

## OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN

### NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

**DR CAROLINE HUSSEY** on 1 December 2016 in the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on **RUAIRÍ QUINN**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

When Ruairí Quinn decided, earlier this year, not to stand again for election to the Dail, he brought to an end a highly distinguished career as Labour TD for Dublin South East which spanned nearly forty years and required him to contest twelve General Elections.

Ruairí is one of the six children of Julia and Malachy Quinn who grew up in the Sandymount area (long before any of us had heard of ‘Dublin 4’ or indeed ‘Dublin South East’). He attended school locally in St Michael’s and subsequently Blackrock College. Academic work came easily to Ruairí, so he was able to devote much of his energies to sport and other extra-curricular activities. Although a competent rugby player, his real talent was for athletics, and he became a very successful middle-distance runner, coached by the late Tony Farrell. Always gifted and competitive, he also won distinctions as a schoolboy artist and essayist.



L-R: NUI Chancellor, Dr Maurice Manning, Dr Caroline Hussey, Ruairí Quinn, Dr Attracta Halpin, Registrar NUI

Architecture was an obvious choice when Ruairí entered UCD, combining artistic values with social engagement. He soon joined the Labour Party whose radicalisation matched the tempo of student action across Europe. RIBA was threatening to withdraw its recognition from the UCD School of Architecture, and this was obviously a matter of great concern to Ruairí and other students who drew attention to the situation by a carefully-planned sit-in in the school of Architecture. Following postgraduate study in Greece, Ruairí returned to Dublin and set about re-organising the party in Dublin South East and, when a General Election was called in February 1973, he was the obvious candidate. Ruairí’s autobiography *Straight Left* gives a vivid description of the count and the long, long day which culminated in Ruairí being thirty-nine votes short of winning a seat.

A week may be a long time in politics, but four years can be very short when major changes are needed, and Ruairí worked relentlessly to establish a Labour seat in Dublin South East. When the election was called in June 1977, Ruairí’s team was ready. It was a long and wearisome campaign, but four weeks later when Ruairí emerged from his habitual visit to the cinema on the day of a count, it was difficult to

convince him that he would win a seat; the seat that he was to hold, apart from a very long six months in 1981, until this year.

In 1982, Garret FitzGerald's government fell on a budget vote. This was to be the second of three elections in two years. From Ruairí's perspective it was a windfall: an opportunity to return to the Dail which he could not reasonably have expected so soon. His success in that February 1982 election was to be repeated for the rest of his political career.

The second 1982 election resulted in the formation of a FG/Labour government, led by Garret FitzGerald and Dick Spring. Initially, Ruairí was appointed Minister of State in the Department of the Environment with responsibility for Housing and Urban Affairs, but became a member of the cabinet a year later as Minister for Labour.

The 1992 General Election led to the first ever Fianna Fail/ Labour coalition, in which Ruairí was Minister for Enterprise and Employment. However, the alliance didn't last, and in November 1994, was replaced by a Labour/Fine Gael government in which Ruairí was Minister for Finance, where he introduced a number of significant innovations, such as the Criminal Assets Bureau, set up in response to public outrage at the brutal murder of journalist Veronica Guerin. The Single European Currency ( or 'Euro') was also agreed during his watch as the Irish representative on 'EcoFin'.

The 1997 election resulted, yet again, in devastation for the Labour Party, so it was not the best possible time to become Party Leader, yet Ruairí served a 5-year term and did much to heal wounds and restore equilibrium, but probably his most significant achievement was to unite the parliamentary left through a merger of Democratic Left with Labour.

From such a long and successful political career it is inevitably difficult to single out particular achievements, but three things which must stand out are the CAB (a model adopted by several EU states), the Social Employment Scheme and, as Minister for Education in the last Dail, serious attempts to put third level funding on a strong and coherent base.

It is very unlikely that Ruairí Quinn will sit back and put his feet up yet awhile but, although he intends to spend more time with his wife Liz, his children Malachy, Sine and Conal, and his grandchildren, he still has a lot to contribute to the public good, probably in the fields of education and European Affairs.

## **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,  
totique Academiae.**