

Ollscoil na hÉireann

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY

WILLIAM J. SMYTH, B.A., PH.D., LL.D. Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University,
President of National University of Ireland, Maynooth, on 21 April 2004 on the
occasion of the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* upon
PAT HUME

A Sheansailéir agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile

Few cities of its size have established for themselves an international and national image as powerful as that of Derry. *Remember 1690*, the omnipresent slogan of Orange Arches and Apprentice Boys parades, recalls a time when the siege of the city was a pivotal ingredient in the cockpit of European politics. The world-renown haunting music of *The Derry Air* recalls the personal pain of parting, fittingly so for a city which for most of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was *the* primary emigration port of Ireland. In more recent times Civil Rights marches, the Bogside siege and the horror of Bloody Sunday have all projected the image of this northwest Irish City into global headlines.

These, and many other images, convey a powerful sense of a City which has suffered much. Yet despite its troubled past one can find in its people a resilience of spirit, a sense of history and music that ennobles the human condition. Above all, it has for many generations been the most matriarchal urban society in Ireland. Unemployment among males extending from the second to, in some cases, the third generation meant that in many families the dependable wage earner was the wife and mother. The shirt manufacturing industry was the haven of employment for women, especially the Bogside migrants from Donegal.

Resulting directly from its fractured political and social past, Derry has become an international byword for two elements of specific local origins and ultimately of international significance – the perpetration of a sustained policy of gerrymandering in local elections, and the emergence of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement.

It was into that city of historical grandeur, diminished economic fortunes, and festering socio-political ills that Patricia Hone was born. Throughout her life as a child in the Waterside as a teacher locally for more than twenty-five years, as wife and constituency office manager for her husband John Hume, and as an enduring and sustaining voice for directed reasonableness, Patricia

has proved herself to be, at home and abroad, a worthy advocate of local and national interests as well as being a readily identifiable creation of that city of diverse challenges.

Pat Hone had to expend little effort in changing her name to Hume following her marriage to John in 1960. But throughout the past four decades she has had to expend what amounted to superhuman effort in successfully raising her family of five children, supporting and managing the activities of John, and injecting her own brand of common sense into liaising with, and briefing foreign journalists, visiting American politicians and UK government figures. She did so at times amid very real dangers and threats to the well being of herself and her family, and she did so with all the self-contained steely resolve for which Derry women are renown.

Pat Hone was born in the mixed religious/political area of the Waterside in Derry city where she attended the local primary school. She received her secondary education in Thornhill College. One of six children of a small-scale self-employed building contractor, Pat had the advantage of a family commitment to education and progress.

Her commitment to education brought her to St Mary's Training College, Belfast and on graduating she returned to her old school in the Waterside. It was there that she was to spend twenty-five years teaching the children of Derry. Almost half that period coincided with an era of quiet political stability, but the remainder of her teaching career was spent in the classrooms of a city under siege. In 1979 she retired from teaching to assume the fulltime role of manager of the constituency office of her husband, John who had then been elected to the European Parliament with its added bonus of a regular salary.

John and Pat share a common interest in teaching and in pride in their local city. Early on they were to be bound by a shared experience of political activism in a period and place of destabilised community and governmental relations.

Their early-married life was lived in the Bogside – balancing normality of family atmosphere with the dangers and threats of a political activism. Throughout these turbulent years Pat was a constant factor of family solidarity and community support. Her teaching income throughout the 1970s sustained the family when, after the dissolution of the Stormont Government in 1972, waged returns for political representatives was at best briefly episodic – linked to the ephemeral emergence of political representative assemblies.

John Hume's constituency office was located in the family home. Personal, community financial and political difficulties were central to the lived experiences of their Bogside neighbours. It was from that office, from that family home, that Pat dispensed advice and help and aid to neighbours and constituents. It was not easy. Especially, it was not easy during the Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s when the home was frequently under attack and the lives of her family were endangered. On nights when rumours of attacks circulated the family would not go to bed; on nights when gunshots were fired and petrol bombs were thrown, the family could not go to bed.

During these years Pat Hume's kitchen became renowned for the hospitality, detailed political briefings and political introduction effected – all dispensed with consummate ease by Pat. Indeed her kitchen's AGA stove was to assume a legendary status of its own as the focal point of political education. It was to that stove that Pat returned daily from her work as a teacher in the Waterside and it was around it that visitors seeking an audience with John were seated as they awaited in hope his return, several hours later, from the most recent crisis point or political meeting. US Senator Ted Kennedy, Tip O'Neill and Daniel Moynihan, all took their place by the stove, as did Home Secretary James Callaghan. Bishops of Protestant and Catholic faiths, the occasional Taoiseach, southern diplomats and myriad journalists, all found comfort and sustenance from the ever-bubbling stew pot. Regular attendees were known to arrive with brown paper parcels of meat and kidneys to add to the cauldron and dignitaries of Church and State took their place amid drying nappies and other family paraphernalia.

They were served much more than Irish Stew. Their lengthy waits were the occasion of tutorials and political briefings delivered in a clear, concise and unambiguous manner by schoolteacher, Mrs Hume. From that hospitable Bogside home, Pat delivered factual details and analysis, administering political reality checks to those whom ideology, bias, geographical distance or fundamental ignorance insulated them from an understanding of the tenor, tone and content of that to which they referred as "the Northern Ireland Problem".

The effectiveness of Pat's briefings, her legendary organizational skills that facilitated the political campaigns, her unwavering support of John, even at moments of deep despair, are impossible to measure. She would be the first to minimise them but in Westminster, Dublin and Washington, they were acknowledged, incorporated into policy, and privately recalled by those who had power and influence.

In more recent years Pat, along with Mrs Daphne Trimble, has spearheaded the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. The aim of that fund is to provide support to the families of the 3,800

people killed in the Troubles and the 40-50,000 people maimed and seriously injured in them during the past thirty years. Practical help in the form of wheelchairs, artificial limbs, educational opportunity, have been accorded to the injured and their families and several thousands have benefited from this cross community support. But while the overt function of this organization has been to raise funds for certain purposes its international significance, and particularly its American significance has been derived as much from the medium as from the message. The wives of the two Nobel Laureates and Party Leaders acting in concert have conveyed emphatically, and especially in the United States, the substance of co-existence which underpins the Peace Process and have highlighted in a clear and unambiguous manner the fact that the aftermath of the Troubles was not just a British or an Irish problem : it was also a problem of local community reconciliation and a summation of a set of myriad individual problems, all requiring solutions.

Nationally and internationally Pat Hume is recognised in her own right as a woman of some considerable skill. In 1998 she was appointed to the RTE Authority in recognition of her many skills, experiences and objective judgement. She was well respected in the fulfilment of that role.

Internationally, she has received formal recognition by the award of a Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa* by Manhattan College in May 2000.

Chancellor, I now propose to you for the award of a Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, Mrs Pat Hume. I propose her for her services to the community of her native Derry, her immense contribution to the politics of reasonableness in Northern Ireland, and for her educational services rendered to all those leaders who gathered in her Derry kitchen. Above, all, however, I propose her as a person who has in her life and actions demonstrated the fundamental transcendence of the human spirit, and unfailing courage in the face of adversity.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hanc meam filiam quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo totique Academiae.