



Shannon supporters . . . A section of the march through Limerick city on Saturday in favour of maintaining the status of Shannon Airport, —
 Photograph: Press 22.

Over 30,000 back Shannon status

From Arthur Quinlan, in Limerick

THE BIGGEST gathering since the visit of the Pope to Limerick 13 years ago attended the "Save Shannon Rally" in the city on Saturday. The attendance was put at over 30,000, with people coming from all parts of Munster and Connacht, particularly from Clare, north Tipperary and Limerick county.

The speakers represented Church, community, political and business leaders.

A dozen bands took part in the march throughout the city. Many groups carried black banners with such slogans as "Cromwell returns" and "The West demands the right to survive". Theatre Omnibus from Ennis, led the parade with a tableau of a pagan funeral for the airport and the west of Ireland.

Mr Bill Attley, joint general president of SIPTU, said that any attempt to overfly Shannon, however insignificant, would inevitably lead to its undoing as an industrial and aviation centre. He said it was not acceptable, given the need to create employment, that the only proposal before the Government was one which, if implemented, would destroy huge numbers of jobs in the region.

Mr Tom O'Dwyer, president of the ICMSA, said the decision on the future of Shannon would be a test of the Government's commitment to rural Ireland. He called on the Minister for Transport to evaluate seriously the implications for any change.

The Rev Harry Bohan, the rural sociologist, said: "We are tired of things closing down in the west of Ireland, and the people

are sick and tired of seeing their kith and kin leaving the valleys and the hills."

Mr Michael Hillery, chairman of the Shannon Status Committee, who is also chairman of Clare County Council, said that Shannon Airport was being attacked "by narrow sectional support groups who are putting their own self-interest before that of the nation. We are not anti-Dublin nor, indeed, are we anti-Dublin Airport, which we would like to see continue to prosper beside Shannon."

The Mayor of Limerick, Alderman Jim Kemmy, described the opponents of the compulsory Shannon stopover as "a small influential group concerned only with profits and greed."

Mr Alan Dukes, TD, on behalf of Fine Gael, said that Shannon

was in a better position to handle any development in trans-Atlantic traffic. What was needed was a renegotiation of the bilateral agreement between Ireland and the US to give us greater openings there.

Mr Pat Cox, the PD MEP, for Munster, demonstrated a clear message to the Cabinet that "woe betide anyone who would attempt to change the status of Shannon." The PDs, he said, would fight any such proposal in Cabinet.

Although the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Mr O'Malley, did not attend the rally, saying it would be inappropriate for him as a member of the Cabinet to do so, he issued a statement in favour of the present status.

Mr O'Malley said it should be noted that while Aer Lingus seeks to use Shannon "as a whipping boy for their commercial failure, the only route on which they have made money in recent years is on the trans-atlantic."

The Labour Party leader, Mr Dick Spring, in a statement issued in connection with the rally, warned the Government not to examine the Shannon stop-over issue simply as a matter of competing commercial interests.

"It is first and foremost an issue of regional policy. And while it may be easier and more self-serving to make a case against Shannon Airport on purely commercial grounds, no case whatever can be made against Shannon on regional policy grounds," he said.