

How A University College in Limerick Could Serve This City And County And A Further Wide Area Of Munster

WE are pleased to publish below a very interesting and informative article which throws new light on the question of Limerick's claim to a university. The article has been written specially for the "Limerick Leader" by Mr. Tom O'Donnell, B.A., Dromin, who is a well-known member of Muinir na Tire, and is prominently identified with the adult education movement.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the campaign to secure a university for Limerick is the wholehearted support which has been forthcoming from various public bodies and organisations. This proves quite clearly that there is in Limerick and surrounding areas a strong demand for university education and, further, it furnishes an unanswerable case for the establishment of a Constituent College of N.U.I. As there are no unsurmountable obstacles in the way, it is only reasonable to expect that the justice of Limerick's claim will receive official recognition, and that the necessary facilities will be provided without undue delay.

Every effort must be made to secure the co-operation and support of every section of the community. Despite the progress which has been made up to the present, there still remains a large section of our people who feel that the University question is a matter which does not concern them. This section is composed mainly of the ordinary farmer and many of whose present income is not sufficient to enable them to send their children to a secondary school let alone a university. These people, while they are not actively opposed to the University project, cannot, nevertheless, be blamed if they look upon it as something from which they can derive no benefit.

The successful outcome of the campaign will depend on the active support and wholehearted co-operation of the entire community of Limerick and its surrounding areas. To secure this support it is vitally essential that the true meaning and purpose of a university be fully understood. Unfortunately, most people tend to regard a university as an institution which provides courses leading to degrees and diplomas, and which can be attended only by those students who have completed a full secondary school course and whose parents can provide the necessary finance.

If this popular concept is accepted as indicating the true meaning and purpose of a university, then a large section of our community will gain nothing from the establishment of a university in Limerick. Fortunately, the true concept is much wider than this and brings within its scope every section of the community irrespective of occupation, income or educational standard. To make this true concept known and understood and thereby secure for the Limerick campaign the support of the entire community is the motive which has prompted the writing of this article.

THE FUNCTIONS OF A UNIVERSITY.
The functions of a University can be divided into two main categories. Firstly, it provides within its walls, courses of lectures, etc., leading to degrees and diplomas. These courses normally entail full-time attendance during the day, except for certain courses which may be pursued by part-time attendance at night. Secondly, a University provides courses, both within its walls and outside centres, for people who cannot attend the normal courses. These courses are generally referred to as adult education.

The primary or internal functions of a University have already been adequately dealt with in the course of the present campaign and do not, therefore, require any further elaboration. On the other hand, practical attention has been paid to the external functions. It is with this aspect of University education, therefore, that this article is concerned.

Nearly all most people are familiar with the idea of adult education, but very few seem to realise the extent to which universities throughout the world are participating in this field. Unfortunately, the contribution of our Irish Universities to this important branch of education has been very limited in its extent. A notable exception, however, is University College, Cork, which has been doing excellent work over the past thirteen years.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, CORK.
It was in 1948 that Dr. Alfred O'Reilly, the then President, opened the doors of the College to the workers of Cork. The workers became students of the College while they still remained at their jobs as bus conductors, fitters, labourers, shop assistants and "Trade Union officials." Every Wednesday afternoon they attended lectures on economics and sociology in the college. After the lectures they had tea with their lecturers. In the college restaurant, on two other evenings of the week they attended lectures in accountancy, modern social organisation, modern practice in public speaking. After two years 25 passed their final examination and were awarded the Diploma in Social and Economic Sciences. No sooner had this course concluded than fifty other workers applied for admission and a second course was commenced in 1950. At the same time the College received requests for courses from workers in Limerick and Waterford. The Technical Institutes in these cities, the college and the first classes received their diplomas in 1950.

At this stage the smaller provincial towns began to look for courses and to satisfy this new demand a special course leading to a Diploma in Social Studies was designed. The first of these courses opened in Fermoy in 1950, and since then similar courses have been held in several other centres throughout Munster.

THE RURA AREAS.
Encouraged by the success of the courses in the urban areas, the college now began to turn its attention to the rural areas. To cater for the needs of young farmers a few courses leading to a Diploma in Rural and Social Science were designed. These courses extend over two years. Lectures are given on two evenings each week from October to April. The subjects include Rural Science, Geology, Economics and Farm Engineering. The course has proved very popular and over the past nine years several hundred young farmers throughout Munster, including a large number in Co. Limerick, have been awarded their diplomas. The work of University College, Cork, in the field of adult education gives a good indication of the service which a University can render to the community. Unfortunately the work has been hitherto hampered by lack of financial resources. The entire scheme operates on a Government grant, which at one time was £3,000 per annum, but was reduced a few years ago to £1,500. Efforts to have this grant increased have been repeatedly turned down, and as a result the College authorities have been forced to curtail their activities. It is, indeed, difficult to understand an educational policy which can provide £7 million for the building of a new University in Dublin, but cannot restore the original grant of £3,000 to the Adult Education Department of U.C.C.

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IN GREAT BRITAIN
In Britain the position is very different. Here, the main burden for providing liberal adult education has been assumed by the Universities in partnership with the Workers' Educational Association. At the present time 21 Universities are actively engaged in the work and provide a total of over 4,000 courses each year. This union of scholars and ordinary workers for the purpose of Adult Education is a truly essential element in the development in the history of education. It originated way back in 1871 when the Mechanics' Institute appealed for support to Cambridge University. The reason for the appeal was clearly stated: "As the great bulk of the youth of the nation cannot go out to them, the Universities should be getting out to them, whom they have trained and equipped for the service of the nation. In this way the Universities would hold a position and have an influence in every part of the country, and the great mass of people would be led to value them as national institutions directly benefiting them with the high advantage of knowledge and culture."

As a result of this appeal the first of the University Extension Congresses was launched in Nottingham in 1874. The movement progressed rather slowly until 1903 when the Workers' Educational Association was founded. The primary object of this Association was the extension of university teaching through an alliance between the universities and the working class movements. During the past half century the W.E.A. has created for itself a permanent place in the educational life of the nation. Starting in 1908 with a branch of 23, it has grown to its present strength of 1,000 branches with a total membership of over 100,000 workers.

THE COURSES.
The main function of the W.E.A. is to stimulate a demand for adult education among the workers. The function of the universities is to design courses and provide the teachers. The courses range from short six lecture courses to three year tutorial courses leading to a University Diploma. The wide range of subjects, including history, economics, sociology, politics, science and literature.

In addition, several Universities provide special courses of a more intensive character than those normally arranged through the W.E.A. The London School of Economics has for a number of years offered a full-time day course in trade union studies, while the Universities of Nottingham and Sheffield provide a day release course for workers in the mining industry.

The achievements of the Adult Education Movement in Britain have been summed up by Robert Eades, former head of the Extra-Mural Department of Nottingham University, and one of the world's greatest authorities on adult education. In his recently published book, "Adult Education—A Comprehensive Survey," he states: "In the first place the growth of the adult education movement demonstrated not only the demand, but also the capacity of ordinary working people for intellectual activity of a high order, and for ends which had to do not with improved material prospects, but with the desire to enlarge their interests and understanding and to serve better the communities to which they belonged. There is no doubt that these students who had passed through the discipline of the tutorial class formed the nucleus of a new democratic leadership. The later history of the working class movement and the contribution made by working class representatives to local, national, political, bear tribute to the influence of adult education."

THE UNITED STATES.
Whereas in Britain the term "Adult Education" is normally applied only to non-vocational studies for adults, in America, on the other hand, "adult education" simply means the education of adults through part-time studies of any kind—technical, professional and liberal. The contribution of the American Universities to this field of education is outstanding. The National University Extension Association, which was founded in 1892, has a membership of 70 Universities.

Extension services provided by the Universities include not only continuous classes, but also courses, conferences, lectures, films, libraries, radio and television shows. In 1952 it was estimated that out of a total adult population of 100,000,000, fifty million people utilized one or more of the extension services provided by the Universities and colleges.

While the extension service has made a notable contribution to adult education in the urban areas of the U.S., its greatest achievements have been in the rural areas. The Cooperative Agricultural and Home Economics Extension Service, which was set up in 1910 by the United States Act, is the agency responsible for organising the service in the rural areas. This service is a joint undertaking of the Federal, State and Local Governments based on the Land-Grant Colleges and the Universities. Its purpose is to aid in disseminating

among the people of the U.S. useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics. The services provided include demonstrations in the field and in the home, courses of training for voluntary leaders, preparation and distribution of bulletins, etc. The professional staff employed numbers about 2,500, which includes 5,000 County Agents and more than 2,500 Home Demonstration Agents.

NOTABLE RECORD.
Since its foundation the service has to its credit a notable record of achievements. In the annual report of the Extension Service for over 4 1/2 million families had been influenced by the extension service to change one or more agricultural practices, and more than 3 million families had been similarly influenced to change home practices.

Outside of Britain and the U.S. there are numerous examples throughout the world of the way in which the influence of a University can be felt in a community. The most outstanding example of all, and one which contains lessons of the greatest importance, was the first in Ireland, the world famous Antigonish experiment in Nova Scotia, which sprang from the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier's University.

It began in 1923 when Fr. James Tomkins, who had been for most of his life a Professor at the University, was appointed parish priest of a small village called Casco. His parish was typical of every other in the area, the parishioners were poor farmers, impoverished fishermen and poverty-stricken miners. Fr. Tomkins was appalled at the economic and social condition of his parish and resolved to do something about it. Knowing that it was useless to seek the help of a Government which had for years ignored the plight of his people, he decided that their only hope lay in self-reliance and co-operation. Accordingly, he began to organise his parishioners into informal study groups, in which their common problems were discussed and the importance of self-help was stressed.

The study groups led to the formation of credit societies and co-operatives for the marketing of fish and farm produce. In a remarkably short space of time Fr. Tomkins had had the people out of economic wilderness in which he found them.

Encouraged by the success of his efforts at Casco, Fr. Tomkins applied for help to St. Francis Xavier's University. The appeal met with a very generous response. The University sent out teachers and leaders to help the study groups on the same lines as those organised in Casco. Soon, credit unions and co-operatives began to spring up in the area, and the whole life of the people was transformed.

The example of the Antigonish movement has spread far beyond the confines of Canada and has been particularly influential in the adult education work of Jamaica Welfare and other organisations for mass education in the West Indies. It is interesting to note that the man mainly responsible for the success of the Antigonish movement was an Irish emigrant priest, Patrick J. Conroy, who was for several years Director of the Extension Dept. of St. Francis Xavier's University.

A STRIKING FACT.
From a close study of the functions of a University in the modern world, the following striking fact emerges, which is of special significance to the present campaign to secure a University for Limerick, namely, that the service which a University can render to a community is local rather than national in its extent. In view of this fact, the present proposals to erect a mammoth building in Dublin at the cost of several million pounds, would, under the best of circumstances, deprive the vast majority of the Irish people of the benefits of University education. Situated in a rural area, with its own population atmosphere, such an institution would become a centre of privilege and conservatism, playing a role of social learning and would be completely oblivious of the needs of local communities.

Our National University is to make any worthwhile contribution to the cause of national progress, its facilities must be decentralised and distributed in provincial centres, where students can pursue their studies in the friendly atmosphere of their native environment, and where courses can be designed to suit the particular needs of area. Limerick, by reason of its strategic position, is a natural centre for such a college.

MATTER OF URGENCY.
In the case of Limerick, however, there are special circumstances which make the establishment of a University a matter of extreme urgency. Firstly, there is the question of the Shannon Free Port Project. The economic and strategic position of Limerick and the material and financial advantages offered, have aroused widespread interest among industrialists, and it is estimated that the number of students for such a college would be considerable.

It is no exaggeration to say that a powerful added attraction and could well prove to be a decisive factor in influencing investment in the area.

There are many ways in which the University of Limerick could contribute to the development of the country. In the first place the recruitment of graduates to industry is now commencing an advanced country. In the 1949 "Directory of Opportunities for Graduates" British alone, seeking gradu-

ates to fill a variety of posts. Graduates in engineering and science are required for positions of responsibility in research, design, production, management, etc. While graduates in arts, commerce and economics are offered a wide choice of posts in advertising, accounting, sales, management, market research, transport and work study. As well as recruiting graduates, most firms also operate student apprenticeship schemes, which enable a young man to enter the industry straight from secondary school. During his apprenticeship the student is not only given practical training in his own special branch of the industry, but is also given an opportunity of pursuing his professional studies at the local University or College of Technology, which a University can assist industry in the field of Adult Education. As we have already seen, this is an important function of Universities all over the world.

A TREMENDOUS ASSET.
It can be seen, therefore, that a University would be a tremendous asset to any industry setting up a plant in Shannon Free Trade Zone. In fact, the more closely one examines the whole situation the more difficult it is to visualise any worthwhile industrial expansion in the absence of a University. It must be realised that any industry set up in the Shannon area will be engaged, primarily, in the production, processing and packaging of goods for sale in the European market. With the rapid realisation of trade in Europe, this market will become one of the most competitive in the world. It follows, therefore, that any industry hoping to sell its products in this market will be compelled to operate at the highest possible level of efficiency. This will demand the maximum ability on the part of the management and executives and a similar degree of skill in the part of the workers. It is pretty certain, therefore, that the recruitment of graduates and the operation of student apprenticeship schemes will all form an essential feature of the policy of this type of industry. For this reason alone the establishment of a University in Limerick is a matter of the utmost importance.

Of course, it may be argued that a College of Technology is the obvious solution to the whole problem. This argument has, in fact, come to the surface occasionally in the past, in the discussions on the University project, but, fortunately, it hasn't given rise to any serious controversy. The one is no substitute for the other and both are equally necessary as far as Limerick is concerned.

With regard to the question of a College of Technology, it must be pointed out that the need for this type of education establishment depends to a large extent on the nature of the employment in the area. If present plans for the industrial development of the Shannon area should materialise, then the provision of adequate facilities for technical education will become a matter of absolute necessity. In fact, prospective employers have been given an assurance that such facilities will be provided according as the need arises.

IMPORTANCE OF A LOCAL UNIVERSITY.
A University's, however, equally necessary if the needs of modern industry are to be fully catered for. In fact, a University would greatly facilitate the recruitment of graduates and the operation of student apprenticeship schemes. Further, it can be assumed with certainty that the £7 million "Belfield Plan" contains no provision for bringing adult education to the rural areas surrounding Limerick.

The establishment of a University in Limerick is the obvious solution to the whole problem. With the facilities which would then be available, Muinir na Tire could go ahead with its plans for organising adult education courses at parish level.

CONCLUSION.
The University question is so wide and it means so much to the future of Limerick that it would be impossible in the course of a single article to present anything like a comprehensive survey. All that has been attempted here is to indicate the different ways in which a University can serve the community. A more detailed survey could be best undertaken by the various sectional organisations. If each of these groups would make a thorough investigation of the question in so far as it concerns their respective interests, it would be possible to build up an unanswerable case for the establishment of a University in Limerick.

Now that the system of University education is under review, Limerick has a golden opportunity of pressing its claim. All that is needed is the co-operation and support of the entire community. This will be forthcoming once it is realised that a University is not just a centre of higher learning for the privileged few, but a major instrument of economic and social progress. Given this, the present campaign can be developed into a powerful, continually increasing, which will bring to the community of Limerick a centre of learning, which would be worthy of the highest distinction in the world. What a fitting memorial this would be to one of Limerick's most distinguished sons, the late John Conon Hayes, the great pioneer of the community development idea.

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