landlord associations were strategic in their selections of which estates to support. They did not show compassion for the majority of landlords struggling against the Plan, but rather selected a few symbolic cases in which defeat would not be an option. They had the means and the wherewithal to achieve this.

Just as the National League generally chose to launch the Plan of Campaign on heavily encumbered estates which presented the greatest possibility of success,\(^{74}\) so the landlords picked their battles carefully. Certain estates were strategically chosen where the Plan was to be opposed at all costs, though those estates' landlords would not necessarily benefit greatly from the resultant 'victories'. While events on the O'Grady and Ponsonby estates led to bitter losses for the National League, The O'Grady himself was almost ruined and Ponsonby's tenure as a landlord came to an untimely end, sacrificed by others of his class who were in a stronger position than he. Though he was well compensated, he was unable to continue in the position to which he had only recently retired.\(^{75}\)

The government often lamented the fact that the landowners did not present a united front as the tenant farmers did.\(^{76}\) There was, however, unity at the top, a kind of bargain-hunting search for an answer to the Plan that would save only those landlords it had to. If landlords were slow to respond to the threat of the Plan of Campaign it may have been that they were waiting for the government to respond on their behalf. The introduction of the 1887 Land Act by the Conservative Party, the natural political allies of the landed

\(^{68}\) O'Grady Papers, § 5.

\(^{69}\) Donnelly, _Land and People_, pp 355-6.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., pp 357-60.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., p. 360.


\(^{73}\) Ibid., p. 140.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., p. 47.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., p. 139.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., p. 3.
class,\textsuperscript{77} may have forced landlords to feel they could survive only by fending for themselves, and a kind of survival of the fittest emerged with those at the upper end of the spectrum often willing to sacrifice many of those below.

The Herbertstown tenants were well off by comparison with many other Irish tenant farmers. Through the auspices of the National League they saw an opportunity to impo-
erish their landlord and purchase their holdings at a greatly reduced rate.\textsuperscript{78} The \textit{Liberal Unionist} of 13 April 1887, in an appeal to the English public, named the O'Grady, Ponsonby and Lansdowne estates as clear examples that the Plan was 'fought with the greatest bitterness and obstinacy on those estates where no pretence of poverty could be put forward', calling the Plan a 'gigantic scheme for the robbery of tenants as well as of landlords'.\textsuperscript{79} The O'Grady was a relatively small landlord, caught between his tenants who were willing to see him ruined in order to improve their own lot and a class of larger landlord quite prepared to use him as a pawn in order that the National League might be defeated. Their primary aim was to defeat the Plan rather than to save the landlord. His initial offer of a fifteen per cent reduction on judicial rents before the implementation of the Plan, later increased to twenty per cent, seems to have been reasonable. Heavily encumbered, he had little choice but to allow himself to be propped up by the Land Corporation and the Anti-Plan of Campaign Association. These organisations, run by some of the wealthiest landlords in the country, had at heart a desire to promote the best interests of the elite of the class rather than the individual landowner. The landlord system within itself was hierarchical, with those at the top often as willing to exploit those at the bottom as they were the rudest tenant farmer or labourer.

The course of the Plan on his estate was largely taken out of the hands of The O'Grady by these bodies. Their inflexibility not only brought the Herbertstown tenants to ruin, but very nearly their landlord too. Paradoxically, their behaviour mirrors a criticism many had of the National League and the Irish Party. It was said that they were often guilty of carelessly leading tenants on to self-destructive courses of action in pursuit of their political objectives.\textsuperscript{80} Many of those evicted on Plan of Campaign estates had few options open to them other than the emigrant ship or the workhouse, and their once vocal Irish Party champions did little in their defence. One representative of beleaguered tenants was left to wonder where were 'the members of parliament...who induced them to give up their farms, under promises which have not been redeemed, and who now leave them to their fate'.\textsuperscript{81} National League guarantees of financial support were impossible to honour. The O'Grady only held on to his estate by the mercy of those to whom he owed money. A number of his mortgagees, who were relatives of his, reduced the annual interest rate on his repayments to three per cent, and waived one year's payment. The Dowager Madam O'Grady reduced her jointure from £500 to £100. During the period that the Plan was in operation the household at Kilballyowen had been maintained by Mrs O'Grady from her own personal income.\textsuperscript{82} She died shortly after the agitation came to an end.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 77.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., pp 47-8. The secretary of the Herbertstown branch of the National League admitted as much to the American observer George Ebell.
\textsuperscript{79} O'Grady Papers, § II.
\textsuperscript{80} Patrick Maume, \textit{The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life 1891-1918} (Dublin, 1999) p. 40. Maume says that some critics saw in the land issue 'an agrarian fig leaf to disguise the party's political bankruptcy'.
\textsuperscript{81} Canon D. Keller quoted in Donnelly, \textit{Land and People}, p. 376.
\textsuperscript{82} Geary, \textit{Plan of Campaign}, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{83} O'Grady Papers, § vii.
It is difficult not to reach the conclusion that tenants and landlord alike would have been best served had The O'Grady's early offers of abatements been accepted. Perhaps the best contemporary analysis and advice came from one P. Godfrey in a letter to Elizabeth O'Grady on 11 February 1887. He felt that 'the dispute in this case would never have arisen but for the councils of others who would much prefer to see The O'Grady beating the power of the Plan of Campaign'. Furthermore, he cautioned against incurring legal costs which the tenants would never be able to pay, and said that he wrote to her 'for the purpose of directing your attention to the awful consequences to landlords and tenants if this unhappy dispute be followed up to the bitter end'. It may be fitting for the last word to go to Honora Crimmins, one of the few tenants in a position to reclaim her holding after the dust had settled. In a letter to the O'Grady, simply dated Sunday, she wrote 'I am grateful to you to give me back my home to end my days there'. Her gratitude was accompanied by a request: she desired the use of sixty pounds to rebuild the homestead, the stones of which Arthur White had removed 'to make drains in the domain'.

84 The word may be 'besting', the writing is difficult to decipher.
85 O'Grady Papers, §§ viii, ix.