

University of Limerick Oral History Project

Interview: Tony Bromell

20 November 2008

I: Tony thank you for talking to me, you were an important part of the University of Limerick Project Committee set up in 1959, will you tell me about that committee?.

T.B.: Well thank you indeed, and welcome Catherine, and I'm glad in a way that you are doing this so that it will remain on the record. I think unfortunately a lot of local history and every type of history is lost, and since I wrote my own book I'm cajoling other people to write down their memoirs and so forth like that.

The Limerick University Project Committee started really at a meeting of Sexton Street CBS Past Pupils Union in, I think it was 1958 or maybe 1959, I've asked the archives in Dublin, the CBS archives in Dublin, to check on the minute books to see whether it is '58 or '59, I haven't got word from them yet, but I hope to. But at the meeting of the Past Pupils Union, of the CBS Past Pupils Union, at a meeting of the executive, it was proposed that another effort would be made to get a university for Limerick. Now you might say what was all this business about a university for Limerick and I suppose there's a long history in it. If we wanted to we could go back to the days of the monastic settlements in Ireland when Mungret College was if you like, a university in its own right, with students from both Ireland and the continent studying there and there are many stories told about the prowess of Mungret College as a university we'll say, one of them being that the examiners were coming, I suppose the modern external examiners of the university today, to check up on the fluency of the monks and of the teachers there in Latin, and the Abbot was a very astute, scheming kind of a man and he dressed some of them up as ordinary workers and when the external examiners as we'll call them, arrived they engaged with 'the workers' and their Latin was so good they decided it wasn't worthwhile going on then and examining the examiners. Now a nice story, but I think it

tells really the type of situation that existed in many areas in Ireland, Clonmacnoise and other areas, for example, in Mungret during the great monastic period in the country.

Then later on, if we come along to 1848, and the establishment of the Queen's Colleges as they were known at the time in Belfast and Cork and Galway, and Limerick lost out in that time. It is said that Limerick was to get one of the Queen's Colleges but the M.P. for Limerick at the time was William Smith O'Brien who was involved with the Young Irelanders, and it is said, how true I'm not quite sure, that due to that that Limerick wasn't considered at that particular time. And then going on further, you had then of course, the establishment by Newman of the Catholic University in Dublin, so you had Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Galway. And then you had the establishment of the Royal University, which was only an examining body really, and again going back to Mungret, Mungret became a recognised, not a recognised college but a college that prepared people to do the matric. of the Royal University and to do the degrees of the Royal University. And Limerick felt all the time that it should, it had a big enough population and especially a school going population that would deserve to have third-level education and the Bishop of Limerick in 1945, Bishop O'Neill, set up a committee to see if they could be instrumental in achieving a university for Limerick. That lasted for a number of years and then in the 1950s, in the early 1950s, the Mayor set up another committee, again to see could they get a university for Limerick. But both committees, though they did an awful lot of work were getting nowhere and it was due to this, that the Past Pupils Union meeting, the executive meeting in '58-59 that it was suggested that we have another go. And I was secretary of the committee and I was instructed to write to all the other past pupils' unions in the area, and we get a meeting together and see could we form a committee that would look for a university for Limerick.

Now I suppose I should mention that a lot of people at present wouldn't know what a past pupils' union was, they've kind of lost their impetus. But at that time in the schools, in the secondary schools particularly there were no Boards of Management, there were no parents committees, there was nothing like that but the past pupils' unions were very, very effective. They were effective in a number of ways, they were effective in helping

the school, in the case of CBS for example in Sexton Street, they subscribed to a library there, they subscribed for scholarships and so forth like that and they helped with what was termed there mock interviews, in other words business people and people who got on well in various professions would come in and put the students through interview, which was a help to them going into the world shall we say in having to do the proper interviews. So they were very influential bodies at the time and it was an honour really to become president of the Union or secretary of the Union and stuff like that; the CBS one started, I think, about 1956. I had just started teaching in Sexton Street, which was my Alma Mater as well and a Brother Keely and myself became the joint secretaries of the union and that remained for quite a number of years. So acting on the instructions of the committee, I wrote to the other past pupils' unions in the area and suggested that we could get together and maybe form some kind of a committee that would bring a university to Limerick. And again there was quite a good response from the past pupils unions' and we did meet and a committee was formed to get a university for Limerick. Now there were many past pupils, I can't remember how many past pupils' unions that were formed, but two of the most prominent were, going back again, Mungret and CBS, and they formed the nucleus really of the committee.

And for the record the committee that was set up was, John Moloney as chairman, who was CBS, and Dermot Hurley as vice chairman, he was Mungret; then Margaret Lyddy became secretary, Tom Duffy who was the treasurer and the rest of the committee was myself, Tony Bromell, Pat McCarthy, Jim Lyons, Gerard O'Connor, Sean Prendergast, Michael Finnan, who represented the Trades Council and John Hurley and Jack O'Dwyer, and that committee set about getting a university for Limerick. I should mention that Margaret Lyddy wasn't a member of a past pupils union and we were very lucky to have got her as secretary. Now maybe I should put on record how that happened. It was suggested to me that I should become secretary since I had got the group together but I was very much involved and a young teacher at the time and we decided no, I wouldn't be secretary, I would help alright and it was suggested that Frank Lyddy might be approached to become the secretary. Now Frank Lyddy was the head of Muintir Na Tire at the time. Now Muintir na Tire was a rural organisation which had branches in

every parish in the country and had built halls in many parts of the country, started by Canon Hayes from Bansha, very influential. Now Frank Lyddy was approached but he was such a busy man, he had his own printing works in Limerick, that he suggested Margaret, and it was the best thing we ever got was to get Margaret as secretary, so she was the only female of our group of men at the time, we didn't even think in terms that time of male and female, there was no such thing as gender balance or anything like that, we just got people for the job, Margaret was a great asset to the committee.

So the committee set about then of how it was going to achieve its aim of getting a university for Limerick. Now I think it's important to put it in the context of the times, we're talking about '58 - 59, the fifties being the most regressive, unprogressive period I suppose, one of the most awful periods of Irish history, massive unemployment, massive emigration, immediately after the World War, immediately after the economic war that we had with England. Things were very bad in the country; political volatility was at a premium. For the first time in 1948 the Fianna Fail government had been defeated and a coalition of about six different parties with about 14 or 15 independents took office. That fell in '51, Fianna Fail came until '54, that fell until '57 and then Fianna Fail, so it was a question of, the finances of the country were very bad, the volatility in the political life of the country was bad and there didn't seem to be much hope at the time. It was in that period that I graduated in UCG and was in the happy position of having two jobs, one available to me in Sexton Street which was kept for me, and the other was an appointment in the Queens University in Belfast in the Department of Irish which was got for me by the Professor of Old Irish, Cáit Mulcrone, which I didn't take. So I could have ended up in Belfast maybe but I came back, I was one of the lucky ones to have a job to come back to at the time; the fifties were a woeful time.

Now you might say, to look for a university, to talk about education, most people were looking for a job, so you would say that our task would be impossible. The amazing thing was that everybody supported us. We got support from the city, from the rural areas, Macra Na Feirme, Muintir Na Tire, the farmers associations, the Trades Council in the city, all the teachers unions, all the schools, anywhere that they could, any group that

could help us, helped us. Then we set about going around the country, we had looked at the statistics and we said we'd take a radius of thirty miles from the centre of Limerick. And Limerick has the advantage that it has a full circle, unlike Dublin that only has a half circle, or Galway, maybe three quarters or Cork only a half circle. We had a full circle around and the support we got, we went to any meeting that was on, we travelled to it and we spoke at the meeting, we let people know what we were talking about, we showed the advantage it would be if people could get to a third level education, how third level education would be good for the future, we were probably before our time maybe in thinking this way. But the support we got was unbelievable, from people who would probably never see the inside of a university, we got support from them and even we got financial support, I think that's important, the first ten pounds we got was from one of the members of the committee, Jack O'Dwyer. Jack O'Dwyer had a business in Parnell Street near the station and he had given ten pounds to the Mayor's committee, but when he found out the Mayor's committee wasn't doing very much he took back the ten pounds and gave it to us, so that was the first ten pounds we got. But we did, for example, hold church gate collections and for example in Limerick we got 200 pounds. Now I'm talking about 1959 when there was no money and which 200 pounds was a huge amount of money to get.

So in that way we were going out to the various areas, we were holding meetings anywhere we were invited or to which we went, we got resolutions passed at these meetings and these resolutions were sent up to the Department of Education, so the Department of Education really knew that there was something afoot in Limerick. One thing we badly needed was statistics and there were really no statistics available. Now some of the universities we approached them for statistics, in actual fact they hadn't got them. The Department hadn't very much statistics either so Tom Duffy got some from UCD, he knew somebody in UCD, so I was given the task of getting more statistics, and went about it in the most direct way, got a circular, sent it around to the schools, for example to find out how many people were actually doing the Leaving Cert, how many people were going to go to university or third level, it was mostly university at that time, there was very little thought about the other third level area and if a university was in

Limerick how many people would go to a university in Limerick so these basic things. We had no information until these circulars came back and again we got great co-operation from all the schools, particularly the secondary schools in an area about thirty miles radius from Limerick city.

Now some of the statistics are interesting especially in the current period where everybody goes to Leaving Cert now and it's assumed that everybody goes on to university. In UCD at the time, which was the biggest college, there were 3,863 students I'm talking about 1958 - 59. In Cork 1,242 and in Galway 875, so the total in the National University of Ireland in '58 - 59 was 5,980 students. Now the Limerick point of view. The number of people in the National University of Ireland from Limerick city, which had a population of 51,000 in 1989, sorry in 1959, you had 75 students, 75 students from Limerick. In Galway, which had a population of 21,000 you had 224 students which showed that if you had a college or university in the area that naturally you attracted more people from the area. The big thing at that time was the cost of maintenance because the fees were relatively low, but of course the cost of living was high, well high in comparison to wages at that time. People looking at having to pay digs for three pounds a week now would say wasn't it very cheap, but it was very dear in comparison to what incomes were at the time. And again the statistics we got showed that the percentage of people attending Galway from within thirty miles of Galway was 41%, Cork 55% and 48% in Dublin, so having a college in the region meant that you attracted, you gave the facility to more people to attend the college.

So this was the kind of statistics that we were looking at and this helped us maybe to progress the cause if it was really a cause, we were evangelists going out sweeping the country all at our own expense by the way, at the time. But how then were we going to approach the Department with all of these things? The first thing, I was asked one time, to go to Dr. Hillery who was the Minister for Education and to meet him at the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis. That time you could go into the Ard Fheis, you could walk up on the stage and you could buttonhole a minister, you wouldn't do it now as easily!. But it was one of the best things I ever did in so far as I knew he was interested in industry and

commerce and stuff like that as well and I had made out a plan that having a university in Limerick would bring in so much income from students and staff and stuff like that and how beneficial it would be on the economics as well as the educational side. The one bit of advice I think he gave me was, which was very interesting, was to forget about the economic side of it, concentrate on the education side of it and I asked him at that meeting then would he meet the Limerick University Project Committee and he said he would. And we had a meeting soon afterwards and again we impressed upon him, we had all our statistics ready, again we had all our arguments ready and so forth like that and we impressed upon him that it was necessary now to act. So soon after that then he established what was called the Commission on Higher Education and he told us that that would decide whether we should get a university in Limerick or not.

Now the Commission was under the chairmanship of Cearbhall O'Dálaigh who later became Chief Justice and who became President of the country and had a difficulty with the government of the time, but we found him the most gentlemanly of people. Now the terms of the Commission we weren't happy about, I'll just read some of them maybe to you:

having regard to the educational needs and the financial and other resources of the country (my comment: and that's always important when you see that) to inquire into and make recommendations in relation to university, professional, technological and higher education generally with special reference to the following: (a) the general organisation and administration of education at these levels, (b) the nature and extent of the provision to be made for such education, (c) the machinery for the making of academic and administrative appointments to the staffs of the universities and university colleges and (d) the provision of courses of higher education through Irish.

Now they were very broad terms of reference and we said to ourselves well now, how long will it take for the Commission to work and when will they have a report and everything on it?. But we were asked then by the Commission to give evidence before it,

and at least this was a beginning. We put all the evidence we had together and the *Limerick Leader* published it and we met the Commission in January 1961, and the people who met the Commission at that time, I think their names should be noted: John Moloney as chairman, Dermot Hurley, vice chairman and then myself, Tony Bromell, Tom Duffy, Margaret Lyddy, Jim Lyons, Pat McCarthy and Sean Prendergast and we were two days before the Commission. Now we were very confident, because I think at that time there were very few in the country had the knowledge, the total knowledge of higher education than we had, because we had devoted nearly our lives to the thing with particular reference of course to the need for having a university in Limerick.

So we were two days there and giving our information and our arguments were very kindly received. We had one person who was very beneficial to us on the Commission, that was Brother White. Brother White had been in charge of Sexton St, CBS Sexton Street and he was very much in our favour, he was patron of the past pupils' union when the resolution was passed and he was nominated by the Minister to the Commission. Now while he never divulged any secrets to us, he always, shall we say, advised us on what to do and what not to do, so we were very happy with that. But after that then we came home relatively happy but of course the old saying is 'when God made time he made plenty of it', with Commissions established by governments, well time doesn't mean anything and what happened after that then was that Paddy Hillery left Education and Donogh O'Malley became Minister for Education. So again we were delighted that a Limerick person was Minister for Education, so we went and met Donogh and impressed upon him that we had done all we were required to do before the Commission and now it was time for the Commission to give us some idea as to whether we were successful or not.

So Donogh O'Malley, who was very much favourably disposed to us got on to the Commission and asked them for what would I call it a preview, an immediate response to our arguments and so forth like that. And this was published and we weren't a bit happy with it. They recommended at that time, if I remember correctly, a college in Limerick, a third level college in Limerick that would have a limited number of pass degrees. Now

you might ask what were we looking for?. And what we were looking for was a Dublin, Cork or Galway, in other words a fairly broad university which would include by the way, medicine. And not alone were we thinking in that terms but we had actually taken an option on seventy acres of land adjacent to the Regional Hospital, we'd taken an option on that so the university would be built there when we got it, we were so confident of getting it that we did that. Now we were very disappointed in that and we told the minister in no uncertain terms that this just wasn't a runner. Then unfortunately Donogh O'Malley died suddenly and after that then you had a succession of ministers, you had George Colley and again we went, every minister who came we went up to meet him, and George Colley about 1969 I think, and we set up a students' committee and the students of the Leaving Cert classes in the local secondary schools and we held a march in Dublin in which the CBS Pipe Band played from the station to the office of the commission in the Four Courts and to the minister for education which made great publicity for us.

And we set up another committee then at that time as well under the chairmanship of Cecil Murray, who died recently. He was the father of John Murray who is the chief justice at present and his task was to collect money so that we could do even more advertising than we were doing. So with all that in mind you had George Colley and then you came on to Brian Lenihan. And I was very friendly indeed with Brian Lenihan and privately and as a committee and so forth like that we were going to Brian and urging on him to do something with regard to what the Commission had said and Brian in his own inimitable way said he was 'granting a college to Limerick which was much better than any university' and that was the beginning of the college that became known as the National Institute for Higher Education, NIHE. And at the same time he nominated me onto the Higher Education Authority and he nominated Margaret Lyddy and Jim Lyons onto the Planning Board that was set up to see what subjects and so forth like that, what areas should be covered in the new Institute. I think it should be emphasised that the whole idea of the Institute was that it would have a business and engineering emphasis, because it was beginning to be felt at that time that the future lay in business and in the engineering side, I suppose computers were still a little bit away from us. Ed Walsh then was appointed I think 1970 by the Higher Education Authority as the first director of the

new college which hadn't a name as yet. The Planning Board and the Higher Education Authority worked together to see what areas should be covered in the new college and how it would be progressed and so forth like that. One thing of interest is the National Institute of Higher Education, the name. The HEA, of which I was a member, was meeting with the Planning Board and we adjourned for lunch to the National Gallery. I'm giving the detail here because the National Gallery becomes very important with regard to the name. The people in the Planning Board were insisting on the word university, there wasn't a possibility in the world of getting the university into the name as much as I would have liked it myself and we were talking about an Institute for Education and so forth like that and at the lunch Terry Rafferty, who was the chairperson of the Higher Education Authority, and I was sitting between him and Ed Walsh and I said 'suppose we put in the word National into it; the National Institute of Higher Education', we thought only in terms of one by the way at the time, would that suffice? So that's how the word NIHE crept in to the terminology of higher education in Limerick.

So then after that Ed Walsh, I must say that Ed Walsh and the Planning Board did tremendous work and I must say as well, in fairness, and I don't think they were ever given sufficient thanks for it, the Department of Education were very much behind the project. If you look back on the papers and you see Ed Walsh giving out stink about the Department of Education, you have to take that with a big grain of salt. He was working to make sure that he got what he wanted but in actual fact the Department were leaning over backwards, I would say, at the time in helping the Institute. I remember Tadhg Carey (UCC), coming up one time and saying to me 'Tony I was in the NIHE today and I saw equipment that I could only dream about and it was still in wraps' in the NIHE. But one thing that they did do was, I mentioned previously, that we had taken an option on land near the Regional Hospital, the two areas we had thought about were on the Ennis Road side or on the Regional Hospital, Raheen side there, but it was the Department of Education, it was they who picked the present site for the NIHE and it was an old tumbledown building called the White House. There's a story about that, I think you probably heard about Plassey House and so forth like that and the way it was mixed up with a place in India and the usual things you have about whether they're true or not I

don't know. But I remember it with no roof on it and the pigeons flying in and out through it. And it was bought for some very small amount of money, I can't think, was it 20,000 or maybe 50,000 pounds at the time and whatever land was around it.

A great advantage that the NIHE had subsequently was that Shannon Development bought an awful lot of land contiguous to it so that that land was there for development which they have used for example in the industrial area and so forth like that. But the house was bought, the house was renovated and that's where it all began. Though before that Ed Walsh had a room, two rooms I think in O'Connell St, and that's how the NIHE started. Its first students were enrolled I think about 1969, I'm not quite sure of that, I think about a hundred students or so like that and it has progressed to its present stature and present eminence. I think maybe if we roll forward that was the beginning in which the University Project Committee was very much involved, after that there wasn't much room for the Limerick University Project Committee because you now had a Planning Board, now you had a college set up and stuff like that. We withdrew if you like, our work had been done.

Later on, we hadn't any active part in what happened but I was a little bit involved myself in that in 1985, Gemma Hussey, who was the Minister at the time set up an international board to see should the college be called a university. And that report voted in favour in favour of a university for Limerick, voted that it should be a university. Incidentally, Dublin, they got an NIHE as well as Limerick, and it was decided by that committee again that they should be called a university, so you had the Dublin City University, DCU. Now Mary O'Rourke became Minister for Education then in 1988/'89 and she was the person who steered the University Bill through the Dáil and through the Seanad. It happened that I was a Senator at the time and had the good luck if you could say that, of being able to speak for the government in proposing in the Seanad that the University of Limerick should be established. So if you like from a personal point of view I was there at the beginning and was there at the setting up of the University itself. That actual Bill going through the Seanad was very important at the time, because unfortunately Charlie Haughey had come back from Japan with great ideas of what was going to happen in the

future and a defeat in the Dáil on a motion with regard to I think, with regard to the people with the blood transfusion stuff at the time which had no consequence for the government, he decided in a kind of a huffy kind of a way to call an election and the election was actually on when the Bill was going through the Seanad, and if it wasn't gone through the Seanad, the whole thing would have collapsed, so it was very important that that Bill would go through the Seanad before the election actually took, well during, the election was taking place, but before a new government and so forth was established.

So the progress after that then was a question for, you've seen that yourself outside that's for another day. The one thing I would say ... the Limerick University Project Committee I think has never been given the recognition that I think it should be given. Now having said that, about two years ago, three years ago, Roger Downer presented Tom Duffy, Margaret Lyddy and myself with the President's Medal which was given, I think, by the Foundation. There were two other people that night who were given the President's Medal as well, Cecil Murray being one of them but Cecil only came into the business really in 1969, ten years after the founding of the LUPC, and the other person who we didn't feel was associated very much with the university at the time or with the University Project Committee. It would be nice to see something, somewhere outside in UL I think, that the Limerick University Project Committee was instrumental, no names or anything, just the Project Committee was instrumental in having the university established and you might say to me if the University Project Committee wasn't there, would there be a university in Limerick? I would confidently say that we wouldn't have got a university at the time we did. I would nearly confidently say that the university as we see it now would hardly be there. It was just something that came at the right time, the beginning, even though the '70s were bad financially, we had just got a glimpse of the Lemass /Whittaker period of the '60s, where it showed what could be done in the country and I think the fact that the University was established at that time helped subsequently, even though the '70s and '80s were miserable as well; that it helped establish what we have had for the last fifteen or sixteen years in what is termed the "Celtic Tiger" period.

If it wasn't established at that time, I suppose subsequently there may have been with the establishment of LIT for example and with Mary Immaculate College there since 1898, that there may have been some effort made to establish a university on their basis, but again that's questionable because we can see that in Waterford for example in the WIT in Waterford, that there's no area down there as you well know yourself in Wexford, Waterford and the southeast, of university status, and that you would imagine that it was one area that would have gotten a university and it still hasn't got it. And it's interesting that Kieran Byrne, who was Head of Education in Mary Immaculate and was later Vice President of UL, is now the Director of WIT, and he was very hopeful there recently when I was speaking to him, of getting a university there but it seems to have gone a little bit sour. Whether you would have had, I think you wouldn't have had a university as soon as we had it, or an IT as it was called, I think if we did subsequently get it, it might be a different type of university.

And an interesting thing with regard to, I mentioned the LIT for example, Limerick wasn't given a Regional Technical College for the simple reason that NIHE had been established and it was intended that NIHE from the HEA point of view, would have a leaning towards technology, engineering, business and so forth like that, and also that apart from its degrees, that there would be diplomas and certificates at sub-degree level. Now I happened to be Chairman of the VEC in the late 1960s, early '70s, and when Ed Walsh was appointed Director of the new college in 1970, I arranged that he would meet myself and Maurice O'Kelly who was the CEO of the VEC in Limerick, because we had a substantial amount of third level education on the technical side; probably the biggest outside of Dublin, but we weren't given a Regional Technical College due to the fact that NIHE was now there. So that meeting wasn't very successful because Ed was inclined to cherry pick the things he liked and the things he didn't like and I think Maurice O'Kelly wasn't too happy, so that kind of ended things in a way. Afterwards the colleges were combined under the VEC and you had COACT, The College of Art, Commerce and Technology and that led to the establishment of LIT eventually. Mary Immaculate, of course, was there from 1898, being the oldest third level institution in the area and the Regional Development Authority held a number of meetings between the NIHE as it was,

Mary Immaculate, COACT as it was to see if there could be co-operation between the three Institutes. Very much didn't come of that at the time but it was an effort to see could there be more co-operation and really I remember as Chairman of the VEC when I signed the building contract for the new college in Moylish that the VEC had bought, I actually said at the signing of the contract that we really had a university in Limerick, we had the NIHE, Mary Immaculate and COACT and afterwards the three developed in different ways. Is that enough?

I: That's great Tony, thank you so much. (T.B.: I probably forgot a lot of it, I have a few notes here that I didn't think of, yes), That's great. Just to go back, I was interested when you said you know in the 1950s right at the beginning there, really the concern in Ireland I suppose was to try and get a job (T.B.: Oh yes), and yet the university project was supported so ... you know, hugely across the board by every sector (T.B.: by every sector), of the population in the community around Limerick and in the city and so on.

T.B.: One of the members on that, what I might term the executive committee (even though we never knew ourselves as any high faluting name as executive) we were the group that met every week, sometimes two or three times a week when things were going hard but one of the people on that was Sean Finnan who was the Trades Council representative on the thing and then again I think maybe that people looked upon education even in very bad times as a way out of maybe the difficulties they had. That was very much part of the rural community and that's why for example, one of the organisations that helped us very much was the ICMSA, the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association. The person in charge of that was John Feely at the time, now he gave us great support and gave us money as well which was a very important thing because we did an awful lot of advertising, if you look back on the papers like the *Sunday Independent*, full pages, which I think cost something like seventy-five pounds at the time which was a colossal amount of money. And you know like especially in the rural areas where there was a small farm and well there maybe six, seven, eight, nine, ten children and only one person could get the farm so it was a way out for them. For example in Mary Immaculate College, you'd have so many people coming to the college

who would have a rural background. I remember one time we used to interview students after the Leaving Cert for the college and I remember interviewing a student one time and there were nine in family, and it was a time when grants were available for students and they were entitled to all the grants and there were five of her family had gone already through college, and she was the sixth and they had become doctors, engineers and so forth like that from very small income. But people appreciated what education could do for them and that's why I think in all areas we got massive support. And like I remember one time having a big meeting in the Crescent Hall which had a capacity of maybe 500, 600 people. And people were down O'Connell St, we had to put loudspeakers in just so people could hear. I just wonder today if you could get the same amount of people interested in an educational context like, you know. But then again you see that we were astute enough to see the need for a university, I think people were astute enough to see that yes, there was a way out of the awful, I would say, penury, of the '50s, there must be a way out and the Lemass/Whittaker era of the '60s kind of showed the first blossoming of that even though the NIHE wasn't established at that time, but it showed what could be done in the country economically as well as politically and so forth like that. But it was an exciting time, a very interesting time.

I: Then of course the introduction of free secondary education by Donogh O'Malley in the mid 60s.

T.B.: And it's very interesting that there already had been a movement towards greater participation in secondary education. The numbers were going up, then when Donogh O'Malley brought in free secondary education the numbers mushroomed of course, and as well as that what was brought in at the time was free transport and without the free transport the free secondary education wouldn't have had the same impetus it had. There was, in a way, a bit of a downturn in some of these things in an unexpected way. I mentioned Sexton Street CBS, for example. And it was a great school as were many of the CBS schools, for example C olaiste Mhuire in Dublin, O'Connell Schools in Dublin. Sexton Street CBS brought in people from all over the city, not only the city but from Newport, Croom all those areas, the rural areas around. With the expansion of secondary

education you had the building for example in Limerick, of the Ard Scoil Ris, you had the development of the new Comprehensive, you had St. Enda's and so forth like that and by degrees Sexton Street became a local school, with a local intake, to a large extent. So it lost out maybe in some ways but in a general way the free education of course led to a massive increase in the numbers and the natural follow on then was that people would go to third level education, and the development of the Regional Technical Colleges which then formed the Institutes of Technology, these of course had a big bearing on the numbers of people going on to third level in a different area. One statistic I think, which is interesting. As I said previously, most people doing the Leaving Cert today it's more or less accepted they're going to go on to third level education. I gave the numbers for Limerick, seventy five being the total number in the NUI colleges, we didn't get the number from Trinity, but due to the ban on Catholic students that time the numbers would have been relatively small, you're talking about a couple maybe, so that the total was very, very small. There were only two scholarships available in Limerick city, two scholarships for the whole city. In my Leaving Cert I won one of them and a girl, Kathleen Morrissey, won the second one, from Laurel Hill We both won what was termed the State scholarship which gave you the opportunity of going to Galway to do the courses through Irish. But when you think that only two scholarships were available in the whole city at that time, and one of the arguments put against us by various people at that time was that an increase in scholarships would satisfy us, would satisfy the difficulties Limerick had. But as I said, there were only two in Limerick city at the time, and again I find it hard now to get the statistic I needed but in 1959 or '60, one of those years I think, you had only 111 scholarships in all the colleges of the National University of Ireland, and whereas in England at that time over 85% of the people would have had a scholarship. So scholarships at the time weren't an answer to our problem, shall we say.

I: When you were appointed to the HEA and the Planning Board, a couple of the members of the committee you were explaining, were appointed to the Planning Board, when the idea for the National Institute you know was being decided, did you personally see that as a compromise from what your original aims had been as a member of the committee?.

T.B.: It was, and I suppose in a way from the Limerick University Project Committee it was the first time when there was a kind of I would not say complete unanimity that we had set out to get a university, we got this NIHE which in Brian Lenihan's words was better than any university and it was hard to accept that you didn't get your goal there and then. I suppose it's a bit like I felt certain sympathy for those who signed the treaty way back in 1922 and I saw the dilemma that they would have been in. But I think at the time we had fought so well, we had got such great support, that it would have been criminal to say no. Now there were big meetings in Limerick at that time and the people loudest in their condemnation were the people who had no part, active part whatsoever in what we were doing, and as things turned out I think it was right. I think we accepted that we could go no further and I think it was the right choice. I should add that membership of the HEA and the Planning Board gave us the opportunity to influence decisions and the progress of the new institution. Talking about people turning out in 1989, there was a big garden party held outside in UL as it is now, when it was given the status of a university. There were actually, I would nearly say, thousands there that night and they all slapping one another on the back. It reminded me of the old saying that if the people who claimed to be in the GPO in 1916 were there they would have been much more successful. But, be that as it may, I think there was a genuine delight in the area, and I think as it has proved that the NIHE and UL have been successful in many ways and again I would pay a special tribute to Ed Walsh who went into, and to the Planning Committee, who went into a green field really, and built up the university that is there today.

I: Ed Walsh said in a newspaper interview in 1970 'that the success of the Institute of Higher Education depends on its providing something in tune with the needs of the country, if it does this it will be successful no matter what it is called or what pre-conceived notions people have'. Do you think it has succeeded in that aspiration?

T.B.: Yes, I think it did, yes. I think it did. And, as I said originally there, it was probably, the thinking behind it, in fairness to Brian Lenihan the thinking behind it, in fairness to the Department, that it would be technologically and business orientated. I think that was good at the time because if you like, the Limerick University Project Committee was very

much inclined towards the UCD, UCG, UCC type of university (I: the traditional model?) yes, very much so, and of course we were all products, well again when I say we were all products, there were only about three or four of us who had degrees actually in the University Project Committee; Margaret Lyddy, Gerard O'Connor, Pat McCarthy and myself, I think were the only four, which again shows that people who hadn't degrees recognised the fact that there should be more participation in university by students and so forth like that yeah.

I: Could you tell me a little bit about the relationship of Mary Immaculate College to the new institution?

T.B.: That wouldn't be a little bit now Catherine (I: that might be another interview?) that would be a long interview!

I: Would it?. Would you prefer to leave it?

T.B.: I'll just say this. Mary Immaculate College became a recognised college of the National University in 1974 and the first graduates came out in 1977, a three year B. Ed degree. We had been in negotiations with the NUI through University College Cork for a number of years and we concluded an agreement with them. Incidentally the NIHE had a rather chequered career in the beginning with regard to who was going to confer the degrees. When the NIHE Bill went through the Dáil and the Seanad, it also had the National Council for Educational Awards Bill and it was intended that the National Council for Education Awards would award degrees and diplomas etc. to both of the NIHEs and to the Regional Technical Colleges, as they were at that time. The Planning Board and the NIHE was never happy with that and for a time NIHE became a recognised college of the NUI, again through UCC, but their relationship with UCC was much more hazardous I think that the relationship with Mary Immaculate, and I think there was an incident one time at a conferring when some fellow threw his gown at the President or something like that. But it didn't work out and one of the reasons was they weren't compatible really but as well as that the NIHE wanted the power the whole time

to confer it's own degrees and they got that then under the University Bill. Mary Immaculate, with the NUI and UCC was much more cordial and much more friendly and we were very much linked in academically because the range of programmes we had, education and then the what you might call the academic programmes were the arts programmes of Irish, English, French, History, Geography, Philosophy, Mathematics, Music; maybe I left out one or two there, we were very much part and parcel of the set up in Cork, and we had a great relationship with them, and there was a great relationship between the administrative section of UCC and ourselves. While UCC was acting in lieu of the NUI, and we had no difficulties whatsoever in continuing that, and it would be another day I suppose to go into the minutiae of the thing.

We had just got permission from the Senate of the NUI to start a BA course and we had many diplomas, for example, we had diplomas in Music, diploma in Irish and the teaching of Irish and in English and the teaching of English, various things like that, we had put a whole raft of diploma through and we had a huge night course element in the college at the time, one of the reasons being that we wanted to progress the college but another reason being a much more practical one that when the Fine Gael/Labour coalition of the 1980's suddenly realised that the birth rate in the country was decreasing they took fright and of course Gemma Hussey closed Carysfort and there was always the possibility of Mary I closing. But we were on top of things maybe better and we produced a development plan for the Minister who happened to be Mary O'Rourke again and we went to her and she said 'put the plan into action' and we took her at her word. So we had our various diploma courses, we had our BA course, we had our B. Ed course and we had provision made for Masters and PhD's and everything like that at the time in our development plan and it's a long story which we'd do in another interview I'd say, you'd really have to go into the minutiae of the thing. The Department wanted us to link up with UL and wanted UL to link up with us and I suppose in the opening negotiations Ed Walsh succinctly said that he hadn't asked for this, nor we hadn't asked for this but it had come from a higher authority and therefore we get down to business on the thing and long negotiations took place which I think would be a matter for another day. UL was after taking over Thomond College at that time and I think their idea was to take over

Mary I as well and as Registrar, I think there was no way that that was going to happen and they came in with four proposals: (a) a complete takeover of Mary Immaculate as they had of Thomond, number four, that they just, what would I say, progress our degrees - I can't think of the word for it. (I: confer your degrees) yes, confer, approve our degrees and do the conferring and in between there was a myriad of things. Now we were bent on retaining our independence and maybe Noel Mulcahy probably put it very succinctly when he put it this way. He said 'we would have to achieve' - what was the way he put it - 'we would have to achieve institutional independence with academic integration'. That was a mouthful, and mind you a very hard thing to follow up on. But eventually we came to an agreement and I've a whole chapter in my book on the workings of, working up to that whereby we became, if you like, integrated into the university whereby we had members on the governing body and members on the academic council and vice versa, they had members on our academic council and on our governing body and we worked more or less the same as we'd worked with the NUI and we continued doing our thing with our degrees, BA, B. Ed and all the various other things, and the conferring was made by UL.

Small little things, for example, gave a lot of heated argument. One of the things they wanted was that the conferring would take place outside in UL, and of course no way was I going to accept that, although when I say I, now the college wasn't going to accept that, so we retained the right to have our own conferring in our own area and so forth like that. But it was reviewed then in 1995, 1996 no, sorry, yes, 1996, and it was working so well that it was said well why have a review?, but I've left the college now, I retired in 1998 and I believe there has been quite a bit of a change since then in that the university now is only very partially involved, which is really only a question of approving the degrees and conferring the degrees there. Which in one way I think is a pity but I'd have to go into more detail on the thing. In my memoirs, I say that if the university had been a little bit more generous and at the time, we're talking about 1992 - '93 around that time, had proposed that the Faculty of Education should be in Mary I, and the Faculty of Arts should be in Mary I it would have integrated Mary I much more into the university than has happened. Whereas, they had a course, a European Studies course which was an Arts

course, which if I may say so I don't think was very successful, now that could be disputed by people outside there, but you had the ridiculous situation of an Arts course in Mary I, which was very successful, and which the Arts and Education were two of the most sought after degrees in the whole UL, with regard to people applying to the CAO, and you had UL setting up an Arts, well they had an Arts Faculty, but setting up a BA in opposition to itself, and they tried various ruses for example, instead of having an open BA they tried the Trinity method of taking shall we say Irish and History and putting them together in order to bump up the points, which is ridiculous, and I don't think that was too successful either. Now I admit that I would be prejudiced in all this because I was part and parcel of Mary I and I wanted to see that our degree was successful but I think the university probably lost out in that way. We had the difficulty in negotiations that they, as I said, they had a bit of an Arts Faculty in the European Studies, they had a bit of an Education Faculty in the remnants of Thomond College, whereas in Dublin with St. Pat's and DCU, there were no remnants in the DCU so we, and again I don't blame them for this, they were protecting what they had, in the same way as we were protecting what we had, but I think if they had been a bit more open that believe it or not, I think Mary Immaculate would be much more integrated into the university today and instead of that it has separated, you could say really. But the discussions are interesting, interesting in so far as where each side came from, there were difficult discussions and the Dept of Education's hand under the secretaryship of Noel Lindsay was very much in evidence during the discussions but as I said there is a whole chapter in my book on that and that's for another day's discussion.

I: Tony, thank you very much.

T.B.: Not at all, you're very welcome.