

Ollscoil na hÉireann

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **DR W. J. SMYTH**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University, President, National University of Ireland, Maynooth on 25th April, 2002, in St. Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **PAT COX**

A Sheansailéir agus a mhuintir na hOllscoil,

Almost half a century ago the Belfast-based, Welsh geographer, Estyn Evans referred to Ireland as the largest and most westerly of the islands lying off the tattered Atlantic fringe of Europe.

Geologically the insularity of Ireland is of short duration, being formerly linked to the continent prior to the Pleistocene era. Historically, it has long been central to the seaways that link Mediterranean and northwestern Europe. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, when an Atlantic fixation directed Irish attention westward, it was intimately tied by trade, politics and migration to the continent of Europe. This bifurcation still finds resonance in the Berlin v Bonn debate over role models for Ireland in 21st century transition.

Representing Munster, Pat Cox as MEP is geographically remote from the Strasbourg Parliament of which he is President and long serving member. However, his approach to European politics has never been insular, nor has it ever been remote from the central issues of a rapidly changing and expanding European Union. It is a truism to say that Pat Cox is the most significant Irish politician in Europe. For many years a strong, focused and articulate voice in the Strasbourg forum, Pat Cox was elected President of the European Parliament on 15 January 2002.

In an expression of true European unity the centre and the periphery, heartland and hinterland are united in his career and position. Pat Cox was born on 28 November 1952 in Dublin and reared in Limerick. Graduating from Trinity College Dublin in 1974 in Economics, he was subsequently appointed lecturer in NIHE (later University of Limerick). It was there that his interest in European Affairs blossomed and he was a founder-contributor to the University's undergraduate programme in European Studies.

Leaving Limerick in 1982, Pat Cox worked for four years as a current affairs presenter and reporter on the RTE programme, 'Today Tonight'. His time with RTE was a particularly enlivened period in the economic and political evolution of this country and his voice and face came to be widely known throughout Ireland. His transition from academia to public service broadcasting was seamless: his trained and incisive mind combining easily with the demands for rapid analysis and communicated insights imposed by the T.V. current affairs programme. Late in 1985 a new political party was born out of the political turmoil on the national scene. The Progressive Democrats, forged in the tradition of European Liberal Parties, appointed Pat Cox as their founding General Secretary.

Within a remarkably short period of time he was to find himself in the role of negotiator for participation in Government when, in 1989, the Charles J. Haughey-

led Fianna Fáil party departed from its hitherto inviolate principle of single party Government to enter into a Coalition Government with the Progressive Democrats. His political skills were soon to be given wider recognition. In 1989 he was first elected as an MEP to the European Parliament and three years later, 1992, he was elected to Dáil Éireann as TD for the constituency of Cork South Central, serving for a time as the party's Finance spokesperson.

His hitherto unimpeded progress on the national and European political stage met a temporary hiatus shortly thereafter when he became engaged in a leadership dispute with the PD's. He left the party and stood as an independent against Desmond O'Malley for the European elections in 1994. It was to prove to be a decisive moment in Irish politics. To the surprise of many Pat Cox defeated his former mentor for the Munster vote, and on returning to Strasbourg he was nominated as the Deputy Leader of the European Liberal Democrats.

His strengths were recognised by the European party and he quickly became a key figure in its strategy and policy formulation Programme Committee. In 1998 he was unanimously elected to the Presidency of the European Liberal Democrats, less than a decade after first entering the Strasbourg parliament. Shortly thereafter European voters watched with interest when, under Pat Cox's leadership, the Liberal Democrats challenged the executive accountability of the European Commission. The power struggle between the Commission and the Parliament yielded an unprecedented result; the resignation of the European Commission. In February of this year he was elected President of the European Parliament. Pat Cox, MEP from the tattered Atlantic fringe of Europe, had arrived centre stage.

As President of the European Parliament he will have a central role to play as the European Union seeks, by the process of enlargement, to extend its borders eastwards. A perspective naturally honed on the periphery will have much value as that process unfolds. It will also provide him with a unique perspective as he watches Ireland prepare for its second Nice referendum.

Married with six children Pat Cox has a family home in Cork but much of his time is spent on the wider European stage. It is a pleasure and an honour to welcome him here today in Dublin Castle - a building whose accumulated history has in recent times been extended by its role as venue for European summit meetings. We welcome also today his wife Cathy and his children.

Chancellor, it is entirely fitting that the National University of Ireland should honour this country's pre-eminent European politician by the conferral of the Degree of Doctor of Laws. I present to you Mr Pat Cox MEP, President of the European Parliament.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totaeque Academiae.