



Introductory address by Professor Brigid Laffan, Principal, UCD College of Human Sciences, University College Dublin on 13th of December 2010, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa on Brendan Halligan.

President, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, UCD Graduates

It is a personal honour for me to present Brendan Halligan, a distinguished UCD Alumnus, for an Honorary Doctorate at UCD today December 13th 2010. Brendan Halligan was born in Dublin in 1936.

We celebrate his long, prominent and varied career as public servant, political director, politician, activist, educator and business man. Brendan is truly a ‘man for all seasons’, a man who is too active to write his memoirs because in his own words he is ‘too busy doing things’. The concept of retirement is alien to Brendan.

Brendan, although at home in any international milieu, loves the city of his birth and his country. He was brought up in the vibrant community of Rialto, bounded by the canal and the South Circular Road. Part of a large extended family, Brendan’s great grandfather, father and later brother worked for Guinness, a company that took care of its employees and their families from cradle to grave. Brendan attended St. James CBS and enjoyed school.

After St. James, Brendan went to Kevin Street to train as a scientist. There under the influence of Tom Dowling, Brendan launched his first student magazine The Alchemist. His first job as a man in a white coat, a chemical analyst, in the CIE Depot in Inchicore developed his lifelong interest in science and engineering. Always an innovator, Brendan and three friends formed a unique co-operative with the aim of funding all four friends through university. This took them to London to make the necessary money.

In 1959 Brendan returned to Dublin, to UCD, and took what was then known as 9c, Economics with Law. UCD re-introduced a law and

economics degree in the last 5 years. The UCD faculty of the time included the legendary George O'Brein, Paddy Lynch, Gerry Quinn and Garrett Fitzgerald in Economics and John Kelly and Paddy McGilligan in Law. Brendan continued his tradition of editing magazines in UCD; *The Alchemist* of Kevin Street was followed by a magazine called *Exchange* and then *Link* which became the magazine of the community development movement. That movement was focused on getting credit unions established throughout the country.

Brendan's extracurricular activity led directly to a job in the Sugar Company after graduation. There he worked with two of his life-long friends, Willie Scally, a friend from UCD, and Tony Brown for that great Irish public servant, Michael Joseph Costello. It was an exciting time in the Sugar Company; Erin Foods was being launched and Brendan found himself back in London marketing this new food brand.

In 1967 Brendan shifted career when at Niall Green's suggestion he applied for the post of Political Director at the Labour Party. He was appointed to that position and soon thereafter became General Secretary under Brendan Corish. This brought him immediately into the thick of referendum politics in 1968, the occasion of the PR referendum and electoral politics in 1969 when the Labour Party ran with the slogan 'The Seventies will be Socialist'. He was central to the changes in the Labour Party which attracted individuals such as Conor Cruise O'Brien, Justin Keating and David Thornley to stand for election in the 1969 and 1973 polls.

Brendan transformed the Labour Party from introspection to internationalism – bringing it into the Socialist International and the EEC/EU Social Democratic movement. He travelled to Portugal in 1969 with an Socialist International group to support the Mario Soares led social democrats in opposition to the Caetano fascists and was deported. He developed links with leaders such as Olaf Palme, Mario Soares, Bruno Kreisky, Kalevi Sorsa, Francois Mitterrand and, above all, Willy Brandt. Brandt made a party political broadcast for the Labour Party in the 1979 European Parliament election.

Prior to the outbreak of the Troubles in 1969, Brendan together with a close colleague, Michael O'Leary opened up contacts with both communities in Northern Ireland. Brendan played a most important role in the creation of

the SDLP. As General Secretary of the Labour Party, he dissolved Labour Party branches in Northern Ireland in 1970 in order to assist with the formation of the SDLP. He promoted the acceptance of the SDLP into the Socialist International and EC/EU Social Democrat structures – where John Hume was to become a key personality as an MEP.

The Arms Crisis in 1970 persuaded the Labour Party that the Irish electorate had to be offered an alternative to Fianna Fáil with the result that a Special Party Conference endorsed coalition with Fine Gael. Brendan played an absolutely central role in creating the *National Coalition* which fought and won the 1973 General Election. Brendan Halligan acting for the Labour Party and Jim Dooge, a distinguished former professor of this university for FG, drafted the 14 Point Plan that formed the core of a joint election programme. He was central to developing, and maintaining, the cohesion between the parties which was so characteristic of that administration. Having won the election, Brendan began his career in active politics following appointment to the Senate by Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave. He won a by-election in 1976 and served in Dáil Eireann until the 1977 General Election. Defeat in that election brought him back to the Labour Party as General Secretary until 1980.

Brendan returned to Kevin Street and lectured on management science for a number of years. In 1983, he took leave of absence to sit in the European Parliament. There he worked closely with the great Italian socialist Altiero Spinelli and in 1984 voted for his visionary Draft Treaty Establishing the European Union, seen as the basis for the Single European Act of 1987.

Brendan's career as a business man began in 1985 when he became managing partner of CIPA, an independent public affairs consultancy. He also acted as Chairman of the Irish Council of the European Movement from 1983 to 1988. In 1985, Brendan became Chairman of Bórd na Mona, a position he held for ten years. He worked closely with Eddie O'Connor to transform BnM and developed an abiding interest in energy policy and renewables.

The experience of the Single European Act referendum in 1987 persuaded Brendan that Ireland needed a 'Think Tank' on European Affairs. He provided the indispensable dynamic for the creation of the Institute of European Affairs (IEA) now known as the Institute for International and

European Affairs (IEA)– his refusal to recognise what others might have accepted as insuperable difficulties and his ability to get colleagues to undertake the extra effort that made the difference. He sold the concept of the Institute to politicians, businesspeople and academics by his unique capacity to combine vision with practical planning. His decision – with Niall Greene – to purchase, in trust, the IEA premises in 1992 was critical, providing the Institute with an outstanding asset and establishing its ethos and prestige.

His commitment to maintaining Ireland’s position within the EU led him to act as Campaign Coordinator for *Ireland for Europe* in 2009. Brendan brought his deep knowledge of politics and referendums, his infectious enthusiasm, his steel when faced with political opposition, his ability to work across the generations, and his unparalleled capacity to mobilise people and resources to *Ireland for Europe*.

During this time, Brendan continued to serve as Chairman of the *Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland* working together with our former UCD colleague Professor Owen Lewis as Chief Executive. Brendan also serves as a Board Member of *Mainstream Renewal Power*, the company run by Eddie O’Connor.

The threads that run through Brendan Halligan’s life are politics, the Labour Party, Europe, Renewable Energy, the Green economy and a deep capacity for friendship and loyalty. He has a passion for engineering, for Roman and Irish history and for Sean Ghaeilge. The latter passion brought him to Trinity to study old Irish in 2001.

Brendan Halligan is a role model for our UCD students today; a model of openness, commitment, engagement, and above all a deep and abiding interest in the world. Brendan’s family are very special to him; his wife Margie, daughters Grainne and Aoife, his son Fergal, and his grandchildren including Killian who is following in his grandfather’s footsteps at UCD.

It is difficult to capture Brendan’s extraordinary energy. The last verse of Robert Frost’s beautiful poem, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* comes close:

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Praehonorabilis Praeses, 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 Litteris; idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique
Academiae.