

# Towards A University For Limerick 1934 - 1972

BY PAT KEARNEY



*Bishop Patrick O'Neill '... the only member of the committee with wide experience of academic life'.*

In the years following the establishment of the National University in 1908, there were great political developments not alone in Ireland but throughout Europe. Britain became engaged in a world war, and considerable financial problems faced the new Irish Free State when it was set up. Thus, there was little money available for any new developments in the educational field. T.G. McElligott has written:

*What a Government with the resources of Great Britain could have done in peacetime to develop the growing universities was too much for the same Government in war (1914-'18) and altogether too much for the new Irish Free State, shaken by Civil War and faced with the formidable task of repair and reconstruction. In fact, the increases given were sufficient only to ensure survival not to permit expansion.<sup>(1)</sup>*

However, in spite of the political and financial situation, there was, in 1934, a renewed interest in Limerick in the need to establish a constituent college of the National University in the city. Surprisingly enough, the impetus came from outside the City and County of Limerick. It came in the form of a resolution passed by the Newmarket-on-Fergus (County Clare) Fianna Fáil cumann:

*That we, the members of the Newmarket-on-Fergus (Sean Ryan) Fianna Fáil Cumann, desire to point out the necessity for the foundation in Limerick City of a constituent college of the National University of Ireland. Such a college would be of cultural and material advantage to the people of Limerick and of the neighbouring counties. The centre is an ideal one and can support easily a university college.<sup>(2)</sup>*

The cumann forwarded the resolution to all public bodies in Limerick and to the Limerick City Vocational Education Committee. In its communications with the Limerick County Council it stated:

'We call upon people of every shade of religious and political opinion to unite in support of this proposal, and we respectfully urge your council to take action with a view to having a college established in the City of Limerick.<sup>(3)</sup> The resolution, which was proposed by Councillor S. Hogan and seconded by Councillor P. McCarthy, was unanimously adopted at the December meeting of the Limerick County Council,<sup>(4)</sup> and also by the Limerick City Vocational Educational Committee (V.E.C.). Its adoption was proposed by Michael Hartney and seconded by J. Sheehan.<sup>(5)</sup> In January, 1935, it was the turn of the Limerick City Council to unanimously adopt the resolution. At this meeting, Cllr. P. Quinlan said that a university college was a long-felt want in Limerick. He stressed the point that if a college were to be established, it would afford an opportunity to the children of the 'working class' to participate in university education.<sup>(6)</sup>

It was only natural to expect that the teaching organisations should support the demand for a constituent college. Thus, at the annual general meeting of the Limerick branch of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (I.N.T.O.), held on 19 January, 1935, Michael Coleman proposed the following resolution:

*That we, Limerick Branch, Irish National Teachers' Organisation, call for the immediate foundation in Limerick City of a constituent college of the National University of Ireland, realising, as we do, the immense cultural and material advantages the establishing of such a college would confer on the people of Limerick and surrounding counties, and we urge upon all citizens the necessity of supporting this demand.<sup>(7)</sup>*

The resolution was carried unanimously, and copies were sent to the Catholic Bishop of Limerick and the Minister for Education.

At the January, 1935, meeting of the Limerick Branch of the Association of Secondary Teachers, the following resolution was adopted:

*That we heartily welcome the recent suggestions for the establishment of a constituent college of the National University of Ireland in Limerick, and that we request the various public bodies in Limerick City and County to give all possible support towards the realisation of this project.<sup>(8)</sup>*

At its March meeting, the Vocational Education Committee again discussed the question. However, this time there was evidence of diverging views on the subject. Some members favoured a college of technology for Limerick rather than a university college. Amongst those who favoured the college of technology were the chief executive officer, P.V. Twomey, and M. White, while Michael Hartney was again prominent in his



*Alderman Dan Bourke T.D., Mayor of Limerick, 1936-'41.*

support of a university college.<sup>(9)</sup>

The local newspapers for the year 1935 show that several other bodies in the city and county passed resolutions in favour of the establishment in Limerick of a constituent college of the National University. There was no further action taken in the matter at this stage. The movement ceased as abruptly as it had started. Indeed, it was to be nine years before an active interest was taken again in the subject.

In 1944, the Limerick Chamber of Commerce decided to investigate the problem. At its monthly general meeting, held on 12 September, a sub-committee was appointed. Its function was to investigate the question of having a Constituent College of the National University established in Limerick'. The members of the sub-committee were: James

O'Keeffe (president, Limerick Chamber of Commerce), Patrick O'Malley (vice-president), Martin W. Maguire, T.A. Williams, and Louis De Courcy.<sup>(10)</sup>

There was a prompt reaction from the Limerick branch of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation. At its quarterly meeting, held on 21 October, a resolution in favour of a constituent college for the city was carried unanimously. It was again proposed by Michael Coleman and seconded by Sean F. Walsh.<sup>(11)</sup> A copy of the resolution was forwarded to the Minister for Education and to the Chamber of Commerce.

The sub-committee's report was submitted to all members of the Chamber of Commerce at their monthly meeting in March, 1945.<sup>(12)</sup> The report itself was quite extensive, amounting to some 2,000 words. Besides the members

own personal contributions, the committee sought opinions from various sources and persons. The report stated:

*Through the local Press, an invitation to the public to express opinions brought forward several interesting letters. Amongst those whose views were obtained were several university graduates in Arts, Commerce, Medicine, Engineering and Law, as well as the heads of a number of primary and secondary schools and others of the teaching profession who hold diplomas in education.*

*The views expressed from these sources were very varied. The 'man in the street' especially the 'paterfamilias' seems to be predominantly in favour of the establishment of a university college in Limerick.*

*Opinion amongst those who have special knowledge of educational matters, including university graduates, as well as, the heads of large business firms, is divided.*

The report then summarised the main arguments for and against the establishment of a university college. The arguments in favour were as follows: it would provide opportunities of higher education for large numbers who were debarred for financial reasons; it would provide employment and revenue; it would ensure a continuation of parental control and home influence of intending students; finally, it would be of benefit to the country generally, as the standard of education and culture of the state would be thereby raised to a higher level.

The report summarised the main arguments against a college as follows: the problem of finance; the difficulty of attracting first-class lecturers; the paucity of students, or the possible overcrowding of the professions.

The report went on to answer the arguments against a college. With regard to finance, it stated that 'the additional taxation necessary will be more than counterbalanced by the revenue and increased business which Limerick will enjoy'. It pointed out that Limerick City and its contiguous area 'has a population estimated at 150,000 and consequently that there would be no lack of students'. The report took a philosophical line when answering the question concerning the overcrowding of the professions. It stated that 'higher education is never lost ... and if generally available, must make us a more cultural people'.

The report continued and stated that if a constituent college were to be established, it should have a bias towards agricultural science and electrical engineering. The committee members were in no doubt as to the overwhelming desire of the majority of citizens for a constituent college. They reported:

*Being fully convinced, however, that a very strong desire for the establishment of a University College in Limerick exists*



*Mayor James Reidy, 1944.*

*amongst a large majority of the citizens, they recommend to the Chamber that this Report be forwarded to the Minister of Education, and to the Senate of the National University, requesting that these, in view of the date, knowledge and experience which they possess, or are in the position to obtain, and which the Chamber lacks, should examine the whole position very fully, and give particular attention to the fact that Limerick citizens in general feel aggrieved that their children are denied a University education.<sup>(14)</sup>*

The report was a balanced statement of the position. It did not set out to be totally for or against a constituent college. Clearly, it recognised the depressed economic state of the country at that time. Ireland's economic difficulties were only part of a more general European pattern. Progress had to be made in other areas besides education, and a beginning was made with house-building programmes and rural electrification by the end of 1945.<sup>(15)</sup> The report emphasised, once again, the need and the general desire of the people of Limerick for a constituent college of the National University. It was circulated to all local bodies, including the Limerick Corporation, and it was the Corporation which was to carry on the campaign.

The Limerick city manager forwarded copies of the report to the members of the City Council. It was considered at a meeting of the General Purposes

Committee, on 26 April, 1945.<sup>(16)</sup> This committee felt that a stage had now been reached when the various bodies interested in the project should be afforded an opportunity of coming together for a full and frank exchange of views. For that purpose, the meeting asked the mayor, Alderman James Reidy, T.D., to call a public meeting. The mayor summoned the meeting for 18 May, 1945, at the Town Hall and invited all organisations who were interested to appoint representatives to attend.<sup>(17)</sup> It is of interest to note that the meeting was held exactly a hundred years after the Colleges, Ireland, Bill, which established the Queen's Colleges, was passing through the House of Commons. The Corporation held that, with a native government, the prospects of success for Limerick must surely be greater.

The meeting was very well attended, and all the major bodies, business, trade union and educational, were represented. The mayor submitted the following two items to the meeting for debate:

1. *To discuss the proposal to have a constituent college of the National University of Ireland set up in Limerick, and to decide whether such a proposal is feasible.*
2. *If the meeting favours the proposal, to decide on the steps to be taken to bring it to the notice of the Minister of Education and the Senate of the National University of Ireland.<sup>(18)</sup>*

One of the first speakers was James O'Keefe, president of the Chamber of Commerce. He gave the background to their report, and stated that the Chamber of Commerce was unanimously in favour of a university college for the city. Both the primary and vocational representatives present said that their respective organisations fully supported the project. The trade union representatives spoke very strongly in favour also and indicated that they had received a strong mandate from their unions. Michael J. Keyes, T.D., felt that 'there was no reason why Limerick could not have as comprehensive a university college as either Cork or Galway.'<sup>(19)</sup> All the representatives of the Catholic Church bodies in the city spoke in support, as did Very Rev. Canon O'Neill, P.P., St. Munchin's (who was soon to be the new Bishop of Limerick). A few speakers felt that the prospect of a university college was rather remote. P.V. Twomey, chief executive officer, Limerick City V.E.C., stated that it might be more realistic to seek a school of higher technology. However, G.E. (Ted) Russell, Limerick Employers' Federation, (later mayor, Dáil deputy and senator), accurately assessed the feeling of the meeting when he said that there was practically a unanimous demand for a university college in Limerick.

A committee was proposed for the purpose of taking steps to give effect to the decision of the meeting. Very Rev. Dr.

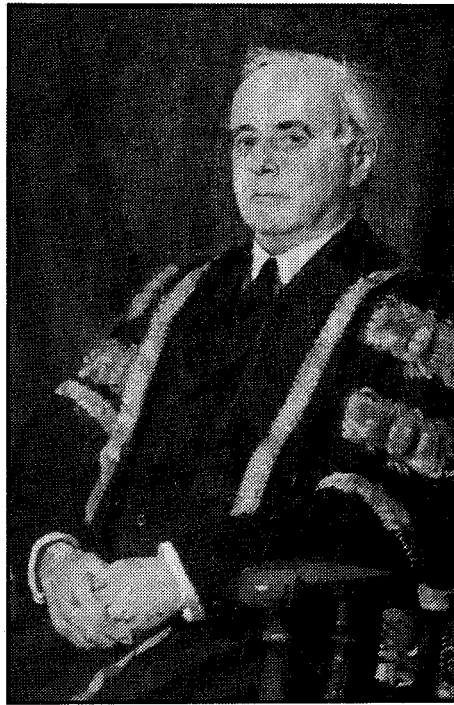
Clare and Tipperary. He further reported the committee's decision regarding the most suitable faculties for any such college as being arts, commerce, engineering, agriculture and medicine.<sup>(31)</sup>

The report was considered in detail and it was decided that the mayor, senators and Dáil deputies from Limerick City and County and three members of the university committee should seek an interview with the Taoiseach and Minister for Education. The object of the interview was to press the claim of Limerick for a university college and to submit to them the report of the committee. The Dáil deputies were requested to approach the Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, on the subject and to make the necessary arrangements for the reception of the deputation.

Education was not an immediate priority of the government at that time. There were more pressing social and economic problems to be dealt with during the period of 1945-'47. The main concern after the war was to achieve economic recovery as quickly as possible. Indeed, the country continued to experience restriction and shortages for some time after 1945. It is only fair to say that this was not the best time to press the demand for a university college on the government of the day. Fianna Fáil had been in power without interruption since 1932, and it was to the Bruree, County Limerick-reared Eamon de Valera, who was also a Fianna Fáil T.D. for the neighbouring Clare constituency, and his Minister for Education, that the local Dáil members made their representations. They were not encouraged in their endeavours, and the private secretary to the Taoiseach intimated to Ald. Dan Bourke, T.D., that no useful purpose would be served by such a meeting.<sup>(32)</sup> The university committee pressed for an official statement from the Taoiseach on the subject, and received a reply from his private secretary in June, 1946:

*I am directed by the Taoiseach to refer to your letter on the 7th ult, and to state that he feels that, at the moment, nothing would be gained by the reception of the proposed deputation from your Committee. The establishment of further Colleges of the National University would be a matter of major importance affecting the interests of the existing institutions and involving a variety of considerations in connection with higher education. The Taoiseach thinks that your Committee should in the first instance get in touch with the authorities of University College, Cork, whose interests would be most immediately affected. If your Committee can work out a satisfactory scheme with these authorities he feels sure that the Government would be willing to give it the most careful consideration.<sup>(33)</sup>*

This was the only direct contact which the university committee had with the



*Dr. Alfred O'Rahilly.*

government, and it is interesting to observe that it was the Taoiseach and not the Minister for Education who dealt with them. Although de Valera's attitude was thought by many to be unjust and arbitrary, nevertheless, he did make a positive suggestion in recommending the committee to consult with the authorities of University College, Cork. Clearly, the only course now open was to seek 'recognised' status.

A public meeting was held in the Town Hall, on 26 June, where the Taoiseach's letter was discussed, and it was decided to advise the committee's secretary to write to Dr. O'Rahilly, president, University College, Cork, and to seek his approval and assistance towards the reception by his governing body of a deputation from the university committee.<sup>(34)</sup>

Dr. O'Rahilly replied to the committee in July and stated: "The Governing Body cannot meet until next October and I see no purpose in having a deputation meet the Governing Body at its first meeting, until the Governing Body has some further information concerning your proposal."<sup>(35)</sup> He further stated that the findings of the university committee should have been forwarded to the Cork authorities at the same time as they were sent to the Taoiseach and the Minister of Education. He continued:

*I take the liberty of pointing out the two points with which the Governing Body would be primarily concerned:*

- 1. Your letter suggests that your committee is going to discuss the establishing in Limerick of a Constituent College of the National University of Ireland. This is a matter on which I intend to have a serious*

*discussion at a meeting of our own Governing Body. It concerns not only this college but also the Dublin and Galway College and the National University of Ireland. As you are already aware, the Senate of the National University of Ireland, containing representatives of all the Colleges, is unanimously opposed to the erection of any further Constituent College for this would involve an alteration in our charter. You will, therefore, appreciate that the sole matter which you allege for discussion is one against which the University, representing all the Colleges, has given a unanimous decision.*

- 2. There is a further point which, apparently, is beyond the purview of your Committee, namely, the recognition of the National University of Ireland of some University College or Institution in Limerick. This recognition is already operating in the case of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. The Governing Body is intimately connected with this and the National University cannot recognise any such college in Limerick without the approval of our Governing Body.*

*I convey this information merely to show you the importance of clarifying your own minds before proceeding further.<sup>(36)</sup>*

It is clear that at this stage a constituent college of the National University could not be achieved, and that a 'recognised' college would have to gain the approval of the governing body of University College Cork. In the light of O'Rahilly's letter, the entire position was discussed at a committee meeting on 27 September.<sup>(37)</sup> The members were disheartened by the turn which events had taken, and the suggestion of a school of technology, rather than a university college, was again put forward. Very Rev. Canon Michael Moloney, P.P., St. Munchin's, made this suggestion, and he was supported by many others, including Michael Hartney. Indeed, he (Hartney) proposed the following: 'that the committee, having explored every possible avenue to secure a constituent college in Limerick, now felt that the best interests of the citizens would be served by the establishing of a School of Technology'.<sup>(38)</sup> The proposal was seconded by Tadhg O'Ceallaigh, N.T. It was decided to convey this proposition to Dr. O'Rahilly.

It is understandable, under the circumstances, that the committee should have felt and acted as it did. However, it is well to remember that the members did not consult the public at this stage and explain their position, as they certainly should have done, since they were elected as a university committee and for no other purpose. O'Rahilly replied to the most recent development:

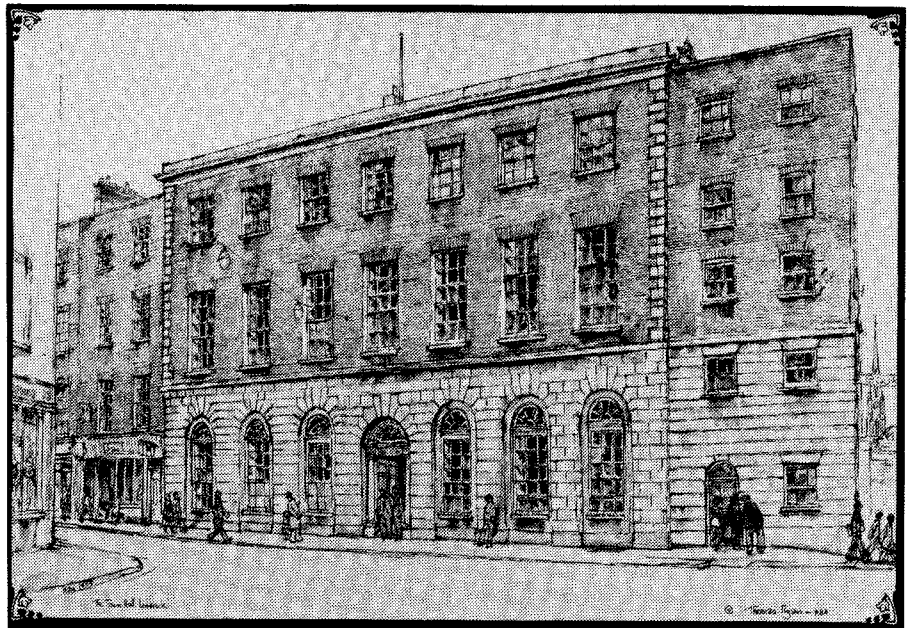
*I am sorry that you have given up the idea about a University Institution in Limerick. I personally am most*

O'Neill was appointed chairman of the committee, Councillor Michael Hartney vice-chairman and James O'Donnell, B. Comm., honorary secretary.<sup>(20)</sup> It was decided to defer constituting the remainder of the committee until such time as the various bodies represented at the meeting had an opportunity of selecting one delegate each. The mayor undertook to receive the nominations from the different bodies represented and to make arrangements for calling the initial meeting of the committee. Public opinion, then, was overwhelmingly in favour of having a constituent college of the National University established in Limerick. The April meeting underlined this fact, since it was thoroughly representative of a wide cross-section of the community, all of whom were in favour of a college. It may be well to note that the few people who expressed doubts about the prospects of getting a college were in no way opposed to the principle of having the benefit of university education extended to Limerick. Their view, which was very much a minority one, was that since Limerick was unlikely to get a constituent college, it ought to look for something that might be easier to obtain (a college of technology). Indeed, the editor of the *Limerick Leader* put the case for university education very well when he said: 'it can do enormous good by spreading true culture and producing a more enlightened democracy.'<sup>(21)</sup>

By the middle of June, the various bodies which had been represented at the April meeting had nominated delegates to represent them on the committee. The names of these nominees were forwarded to the secretary, James O'Donnell, by Mayor James Reidy.<sup>(22)</sup> Further support for the campaign emerged from the annual congress of the Irish Local Government Officials' Union, held in Dublin, on 6 July. A strong case for the establishing of a constituent college was presented to the meeting by the Limerick delegates. The meeting gave its support to the project, and the following motion was unanimously adopted:

*That the Central Council approach the Minister of Education with a view to having a constituent college of the National University of Ireland established in Limerick City, where the demand for such a college is deeply felt.*<sup>(23)</sup>

Besides the action taken by local bodies, another feature of the campaign was the interest taken by individual citizens. One of these was Dr. James McPolin, medical superintendent of health for Limerick. He wrote a long article on the subject and effectively answered many of the 'stock arguments' which had been used against the provision of a constituent college.<sup>(24)</sup> He also wrote at least three other articles in the *Limerick Leader* advocating a university college, during the period August, 1945, to May, 1947. These articles



*A watercolour of the City Hall by Thomas Ryan.*

dealt with the subject, although not always with complete objectivity, from both a philosophical and practical point of view.

The committee appointed at the April meeting (henceforth called the university committee), met on 24 October, 1945, in the Town Hall. Very Rev. Canon P. O'Neill, D.D. presided.<sup>(25)</sup> The secretary was directed by the meeting to try to obtain information on student numbers, with particular reference to the number of matriculated students in the city and county.

However, within a month of this first committee meeting, the registrar of the National University wrote to the Limerick Chamber of Commerce. He stated that its report on the question of the establishing of a constituent college of the university had been fully considered by the university's Senate. He was directed to state that the Senate was opposed to any measures which would involve any change in the charter of the university or of the colleges. The registrar further stated that the Senate had requested Dr. Alfred O'Rahilly, president, University College, Cork, to give information and advice on the matter to the Limerick committee.<sup>(26)</sup> A copy of this letter was forwarded to the university committee, and it was considered at its meeting on 7 December. In view of the attitude of the Senate, the possibility of 'the establishment of an independent university' was then considered by the university committee.<sup>(27)</sup> During the following three months, the committee met on a number of occasions, and gathered together data, statistics and general information on the project.

On 21 December, the Apostolic Nunciature announced the appointment by Pope Pius XII of Rev. Dr. O'Neill to the vacant See of Limerick. The news was well received, and it was generally felt

that the honour was merited. The bishop-elect had a brilliant career. He was a leading moral theologian and canonist, being both a doctor of divinity and a doctor of canon law. He had been professor of moral theology and canon law at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, and vice-president of the college. He was appointed parish priest of Bruff, County Limerick, in 1941, and held the same post in St. Munchin's parish in Limerick City up to the time of his appointment as bishop.<sup>(28)</sup>

Dr. O'Neill's appointment heralded the end of his formal association with the university committee. However, he gave advice and assistance in a private capacity to the committee,<sup>(29)</sup> and discussed the question fully with Dr. O'Rahilly when he visited Limerick. There was a certain loss of momentum in the campaign with the departure of Dr. O'Neill, since he was the only member of the committee with wide experience of academic life.

By March, 1946, most of the relevant information and statistics had been collected. Clearly, the committee had worked very energetically towards this end, and tribute must undoubtedly be paid to James O'Donnell, the secretary. The committee decided to hold a public meeting, on 14 March in the Town Hall to outline its findings.<sup>(30)</sup> The vice-chairman of the committee, Michael Hartney, who was now mayor, presided at the meeting. In the course of his address, he said that in view of the attitude of the Senate of the National University, he thought that the time had come to make direct representation to the government. James O'Donnell then spoke at some length and gave a summary of the general information collected. He presented relevant details of salaries, student numbers and the projected costs involved in a college. The survey of students included parts of

The following schools were represented: Salesian Convent School, Mount St. Vincents Schools, St. Mary's Convent Schools, Villiers School, Mungret College, Copewood College, Pallaskenry, Redemptorist College, Glenstal Abbey School, Murroe, Sacred Heart College, St. Munchin's College, Christian Brothers' Schools, Laurel Hill Convent Schools and Presentation Convent Schools. The City of Limerick Vocational Education Committee was represented at subsequent meetings.

Arising from the discussions which took place at the meeting, it was decided that the following steps should be taken:

1. The Mayor was requested to meet the President of University College, Cork, for an informal discussion on the whole subject.
2. Depending on the result of the Mayor's discussion with the President of University College, Cork, a deputation from those present (and referred to as the Committee) would wait on the Governing Body of that University College and further discuss the matter.
3. The Mayor was requested, when a favourable opportunity should present itself, to discuss the matter with the Minister for Education.

Between the months of June and November, Ald. Russell was most active, and a further meeting was called for 15 November, 1957. The new mayor, Cllr. Christopher Keyes, took the chair, while T.J. (Joe) McHugh, town clerk, acted as secretary. There was a full attendance of representatives of the secondary schools, and James O'Donnell,<sup>(51)</sup> chief executive officer, represented the City of Limerick Vocational Education Committee. Ald. Russell reported as follows:

1. He saw Dr. Henry St. John Atkins, President of U.C.C., who expressed interest in the proposals advanced, but pointed out that the Senate of the National University had the final decision. He said that he would endeavour to have the matter on the Agenda for the October meeting of the Senate of the National University of Ireland.
2. He understood from his discussions and correspondence with Dr. Atkins that University College, Cork, would be willing to undertake a Higher Diploma in Education course in Limerick.
3. He called on Monsignor Padraig de Brun, President, University College, Galway, and had a most encouraging discussion with him. Monsignor de Brun approved wholeheartedly of the efforts of the Committee to obtain facilities for university education in Limerick City. He suggested that a Science Course should be included in the curriculum.
4. He met Dr. Michael Tierney, President of University College, Dublin and Professor Hogan,



Michael Keyes T.D.

Registrar of U.C.D. His interview with them was anything but encouraging. Dr. Tierney was strongly opposed to decentralisation, and referred to the financial difficulties of the National University and to the fact that, if Limerick succeeded, other centres would also make similar claims. Professor Hogan referred to the difficulties which would be encountered in recruiting lecturers and in dealing with their remuneration. Alderman Russell said he was convinced that there would be very strong opposition from Dublin to the claims of Limerick.

5. He was received by the Taoiseach, Mr. de Valera, Chancellor of the National University of Ireland. He had prepared a memorandum on the subject and had submitted it to Mr. de Valera before their meeting. The Taoiseach undertook to give the matter careful consideration.<sup>(51)</sup>

Concluding, Ald. Russell said that the committee would have a 'tough fight' ahead, but he felt a good case could be presented and, with backing from the 'right quarters', they would succeed. The committee's principal hope lay in getting the support of the Galway and Cork university colleges, as this would be an important factor in any discussions on the matter with the Senate of the National University.

Clearly, Ald. Russell had worked energetically and had gathered most support from University College, Galway, and at least from its counterpart in Dublin. After further discussion at the meeting, it was decided to form a working committee to draft firm proposals, and to wait on Bishop O'Neill to seek his advice and approval.<sup>(52)</sup> The bishop's successor, Dr. Henry Murphy, also helped and encouraged the committee).

Further meetings of the sub-committee and of the committee were held under the chairmanship of Ald. J.P. Liddy and Ald. John Carew, T.D., during their terms of office as mayor. At these meetings, various means of providing university facilities in Limerick were considered, including the establishment of an independent university, outside the ambit of the National University; the establishment of a recognised college on the lines of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth; the establishment of junior colleges, where students could do their first and second years of their courses, similar to Magee College, Derry, which had such an arrangement with Trinity College, Dublin, an arrangement which would permit students to do the first year courses in arts, science and commerce in approved secondary schools. Finally, they considered the establishment in Limerick of a constituent college of the National University of Ireland.<sup>(53)</sup>

The committee presented a report to the Limerick City Council on 12 November, 1959.<sup>(54)</sup> It was a comprehensive statement of the case for university facilities, and it also assessed the position in the light of *The University Commission Report 1959*. This commission had been appointed by the government to enquire into the accommodation needs of the constituent colleges of the National University. It found that there was serious overcrowding, particularly in University College, Dublin, and recommended a large-scale programme, which included the transfer of U.C.D. to a site at Belfield, on the outskirts of Dublin, and extensions and improvements to U.C.C. and U.C.G.

The government accepted in principle the commission's recommendations regarding University College, Dublin.<sup>(55)</sup> On the other hand, the committee's report commented:

*The Committee regard it as extraordinary that a recommendation to embark on an expenditure of over £7 million should have been accepted without an examination first being made of the needs of large populous areas in the country for facilities for higher education. At a time when there is concern in the public mind about the unnatural growth of Dublin and the excessive concentration in the Capital of industrial, commercial and cultural development the proposal to erect a new and presumably larger University in Dublin appears to be contrary to sound policy and planning and to the interests of the majority of the people in the country.<sup>(56)</sup>*

The committee's conclusions were:

1. As a result of their investigations, the Committee are satisfied that there is a definite and growing demand in Limerick City and its contiguous area for University education. From the information at their disposal and

*sympathetic to such. All I wanted was an opportunity of advising you not to try the impossible. I am still prepared to go to Limerick – but not just at present, as I am very busy. We could at least discuss the whole question of University education. I would not like you to think that I have taken up a completely negative attitude. Even if you failed in your efforts, it would at least be more satisfactory for the people in Limerick to realise the difficulties involved.*<sup>(39)</sup>

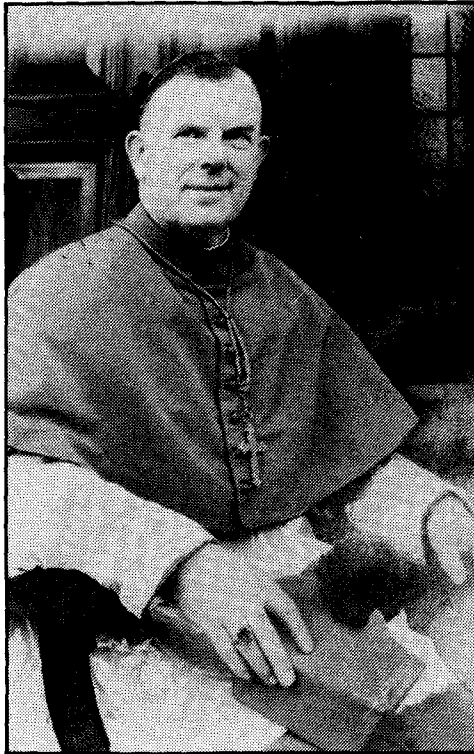
Dr. O'Rahilly's letter was conciliatory, and his personal sympathy for the project evoked a response in Limerick. A public meeting was held in the Town Hall, on 11 October, and was presided over by Mayor J.C. Hickey. The university committee put the most recent developments before the meeting. It was decided to enlarge the committee and to continue with the campaign. One of those co-opted was Dr. James McPolin, a man who was very definitely in favour of a university-type establishment. It was further decided to invite Dr. O'Rahilly to Limerick to address the committee and interested citizens.<sup>(40)</sup>

The campaign entered its final phase when O'Rahilly arrived in the city, on 11 December, to address a meeting at the County Council offices. An official report of the meeting was supplied to the local newspapers:

*In connection with the establishment of a university college in Limerick as a separate entity Dr. O'Rahilly strongly opposed the project as it would involve the amendment of the charter and such procedure would have eventually very serious repercussions on the autonomy of not alone University College Cork, but the other universities in Ireland, and may eventually promote state interference, which would have disastrous consequences as regards the liberties in the existing charter. Not alone would the project be strenuously opposed by the authorities of University College Cork, but the Senate and the other universities would be very determined in their opposition to the proposal, since it would involve the amendment of the charter.*

*After a lengthy discussion, it was decided having regard to Dr. O'Rahilly's observations and in view of the position that it would be absolutely impracticable to proceed with the project of the establishment of a separate university for the City of Limerick.*

*The question of the provision of courses in Arts, Commerce, Science and Engineering to cover a period of two years to meet the requirements of potential undergraduates was considered and Dr. O'Rahilly stated that he was very sympathetic to this procedure and would gladly place his service at the committee's disposal to advise, examine and analyse any proposals to render effective the establishment of facilities to provide courses in the faculties of Art, Commerce, Science, Engineering, to embrace the*



**Bishop Henry Murphy.**

*university curriculum of the first and second years as well as the possibility of the provision of courses for the Diploma in Education, Social Science and Public Administration.*<sup>(41)</sup>

It was clear that Dr. O'Rahilly did not wish to have the charter of the National University tampered with in any way. He enlarged on his reasons for taking up such a position in a series of articles in *Hibernia* at a much later date.<sup>(42)</sup> With regard to the disruption of the charter he said:

*Once our charters are scrapped, our University and our colleges would come directly under the Government (through the Dáil). Personally, I have not the smallest doubt that if we were thus subject to Parliament we should forfeit much of the autonomy we now possess.*<sup>(43)</sup>

Dr. O'Rahilly felt that the Irish Universities Act of 1908 was also of religious significance. He wrote:

*In 1908, after a long struggle, the Catholics of Ireland finally obtained sufficiently safeguarded facilities for higher education. The settlement was not merely political, it had and has an important religious significance. Its stability interests the Hierarchy, the Catholic laity and religious, as well as the Colleges.*<sup>(44)</sup>

In a later article, he stated that 'the appreciation of the importance of guarantees for Catholic higher education has weakened considerably since the days of Newman and of the Royal

University'.<sup>(45)</sup> Finally, O'Rahilly was very concerned about the possible action of the state. He considered that there was a 'thirst for control in Governments and civil servants'.<sup>(46)</sup>

Dr. O'Rahilly mentioned in the articles other problems which could arise if a college were to be established at Limerick: the lack of finance; inadequate student numbers; the absence of qualified staff and the problems of administration. However, he made it patently clear that his main objections hinged on the inviolability of the charter of the National University and what he regarded as the religious atmosphere of the colleges, which might have been altered by state intervention if a new college were to be established in Limerick.

O'Rahilly's stated position served only to strengthen the hand of those who favoured a college of technology for Limerick. Indeed, within a few months, the university committee had indicated that this would be the best course open for Limerick, at that time. Naturally, there were some who were disappointed. Dr. James McPolin wrote:

*This committee was set up by a public meeting of the citizens for the purpose of working for the setting up of a university college in Limerick and I notice from a newspaper report that the committee has decided to abandon the work and seek for a poor substitute. This same committee took it upon itself to write to Dr. O'Rahilly informing him that it was giving up the idea of seeking for a university college. The inertia of the committee combined with the assumption of authority to decide that the people of Limerick should not have a university, is certain to defeat all Limerick hopes of ever obtaining a university. I was only recently co-opted as a member of the committee and in view of the action of the committee I beg to submit my resignation.*<sup>(47)</sup>

McPolin's reaction was understandable. However, in retrospect, taking all the difficulties into consideration – the economic situation, the Senate's view and the stated position of the Taoiseach – it may well be argued that the committee acted with propriety. Although the campaign was unsuccessful, it established a pattern for future similar undertakings, and put before the rest of the country the desire of the people of Limerick to have a university institution established in their city.

Indeed, within ten years, the agitation was renewed for a university college for Limerick. At the direction of the Limerick City Council, in May, 1957,<sup>(48)</sup> the mayor, Ald. G.E. Russell, invited representatives of the secondary schools in and near Limerick City to a meeting to consider ways and means of providing facilities for university education in the city. The meeting took place on Tuesday, 11 June, under the chairmanship of the mayor.<sup>(49)</sup>

detailed in this report, the Committee believe that a very strong case exists for the provision of the necessary facilities. It is their opinion that the only satisfactory solution to the problem would be the establishment of a fourth Constituent College in or near Limerick City.

2. The Committee are unanimous in their opinion that no steps should be taken to implement the report of the University Commission until the claims of Limerick to a Constituent College have first been examined. In the opinion of the Committee the expenditure of a vast sum of money in the construction of a new mammoth University in Dublin offers no solution to the general problem of University education in the State and in particular in the important and populous area of which Limerick City is the centre.
3. In presenting this report to the Limerick City Council, the Committee strongly recommend that appropriate action should be taken without delay in conjunction with all interested parties throughout the area, to bring Limerick's claim for a Constituent College of the National University before An Taoiseach and the Government.<sup>(57)</sup>

The Limerick City Council adopted the report, and at a meeting on 23 November, 1959, the following resolution was passed:

*That the Limerick City Council is aware of the demand for facilities for University education in the Limerick area; is concerned at the lack of such facilities and now calls on the Government to take the necessary steps to have established in Limerick a constituent college of the National University of Ireland. That copies of this resolution be also sent to every public body in Limerick City and County, Co. Clare, Tipperary N.R., and Co. Kerry.<sup>(58)</sup>*

The resolution was proposed by Mayor John Carew, T.D., and seconded by Ald. D.B. O'Malley, T.D., (later Minister for Education, 1966-'67).

A copy of the resolution was forwarded to all public bodies in Limerick, Clare, Tipperary and Kerry, recommending the adoption of the resolution, and requesting that they, in turn, should forward a copy to the government. A copy was also forwarded to the Taoiseach, who brought the matter to the attention of the Minister for Education.<sup>(59)</sup> The following local bodies adopted the resolution (or a similar one): Tipperary (S.R.) County Council (1 Dec., 1959); Tipperary Urban District Council (7 Dec., 1959); Tipperary (N.R.) County Council (15 Dec., 1957); Clare County Council (14 Dec., 1959); Kerry County Council (11 Jan., 1960).<sup>(60)</sup>

All these bodies forwarded copies of their resolutions to the government, and this action must have made it patently



**Mayor Ted Russell, 1954-'57.**

clear that there was a widespread desire, in the counties of the mid-west region of Ireland, for a university college to be established in Limerick.

Further evidence, if such were needed, was forthcoming in the form of a new body which was established in 1959, before the committee (set up at the direction of the Limerick City Council) had concluded its deliberations. This new body was called the Limerick University Project Committee (L.U.P.C.). It was set up 'principally at the instigation of the past pupils' unions of the schools in the Limerick area, to aid the Mayor's Committee (the committee set up at the instigation of the City Council), and to continue its work by explaining and stressing the demands for university education in Limerick'.<sup>(61)</sup>

The University Project Committee earnestly endeavoured to achieve its stated aims, sustaining its campaign for eleven years (1959-'70), and contributed in no small way to subsequent developments in third level education in Limerick.

The officers and committee were elected at a meeting in Limerick on 28 October, 1959 (there had been at least five preliminary meetings). The officers elected were as follows: chairman: John Moloney; vice-chairman: D.P. Hurley; hon. treasurer: Thomas Duffy, F.C.A.; hon. secretary: Margaret M. Lyddy, B.A., H.D.E.<sup>(62)</sup> Thirty-six other members were elected to serve on the committee. It was

representative of the following professions – teaching, law, architecture, engineering and accountancy. Farming, commercial and rural interests were also represented. Sub-committees were formed to engage in specific tasks (statistics, finance, publicity).

One of the first acts of the University Project Committee was the launching of a campaign for funds, which met with great success, indicating a degree of popular support for the campaign. A publicity campaign was also launched, and the local and national press carried articles concerning the activities and demands of the committee. Meetings were held in the city and county (and also in Counties Clare and Tipperary) to gain public support for the committee in its endeavours. The first of these meetings was held in Limerick on 1 December, 1959.<sup>(63)</sup>

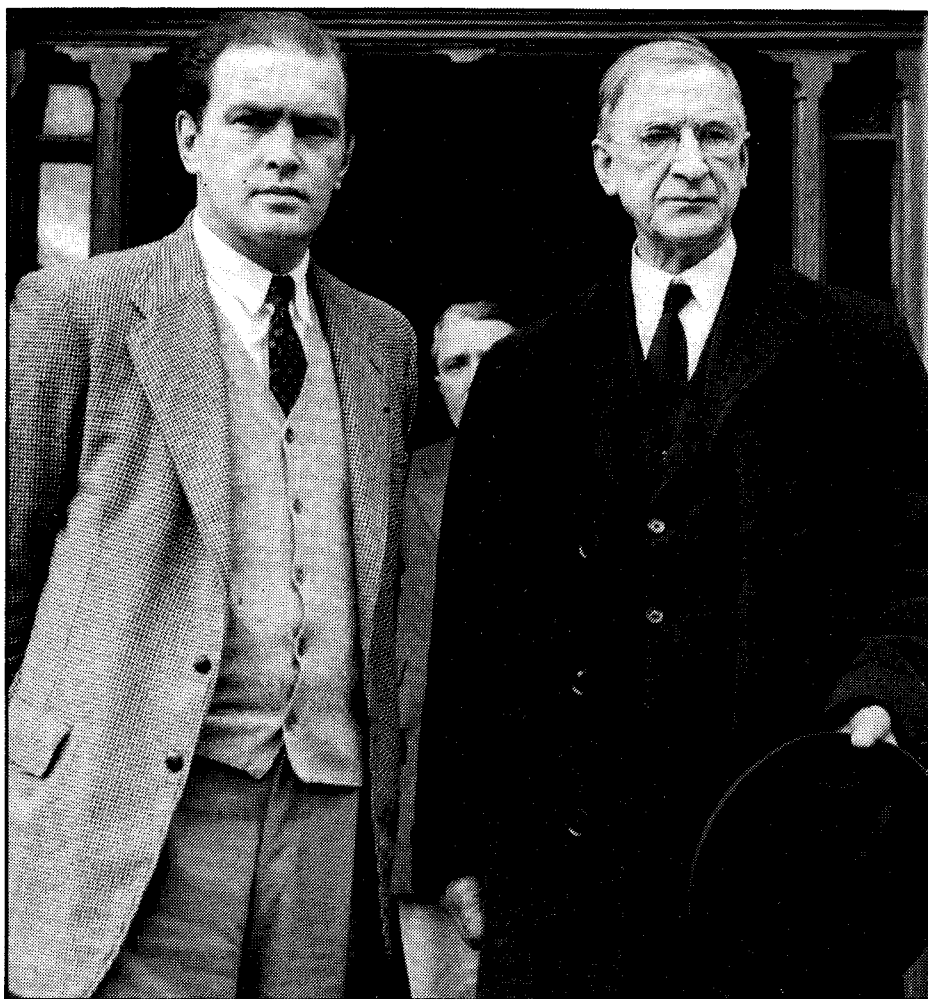
All the members of the Dáil in the region were approached in order to gain their support. It was also decided to inform the Taoiseach of the demands of the committee and a telegram was sent to him. It read:

*The Limerick University Project Committee call upon the Government to arrange for the establishment in Limerick of a constituent college of the National University of Ireland to serve the needs of that important section of the country stretching from Thurles to Tralee which has a population exceeding 300,000 and contains over 11,000 secondary school students. The case for the establishment of University College, Limerick is unanswerable and the movement to have it set up before any sums of money are expended on the extension of University facilities in Dublin is so widespread and so strong that we request that a deputation from this committee be received by the Government before any decision to expend millions on university buildings outside Limerick is arrived at.<sup>(64)</sup>*

The Taoiseach acknowledged the telegram, and stated that he would give the matter his consideration. The committee then sought an interview with the Minister for Education. They met the minister, Dr. Patrick Hillery, at Leinster House on 5 May, 1960. Their secretary later wrote:

*This was the first of many such meetings with successive Ministers – five in all. The Minister informed the delegation that Limerick's case was to be considered by the recently established Commission on Higher Education headed by Chief Justice Cearbhall O'Dalaigh.<sup>(65)</sup>*

A written submission was prepared by the committee, with the help of Dermot Kinlen, barrister and senior counsel, and presented in January, 1961.<sup>(66)</sup> Furthermore, on 27 and 28 October of the same year, an eight-member delegation gave oral evidence before the commission in the Four Courts, Dublin. The witnesses were: J.E. Moloney; D.P. Hurley; T.A.



*Donogh O'Malley and Eamon de Valera.*

Duffy; Margaret M. Lyddy; T.O. Bromell; J.G. Lyons; P.J. McCarthy; S. Prendergast and D. Kinlen (sixteenth day only).<sup>(67)</sup>

The report of the commission, which had been expected by the end of 1961, took eight years to prepare. During the intervening years, the University Project Committee refrained from open action, lest their activities might seem to be lobbying and so damage their case. However, in 1963, the committee urged the Limerick City Council to pass a resolution in order to keep Limerick's claim before the public mind.<sup>(68)</sup>

As a result, the following resolution was passed by the City Council, on 9 December, 1963:

*That the Limerick area needs a University and we, the Limerick City Council, demands that a Constituent College of the National University of Ireland should be established in Limerick without further delay.<sup>(69)</sup>*

The resolution was proposed by Cllr. J.P. Liddy, seconded by Cllr. J. Danagher, and unanimously carried. Copies were forwarded to the secretary of the Commission on Higher Education and to the government, who both duly acknowledged their receipt.

There was obvious frustration in Limerick at the delay in publishing the

commission's report, and a further resolution was passed by the City Council in 1966, which called on the Minister for Education 'to ensure that the report of the Commission on Higher Education is available at the earliest possible date'.<sup>(70)</sup>

Eventually, the report was published in 1967. On 22 March of that year, Donogh O'Malley, Minister for Education, released a summary report, the full text being published in August. A completely new kind of institution was proposed for Limerick, Dublin and other centres. These 'New Colleges', as they were termed, would award pass degrees in three major fields: the humanities, science and commerce.<sup>(71)</sup> The entrance requirements would be somewhat lower than those of the existing universities. The commission found that 'Should the time come for the creation of another university, the development and success of the Limerick New College might be expected to be a determining factor in the establishment of a university at Limerick'.<sup>(72)</sup>

The people of Limerick in general and the University Project Committee in particular were far from satisfied with the recommendations. They informed the Minister, Donogh O'Malley, that a 'New College' in Limerick would be acceptable

only on three conditions. Those were: that honours, as well as pass degrees, would be awarded; that the same entry standards as in the existing universities should prevail, and that the name 'New College' be changed to 'University College'.<sup>(73)</sup>

However, in March, 1967, Donogh O'Malley died and Brian Lenihan became the new Minister for Education. The University Project Committee informed him of their objections. In July, the government decided to set up a new body to deal with higher education in general, and Limerick's claim in particular. This new body was titled the Higher Education Authority, and it was announced in August, 1968. On 12 December of that year, the Government Information Bureau issued the following statement of behalf of the Minister for Education:

1. *The Government have decided to allocate the capital funds necessary to establish a third level educational institution in Limerick. The Higher Education Authority has been asked to recommend how such an institution might be fitted into the existing or future provision for higher education.*
2. *Negotiations for the purchase of a site of about 80 acres for this institution are in progress.*
3. *The Government have referred to the Authority the question of establishing a body which would award national qualifications at technician and technological level.*
4. *The Government have also requested the Authority to make recommendations in relation to teacher training in the context of the future provision for higher education.*

By this time, the Limerick, Clare and Tipperary (N.R.) Regional Development Organisation had begun to take an active interest in the question of the provision of facilities for higher education in the area under its jurisdiction. It appointed a sub-committee to investigate the problem in April, 1968.<sup>(74)</sup> Its members drew attention to the fact that Dr. Nathaniel Lichfield, in his Advisory Outline Plan<sup>(75)</sup> for the region (which was commissioned by Neil Blaney, Minister for Local Government), had stated that 'the new Limerick Region as we conceive it will not be complete in character, or function adequately as an economic or social unit, unless it has among its central functions a University College'.<sup>(76)</sup>

The assistance of Dr. Lichfield was again enlisted, and he was asked, in the following terms, to undertake to advise the R.D.O.:

*Would you elaborate fully your views on the needs of the region for facilities for University, Technological and Technical Education especially in the light of the New College concept, as put forward by the Commission?<sup>(77)</sup>*



*'On 27 and 28 October, 1961, an eight-member delegation gave oral evidence before the Commission on Higher Education in the Four Courts, Dublin'.*

Dr. Lichfield, in his reply, stated that he was willing to undertake the task. He and his associates were asked to complete a report as quickly as possible. By March, 1969, the Regional Development Organisation had received this report.<sup>(78)</sup> It was a comprehensive survey, and reached the following conclusions:

- a. *That full provision for higher education is needed in the Limerick Region if localised growth in the economy is to be maintained, accelerated and spread more widely.*
- b. *That we cannot recommend the Regional Development Organisation to accept an educational institution of the type defined by the Commission on Higher Education and called a 'new college'.*
- c. *That the needs of the Region can only be adequately met by either a university college and a college of technology, situated on one 'campus' and working together as a unit or better still, by a university with a technological bias.*
- d. *That such a new type university should have a high staff/student ratio and should be equipped to do work at*

*both pass or general degree levels, at honours degree level and also post graduate work with full facilities for research.*

- e. *That the new University of Limerick should be sited on the outskirts of Limerick City, preferably to the north.*<sup>(79)</sup>

The report was forwarded to the government, to all public representatives in the region, to all public bodies in the region, to the university colleges, to all the educational organisations, to all rural organisations and to regional branches of all the professional organisations.

On 20 March, 1969, the Higher Education Authority issued its recommendations on (a) provision of third-level educational facilities at Limerick and (b) on the question of establishing a body which would award national qualifications at technician and technological levels. With regard to the latter, it recommended 'that a Council for National Awards be established'.<sup>(80)</sup> In dealing with Limerick, it endorsed the conclusion reached by the Commission on Higher Education that 'there is no national need at present for another university college'. It further stated that

'the most urgent national need is for the existing university colleges to be adequately financed'.<sup>(81)</sup> However, the members of the authority felt that Limerick had a special claim for a centre of higher education and they recommended a 'College of Higher Education'. They listed eight principles which should govern the establishment and evolution of the college:

- a. *It should be a national institution, meeting the needs of the country as a whole and attracting students from a wide area.*
- b. *It should cater for the specific needs of the region.*
- c. *It should be under an independent governing body, but the legislative proposals for its establishment, as well as its financing, should come within the ambit of the Higher Education Authority.*
- d. *Its constitution should be sufficiently flexible to cope readily with future national and regional demands.*
- e. *It should offer Certificate, Diploma and Degree courses, of a standard to satisfy the Council of National Awards, with the Council as the award-giving body.*



*'On 22 November, 1969, the Minister for Education wished to announce the appointment of Dr. Edward Walsh as Director of the proposed Institute of Higher Education in Limerick'.*

- f. Initially, Certificate or Diploma courses including the sandwich type, would form the major part of the College's work. These, while helping to meet regional and national needs at their own level, would give valuable experience in planning the development of degree courses.
- g. Entry standards to degree courses should be the same as those required for entry to such courses in the existing Universities. For entry to all other courses a Pass Leaving Certificate or its equivalent should be required.
- h. The work of the College should be based primarily on a Technological content, but with a significant element of the humanities.<sup>(82)</sup>

The authority further recommended the setting up by the minister of a planning board; the appointment of a director and some senior staff (the director to be chairman of the planning board) and the drawing up of a draft constitution for submission to the Higher Education Authority.<sup>(83)</sup>

The University Project Committee received these recommendations with mixed reactions, and consulted with the Minister for Education on the details of

the report on 11 April, 1969.<sup>(84)</sup> After a full discussion, the members gave the recommendations a rather guarded reception. On the 16 May, they issued a statement, part of which read as follows:

*While the Minister's proposals for an institution of Third Level education in Limerick cannot be regarded as a university, they nevertheless indicate a worthwhile acquisition for the Limerick Region, and it is possible that given the support which the Minister has promised this Committee, the proposed institution could achieve the status and standards of a modern progressive university.<sup>(85)</sup>*

On 21 April, the Minister for Education, Brian Lenihan, T.D., attended a meeting of the board of the Regional Development Organisation. In the course of a statement and in the ensuing discussion, the minister gave his views on the form and function of the proposed third level institute of education in Limerick. Afterwards, the members of the board expressed their satisfaction, and the minutes of the meeting stated:

*The Board gave its support to the proposals as outlined by the Minister, and was of the opinion that these*

*proposals should have the support of its constituent members.<sup>(86)</sup>*

Following the recommendations of the Higher Education Authority that a director be appointed, the Government Information Bureau issued a statement on behalf of the Minister for Education on 22 November, 1969. The relevant portion read:

*The Minister for Education wished to announce the appointment of Dr. Edward M. Walsh as Director of the proposed Institute of Higher Education in Limerick.*

In January, 1970, the members of a committee of the Regional Development Organisation examined sites close to Limerick for their suitability for the proposed third level institute. They completed a report, and concluded thus:

*In the Committee's view four sites merit serious consideration - Plassey, Raheen, Redgate, Clonmacken. The committee regards the Plassey site as the most suitable location for the Third Level Institution.<sup>(87)</sup>*

In February, 1970, the Plassey estate,

situated on the south bank of the Shannon, about two and a half miles to the east of the centre of Limerick City, was decided upon as the site for the National Institute for Higher Education. The institute was officially opened in September, 1972. Dr. Walsh, the director, referred to its role in the following way:

*More than 1,000 years after its foundation this city had been selected as the national centre in which a new breed of technologists will be educated and trained. The objective: to provide our nation with men and women who can contribute to the re-establishment of our cultural, commercial and political role within a new Europe.*

*While the N.I.H.E. is European in outlook and national in concept, its establishment at Limerick meets a very real regional need for higher education; a need that has been sorely felt – and frequently expressed – by the people of the Limerick region, since the 1908 Irish Universities Act established University Colleges in Dublin, Cork and Galway. The Mid-West Region has now been provided with a centre of higher education designed to meet both regional and national needs in the Ireland of the future.<sup>(88)</sup>*

The Institute was not a university nor indeed a university college. However, it gained acceptance in Limerick and Margaret Lyddy, secretary of the University Project Committee, expressed the general view when she said: 'I identify the Institute, as we are preparing it, to be on a par with our existing universities'.<sup>(89)</sup> In this manner, Limerick's long campaign for a university-type institution was successfully concluded.

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