

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **DR ART COSGROVE**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University, President, University College Dublin - National University of Ireland, Dublin 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 **SÉAMUS MALLON**

Chancellor and Members of the University,

I am privileged and honoured to present Séamus Mallon to you for the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

Séamus Mallon embodies all that is best in political life. Keenly aware of the frailties of the human condition, he has never been seduced by unrealistic expectations nor overwhelmed by disappointments, but has pursued with unflagging zeal his vision of a peaceful Ireland. Always eloquent, and with a turn of phrase that seeks to reach an understanding with his opponent of the moment, one feels he has an empathy with the common man.

Séamus Mallon was born in 1936 in Markethill, Armagh, the son of a headmaster and a nurse. Educated at the Christian Brothers Grammar School, Newry, he was a member of the victorious Gaelic football team which gave the Abbey CBS its first ever MacRory Cup win in 1954. As a fourteen-year-old pupil at the school I shared in the ecstatic celebrations which greeted that historic victory, a victory which promoted members of the team to heroic status. He went on to become a graduate of St Joseph's College of Education, Belfast, was appointed to a teaching post at St James Primary School, Markethill in 1960 and subsequently became Headmaster there. As a student Séamus took an interest in amateur drama, and also earned a reputation as a formidable poker player, and expertise in both these areas is not without relevance to a political career!

His involvement with Northern politics stretches back to the 1960s. He first came to prominence as chairman of the Mid-Armagh Anti-Discrimination Committee in 1963 and during the campaign for civil rights in the late 1960s. One of the founders of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, in 1973 he took a seat on Armagh District Council and in that same year was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly. He became Deputy Leader of the SDLP in 1979, a position he held until November last, when he retired from SDLP leadership. He was the first politician to be elected to both the Oireachtas as Senator (in 1981) and the old Northern Ireland Assembly (in 1982). In January 1986, he unseated Mr Jim Nicholson of the Ulster Unionist Party in a by-election to become MP for Newry and Armagh and has continued to represent the constituency at Westminster ever since.

Throughout the Troubles, Séamus Mallon has been a stern critic of the security forces. Nor did he hesitate to speak out against the IRA. His frankness has led to death threats and attacks on the family home. A brave man, he has consistently eschewed police protection in the knowledge that those protecting him might themselves be killed.

Unstinting in his efforts to achieve the Good Friday Agreement which he has described as "the culmination of a lifetime search for an honourable settlement in Ireland" and more memorably as "Sunningdale for slow learners", Séamus Mallon's ability and patience were recognised in June 1998 when he was elected Deputy First Minister of the new Northern Ireland Assembly. He took a leading role in the negotiations to resolve the issue of IRA decommissioning, and ongoing rows over demilitarisation and police reform. In July 1999, as Unionists blocked the setting up of the powersharing executive amidst prolonged disagreement about IRA decommissioning, his principled and courageous response was to resign as Deputy First Minister. He returned to the position when the executive resumed in

November 1999 and charted a sure course through the suspension of February 2000 to the relative calm achieved in May 2000. Following the Westminster election in June 2001, the resignation of David Trimble and the second suspension of the assembly again imperilled the peace process, but by the time of his departure in November last stability had again been restored. The relationship with David Trimble was never easy, but it worked.

A constitutional nationalist who believes in patient negotiation, Séamus Mallon has earned the respect of many unionists as an honest spokesman for the nationalist cause. The Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis once said that while he disagreed fundamentally with many of Mr Mallon's views, "he's truthful and principled and straight as a die". He has served diligently in each and every parliamentary forum to which he was elected over the years, and has given wise guidance to the SDLP since he became deputy leader to John Hume in 1979. As Justice spokesman, he was the party's standard-bearer on the need for reform of the policing system for close on two decades and the fruits of his labours are now becoming evident in the advent of the new Northern Ireland Police Service.

At a time when others chose violence he followed the constitutional path. "The reality is", he says "that violence failed to achieve its objective. The biggest proof that violence failed is that the people who espoused the violence have now adopted the policies we made ... which I take as a big compliment".

Séamus Mallon first attracted my admiration as a fourteen-year-old for his prowess on the football field. Over the years that admiration has grown because of his prowess in the political field where his efforts have been truly heroic. His integrity, consistency, courage and sheer tenacity have been essential to the great political advances of recent years. In paying tribute to him, we also acknowledge the role of his wife, Gertrude, and daughter, Orla, who have shared with him the ups and downs of the past turbulent years. And may I end with the hope, dear to his heart, that Armagh may eventually win an all-Ireland title!

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.