

A DECADE OF CENTENARIES: COMMEMORATING SHARED HISTORY

IBIS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

THE JOHN HUME INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL IRISH STUDIES, UCD

THURSDAY, 20TH MAY 2010

WELCOME ADDRESS BY DR HUGH BRADY – UCD PRESIDENT

I am delighted to open this conference – a decade of centenaries, commemorating shared history - organised by the Institute for British Irish Studies and supported by the Department of the Taoiseach, at which the Taoiseach will speak later in the morning.

The topic is an important one for us all. How we interpret our history is central to how we interpret ourselves and our futures. How we explain the conflicts of the past defines how we attempt to regulate and transform conflict in the future – not just on this island, but in the global context. Identity and community are built around past and present reference points: the 1916 rising and the war of independence; the Great War and the deaths on the Somme. These reference points are real. How we remember them can vary radically, and in part reflect our present-day preoccupations. The university at once has a duty to show the truth about the past, and to show the variety of choices open in the re-reading of these references, to show how we can at once change and ensure continuity in our public life and collective identities. We are beginning a decade of centenaries, when the main features of political life on this island were set, and it has taken a century to overcome many of the conflicts generated at that time. It is necessary to understand and explain how these conflicts were generated, and to do so in a way that allows all of us, in both parts of the island and indeed in Britain, to move beyond the causes of conflict and to use the experience to help those caught in conflict in other parts of the globe. This is a task that signals the engagement of scholars in the university with issues of public political importance.

The Institute for British Irish Studies (IBIS) was founded ten years ago by Professors Coakley and Laffan precisely to further this project. Here research, teaching, and the needs of public life converge. Here at UCD we are proud that it is the only centre on the island with such a strong cross-border focus, that its importance has been recognised by the Department of the Taoiseach and that it has moved ahead to focus also on the wider comparative and global lessons that can be drawn from conflict and settlement in Northern Ireland – the mission of the Department of Foreign Affairs Conflict Resolution Unit. The annual conference is the most public of the wide range of activities coordinated around IBIS – research, publications, an evening lecture series, an active research cluster of staff, doctoral and post-doctoral fellows who engage both in individual and in larger scale collective research.

This conference prepares for a series of commemorations by asking internationally renowned researchers to distil conclusions from their research and to discuss its

relevance for our shared future with media commentators, those whose work involves organising or regulating commemorations, and politicians – the Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen, and Mr Nelson McCausland, MLA and Northern Ireland Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure. From the media we are pleased to welcome Brian Feeney of the Irish News, David Adams of the Irish Times, and independent writer Daltun O Ceallaigh. From those whose work involves them in organising and regulating commemoration, Dr Ian Adamson of The Somme Association, Ronnie Pedlow of the Parades Commission, David Hoey of the Apprentice Boys' Maiden City Festival, Tony Kennedy of the Community Relations Council. And among the academics we welcome a series of very distinguished scholars who are also innovators in their translation of scholarly results from comparative historical social science into policy relevant analysis and public reflection. We are happy to welcome Professor John Horne from the Centre of War Studies, Trinity College, Professor Evanthia Lyons from Centre for Research on Political Psychology, Queens University Belfast, Professor Bill Rolston from School of Sociology, University of Ulster, two very highly regarded political historians, Dr Marc Mulholland from St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford and Dr Margaret O'Callaghan from Queens University Belfast and Dr John O'Dowd, a constitutional lawyer from UCD. And of course the audience itself – distinguished ambassadors and officials, political actors, students, researchers and lecturers at UCD and at other universities – exemplifies the dialogue between academia, politics and the public with which we are engaged.

It also gives me the greatest pleasure to welcome the distinguished chairs of the panels, many of whom give their time to serve on the IBIS advisory Board. In particular, I welcome Sir George Quigley, MRIA, whose work has spanned civil service, banking and deep involvement in helping improve the conditions of life in Northern Ireland and indeed on the island.

Happy now to hand over to Sir George to chair the first panel.