

Connacht's view of Itself^a

Tonight we shall be talking about what the sociologists would call Connacht's "view of the situation". When they are making a study in depth of a particular social group, they pay considerable attention to the group's assessment of its own circumstances and possibilities—to its overall "view of the situation". For it is a simple fact of experience that people's lives and behaviour tend to be determined to a great degree by the way they see their situation, quite regardless of whether their view is, objectively speaking, correct or not.

For quite some time past, Connacht has been letting Dublin do its overall thinking for it. In other words, Connacht has been leaving it to Dublin to form a view of the West's circumstances and possibilities *and it has been accepting this Dublin view of itself*. There is no independent view of Connacht's circumstances and possibilities, as, needless to add, there is no Connacht view of the circumstances and possibilities of the East of Ireland—such a view would be considered presumptuous. All this mental work is left to Dublin as if it were Dublin's natural right and exclusive duty. You will search in vain for Connacht newspapers or magazines in which Connachtmen look at the world and their own province through their own eyes and offer creative or original thought about Connacht's circumstances and future. Read the editorials of almost all the Western newspapers and notice the obsession with Dublin politics. You get the impression of this whole western province lying prostrate, gazing open-mouthed at Dublin without a thought of its own in its head. Nor does University College, Galway, give any noticeable intellectual leadership.

Need I say that this is an unnatural and undignified state of affairs? This mental tutelage means a sort of perpetual childhood for the people of Connacht. The right of looking around at the world, himself and his people and deciding for himself what are his circumstances and possibilities—this right which every young man claims on attaining adulthood, is neither claimed nor exercised by the people of Connacht. Nor have they any representative institution which, bringing them to gether as Connachtmen, would enable them to form their own view.

It is not intelligence which is lacking—there is an abundance of that resource. It is simply that Connacht does not even aspire to think for itself. On the other hand, what it does aspire to do—more concretely, what countless Connacht families aspire to do—is to educate their youth for export from Connacht. If Connacht brains can become cogs in the Dublin thinking-machine, if Connachtmen's skills can go to increase the power of Dublin so that it can the better do with Connacht as it wills, then many a Connacht father's and mother's heart glows proudly—*young Michael has made good*.

^aLecture delivered in Community Centre, Castlebar, 28 May.

Yet, oddly enough, there are many Connachtmen who blame anything and anyone but themselves for the continuing disintegration of Connacht life and society. There are people here who see it as a pure act of God, not as a man-made tragedy, that, while all the major ports of Ireland have been booming these last years, Connacht's major port has been *declining*. Such people want to have their cake and eat it, want to live thoughtlessly and yet prosper, want to export brains, knowledge and skill and yet enjoy the fruits which only these can provide.

Now, if Dublin's view of Connacht were encouraging and inspiring, if Dublin were driving Connachtmen to exploit to the full the rich possibilities of their natural resources and of their position in Europe and the world, Connacht's condition of mental tutelage might still be degrading, but it would at least be advantageous and profitable. As it happens, however, Dublin takes a poor view of Connacht's circumstances and possibilities, and its thinking and planning for Connacht is based on this poor view. Since Connacht doesn't think for itself, most of its people accept this poor view of Connacht, quite uncritically and credulously.

The resulting mentality, transmitted from the adult generation to the youth of the province, is the greatest single obstacle to the success of Connacht and to the building of a proud, self-sufficient life here. When people accept, as most Connachtmen accept, that their province will always be a sort of "poor relation" receiving assistance, then initiative, enterprise and ambition are stifled; many talented young people want simply to get out. Native talent and intelligence aren't directed to grasping and exploiting local opportunities—in the rural parish, the town or the province as a whole. People close their eyes to their environment, as to a depressing sight, and dream moodily about distant places as people do when they are depressed. And if they stay here nevertheless, it is still, in most cases, with their minds closed to their environment—only half alive.

The mentality I am describing is repeated in locality after locality up and down the province. Some of you in Castlebar have tried to smash it and to replace it with a different mentality. But while you have done much, you are helpless while you stand alone and while you fail to get this whole western province pulling with you, not pulling you down. Let me give you an example from my own experience.

Some months ago I began to urge that Irish-speakers from all parts of Ireland, possessing special skills or knowledge or ability, should begin to settle down in Iarchonnacht or South Conamara, and build a full twentieth-century life there—a new Israel—in collaboration with the local people. There have been many volunteers and some of them are meeting next weekend at Cill Chiarain. But a typical reaction from the South Conamara people themselves was "But sure what could they make a living out of?" On other words, their view of the South Conamara situation was, at the very best, that

no additional adults could have any future there. In fact, of course, they meant rather more than that—that it was a poor place for anyone. And this, we can assume with certainty, is the view of the situation which they are transmitting to their children.

For my own part, I saw that the circumstances and possibilities of Iar-chonnacht were similar, in miniature, to those of Switzerland and Norway combined, that is to say, to the basic circumstances and possibilities of the fourth and fifth richest countries in the world. I could see dozens of ways the immigrant Gaeilgeoiri could make a quite substantial living. Having come to live there myself, I was sorry that I hadn't ten lives, or at least that I wasn't starting life again, so many opportunities did I see there of an exciting, challenging, richly satisfying life. I am certain that my own sons will grow up seeing the situation this way too, and quite confident that they will want to grasp some of the exciting opportunities lying ready to hand, especially if everyone else is ignoring them.

So there you have two different and opposed views of the same situation. The point is, of course, that I have not grown up there and been brainwashed from infancy into taking the poor view. I am able to look at the situation with different eyes and with a mind I can call my own. Indeed, precisely as a *stráinséar*, my way of seeing things is not exceptional, but nearer the rule. For in every parish between Cleggan and Galway city, you will find that enterprise, such as it is—even in such simple matters as taking a van round to sell meat and fish from door to door or engaging in the building business—stems to a very great extent from outsiders to the parish or district in question. Some are from other parts of Ireland than Connacht or even from abroad; others are merely from a different part of the West. For even within Connacht, there are gradations in the depression; the shift of a few miles away from "his own place", in the most immediate sense, can sometimes enable a man to open his eyes a little. The universal rule, to which there are very few exceptions, is simply that *your own place*—whether it be your district, town or province you have in mind—offers no opportunities, at most a means of survival, and that hope and opportunity are "elsewhere". This rule applies to each locality within Connacht as it applies to Connacht as a whole within the context of Ireland and the wider world. Test it by increasing your measure of "enterprise" as you consider parish or district or city or province, and observe the occurrence of real enterprise and of really enterprising individuals from Galway city to Ballina. And consider, too, how the Church, how successive Bishops of Kilmore and Ardagh, have stood passively by while Leitrim almost died.

Connacht was not always depressed or lacking in enterprise. If we are to see this malady as it really is, then we must recognise that it has been a gradual development and that it has become acute only in this century and, in particular, since the end of the last war. Depression—in the broad psy-

chological and social sense in which I'm using the word—spread into Connacht from the East. The first wave of real despair and of heavy emigration to hit the old Irish society affected Leinster and the East of Ireland generally in the nineteenth century. In other words—and this is a point to note—the first serious flight from the land and decline of towns took place in what was by nature, in a largely agricultural economy, the *richer* part of Ireland. Then the wave of desintegration reached the eastern parts of Connacht and, finally, quite recently, the western regions, where the poorest land lies.

A hundred years ago, most of Connacht was still vitally alive. At that time, as James Berry, the Mayo writer, recounts, the parish of Carna—where he settled and where I now live—was the richest in Conamara. Its 550 home-built hookers plied a busy coastal trade and fished extensively. A girl's dowry was twenty cows. Then, and up to a few decades ago, there were many workshops there, many trades and skills. Carna was a Switzerland and Norway combined in miniature, at an early stage of the technological revolution. Then again, in the late nineteenth century, Mayo and the West generally still had the strength and vision to give leadership in the Land War, thus contributing momentarily to the course of modern Irish history. Nor was that the only decisive role which Connacht played in that history. Through its place in the affections and the philosophy of the Gaelic League and the Irish literary renaissance, Connacht provided the lever by which the Irish revolution rocked the British Empire and the world. In a more specific way, it was largely a Connachtman, Douglas Hyde, and the book he made called *Love Songs of Connacht*, that inspired both these movements and led through them to 1916 and the War of Independence. Ernie O'Malley tells us the *Love Songs* was the pocket-book of many a fighting-man.

It can be said, indeed, that after the Plantation of Ulster, Connacht found itself on several occasions representing the last bastion of the native Irishry against alienating onslaughts from the East. It was thus at Aughrim as in the heyday of the cultural revival 60 years ago. It was thus again, in a broader sense, when Archbishop McHale, the "Lion of Connacht", was spokesman of the Irish Church against the curial imperialism of Cardinal Cullen of Dublin, and protector of the Fenians against their foreign-minded detractors. For such reasons, every true Irishman is a Connachtman at heart.

Further back, when Connacht was still quite well aware of its place in the world, it had relations with the world at large on its own terms. You had Gráinne Ní Mháille, with her fleet based on Clew Bay, speaking to Elizabeth of England as one queen to another, and a Galway city doing a flourishing trade with Spain and France and further afield. Legend has it that the old chapel of our patron saint in Carna, St. Macdara, was built by a Spanish mason. An archaeologist remarked to me recently that the church did indeed show foreign influence and that the legend might well relate to the days when people on the west coast of Ireland sailed direct to Santiago de Compostela on

pilgrimage. Perhaps less authentic is the story I heard recently of the great boat-builder on Lettermullan who, much nearer our own days, made his own boat from the nails to the sails and crossed to America in it. But it shows you what people considered possible then on the Conamara coast.

In a very literal sense, however—if you take the long, broad view—you can describe the history of Ireland since the Norman invasion as the story of the decline of Connacht's vitality and power and the rise of Dublin's monopolistic power. Ruairi O'Connor, the last high king of Ireland, collected tribute from Dublin city and bargained about its future with Strongbow. But as the English regime became established, Dublin and its Pale became the central bastion of English power in Ireland and gradually subjected the rest of the country to itself and to England's will. Dublin became London-in-Ireland, the mini-imperial city, spreading the increasingly insular English culture and the English language throughout Ireland, drawing our people gradually out of Europe and away from the Atlantic towards an inward-looking obsession with the inland sea on Dublin's doorstep and the British "mainland" beyond. The establishment of an Irish government in Dublin made no difference to this continuing process—it proceeded and it still proceeds. When Dublin intellectuals talk today about being "outward-looking", they mean looking respectfully to London and seeing the world as the better London weeklies see it. This, in European or world terms, means being inward-looking British Islanders, and provincial ones at that.

During these same centuries, first, the political power of Connacht, and then its native church, its vitality, its productiveness and its population declined. As its society and its language disintegrated or vanished in face of the depressing pressure from the East, it finally confirmed Dublin's ascendancy by surrendering its mind to Dublin and ceasing to think—even about its own affairs—for itself.

I have said that Connacht's secondhand, Dublin-made view of its circumstances and possibilities is the greatest obstacle to its success. It is a crippling obstacle because the view in question is a poor view; but it is an absurd obstacle because that view is based on erroneous assumptions and false reasonings—because, in a word, it is quite wrong. It arises out of the parochial and colonial idea prevailing in Dublin that the only circumstances in which Irishmen can achieve success are those of Dublin and the East of Ireland or, at the very least, circumstances approximating to these. The underlying reasons for this degrading belief are, on the one hand, that the circumstances of Dublin and its surrounding counties are rather similar to those of London and the so-called Home Counties or the English South-East; on the other hand, that London and its Home Counties are Dublin's mirror of itself and its unique, obsessive image of *success*—in every sense. (Believe it or not, there are actually business firms in Dublin which have travellers designated to the "Home Counties", meaning the counties near Dublin.)

Let us analyse the set of "reasons" and assumptions on which Dublin's poor view of Connacht is based. It is an arid and distasteful job for the intelligence, but for Connacht's sake and for Ireland's sake it must be done. Let us try to state as propositions what are never stated as propositions but assumed as *a priori* truths in the newspaper talk, the politicians' rhetoric and the pseudo-scientific discussion about Connacht's circumstances and possibilities. The line of "reasoning" runs like this.

Connacht has poor possibilities because:

1. Connacht produces and earns much less than the East and is therefore, in this overall material sense, factually poorer.
2. Connacht is not where the East is, that is to say, on the side of Ireland facing England. (A more vulgar and developed form of this is that most of Connacht is "remote".)
3. Connacht has less arable land than the East and much of its agricultural land is of a different kind than much of the agricultural land in the East; that is to say, not suitable for fat-cattle grazing, wheat and extensive farming. (The more vulgar form of this proposition is that Connacht's land is "bad".)
4. Connacht has many small farms, a relatively dense rural population and a relatively small urban population, while the East has the reverse.

We will pause here and take a look. The first important point to note is that 2, 3 and 4 are imagined not merely to be grounds in themselves for Connacht having poor possibilities, but also to be the *causes* of 1, namely, of the fact that the West is materially considerably less wealthy than the East. This is an erroneous conclusion—they are not the causes of it. But since they are felt to add up to No. 1, this makes No. 1 a sort of ultimate and portmanteau "reason" for Connacht's poor possibilities. So let us examine its validity first.

"Connacht has a poor outlook because *de facto* it is considerably less wealthy than the East". Perhaps we can skip over the parochial assumption that this relative poverty, as between two Irish regions, makes Connacht *poor* by world or even European standards; Connacht is among the better-off regions not merely of the world but of Europe, if we include all of Europe and not merely a few selected regions. Let us say, simply, that before the present century the Scandinavian countries were among the poorest in Europe and that now they are among the wealthiest in the world. Two of them have a higher gross national product in relation to population than Britain or Germany, not to mention the East of Ireland. So the fact that Connacht is now less wealthy than the East of Ireland is no argument for poor economic possibilities here. It is at least as wealthy, relative to size, as Norway at the time of its industrial take-off—and probably wealthier.

Obviously, then, if 2, 3 and 4 *were* the causes of 1—which they are not—this would not indicate that Connacht has poor possibilities. Let us now see how 2, 3 and 4, individually, stand up to examination.

"Connacht has a poor outlook because of its distance from England". Well, in the first place, it is much nearer to England than most other countries which sell a great deal to England. Norway, to go no further afield, has long had England as its principal customer. One could also mention New Zealand. In terms of world and even inter-European trading distances, the difference in freight costs to England arising out of being on the west side of Ireland rather than the east or south sides is insignificant. It merely means that if Connacht wishes to sell as profitably to England as the East of Ireland, it should offer goods of less weight relative to value than does the East. But what a parochial consideration is that in terms of twentieth-century world trade, when Switzerland is selling more to the U.S.A. than to France or Italy and as much to Japan as to the Netherlands! Why should Connacht be *dependent* on selling to England? It lies on the west coast of Ireland and Europe, on the Atlantic, less "remote" from most of the world—from North and South America, Africa, Japan and Southern Europe—than the East of Ireland, not to mention Switzerland. Along with the South-West of Ireland, Connacht lies at the centre of the west European coastline, considerably nearer to America than southwest England and France (to the south of it) or than Norway (to the north of it). The planes which leave Shannon westwards take their departure from Europe off the North Mayo coast. Moreover, this west coast of Ireland, facing the Atlantic, has directly behind it—in the belt 45 degrees to 55 degrees North Latitude where it lies—the most populous and industrialised regions of western Europe. This is a point of some importance in view of the possible uses of Cashla Bay, Killary or Blacksod. So it would appear that the geographical situation of Connacht, far from being a hindrance to its prospects, is in fact one of its principal advantages and opportunities. To put it another way: the Irish-speakers of Rosmuc or Lettermullan, who regard the Atlantic as a sort of lake between the Irish and American parts of their respective communities, are aware of the real position of Connacht in the twentieth-century world.

Let us proceed to 3. "Connacht has poor possibilities because of the quality of its land, as compared with the land of the East of Ireland." Why the land of the East of Ireland—why not "as compared with land in general"? Because Dublin insists on making its own circumstances and what lies on its own doorstep into absolute measures of good and bad for the rest of Ireland.

The position is that, mountain grazing apart, 57% of Connacht land (as against 69% in Leinster) is usable for agricultural purposes. Approximately 40% of Connacht land (the National Soil Survey office of the Agricultural Institute couldn't give me a more precise figure) is arable, that is to say, suitable for crops. This is a pretty good percentage by European or world standards. Connacht has large areas of land suitable for every kind of temperate farming except wheat and fattening of prime beef; there are only small areas suitable for these latter kinds of agriculture. In much of the province,

the quality or configuration of the land calls for intensive rather than extensive use. Leinster, on the other hand, with a considerably higher percentage of arable land, has larger areas suitable for extensive farming. It has also a good supply of very rich land.

Obviously, then, as regards land use for agriculture, Connacht's interest lies in concentrating on rather different kinds of farming than the East; in particular, it can specialise profitably in intensive farming, including farmyard animals. However, in view of the fact that it is considerably less well endowed than Leinster with agricultural land, Connacht (like Switzerland and Norway to an even greater degree) clearly needs to rely much more on *non-agricultural* land use and production: manufacturing industry, fisheries, forest industries and service industries such as shipping and tourism. Insofar as these activities require land, Connacht has a greater abundance of suitable land than Leinster; that is to say, land of low fertility or completely barren land. In many of its maritime districts, it has expanses of excellent rock foundation either on or very near the surface. However, due largely to the fact that Connacht doesn't think for itself, things have not been moving in this direction; that is to say, towards the diversification of land use in the directions mentioned. The proportion of schoolchildren attending technical schools in Connacht is considerably lower than in Leinster.

Now, because of the stress which the Dublin view of Connacht lays on the inferiority of Connacht's land, one might imagine that the need for a concentration on industry here would loom large in this view. After all, for many a brainwashed Dublin journalist or ordinary citizen, Connacht land is just "desert" or "rocks". But this reasonable conclusion is not drawn, among other reasons because it would destroy the unity of the picture and make the gloomy view of Connacht's future quite untenable. Instead, Ballina could hear the Irish Taoiseach, Mr. Sean Lemass, making the following statement there on May 31, 1965:

The prosperity of the West will always rest on the condition of agriculture, and here the aim is to organise the more intensive use of farmlands, and by the creation of viable family farm units in the small farm areas, ensure that as many people as possible may be retained in productive employment in agriculture.

Obviously, the words "the prosperity of the West will always rest on the condition of agriculture" imply that agriculture is predestined to play a more pronounced role in Connacht than in the East or South. But why should it—when Connacht is the least endowed of the provinces in the matter of agricultural land? The reasonable conclusion would be the direct opposite.

Mr. Lemass's odd assumption was directly connected with certain remarkable attitudes of mind which have long pervaded Dublin officialdom. Let me illustrate by telling you about the letter I got from the Agricultural Institute when I asked them for information about the categories of land in Connacht.

At my request, the Swiss Embassy had sent me, by return of post, a booklet which gave percentages for the land of Switzerland under the two general headings "unproductive" (barren mountain, built-up areas, etc.) and "productive". Productive land was broken down into farming land, land suitable for rough pasturage only and forest. I asked the Agricultural Institute to give me a corresponding break-down for Connacht, substituting "forest and turf-bogs" for the Swiss "forest". The answer I got, a fortnight later, said:

Up to recently, figures of this nature were ascertained mainly from Central Statistics Office data. These tended to reflect the pattern of current utilization rather than of potential land use. The attached table shows such figures for Connacht for 1964.

The letter further explained that a General Soil Map had just been published which would yield figures for Connacht's land potential, but that these had not yet been reliably worked out.

The attached table for 1964 showed acreage for Connacht under headings for crops and pasture and for "Other Land". The proportions were correct, but—quite incredible this—the number of acres shown under each heading was roughly a third of the correct number and the total acreage for Connacht one and a half million instead of four and a quarter! Leaving this aside, a note about the heading "Other Land" showed that this figure lumped together "woods, plantations, *grazed* and barren mountains, turf, bogs, marsh, water and roads".

Now there are two things to note here. In the first place, consider the morbid conservatism implied by the fact that up until now statistics about the land of Connacht "tended to reflect the pattern of current utilization rather than of potential land use". Secondly, note the exclusive, peasant-minded obsession with the merely *agricultural* use of land which is implied by the lumping together of woods, barren and *grazed* mountains, turf bogs, marsh, water and roads as mere "Other Land". And this is not to mention the confused thinking which buries mountain grazing in this amalgam while putting *all flatland pasture*, whatever its quality, under the separate heading "Pasture". Yet out of such thinking—I know I'm stretching the word a little—has come the established view of Connacht's possibilities and the planning for its future. What hope there that Connacht might be encouraged as a supplier precision engineering goods, machines and chemicals to the developing countries of Africa?

Finally, let us look at the fourth "reason" why Connacht is held to have poor possibilities. "Connacht has many small farmers, a relatively dense rural population and a relatively small urban population, while the East has the reverse".

In this case, one is tempted to remark "So what?" All European countries had something like these Connacht characteristics, many of them to a much more extreme degree, in the early stages of the technological revolution. More

generally, many countries or regions that are much better off materially than the East of Ireland differ from it considerably in their settlement structures and in the size of their farms. The first thing that these Connacht characteristics suggest is that Connacht still has a much more cohesive society than the East of Ireland. Where there is a relatively large and dense rural population, society has been knit together over centuries. A closely-knit society is an enormous advantage for a people undertaking ambitious tasks. As for the rest, if the present settlement structures are an impediment to real progress in Connacht, Connachtmen are quite capable of seeing this and of *changing* them. Or rather, as Connacht discovers its place and its opportunities in the late twentieth-century world, its settlement structures will change spontaneously as occasion and opportunity demand. Perhaps there is a need to expand some towns or to found new ones — this can be done. If farms are too small, they can be increased in size. But *are* they too small? 75% of the farms are over 15 acres, 37% over 30 acres; the average is 35 acres as against 39 for the Republic as a whole. This is biggish farming by European standards. Is it justified? Are the existing small farms being used for the best purposes? Agricultural statistics show that Connacht does not engage to any greater degree than Leinster in intensive farming, though it would be to its advantage if it did. To the extent that Connacht farming is aping Leinster farming in a second-rate way, instead of developing the best kinds of farming for Connacht, this is simply part of the whole malady we are discussing—Connacht's failure to think for itself.

At all events, this much is clear: the present settlement structures of Connacht are no ground for taking a poor view of Connacht's possibilities, and for this simple reason: if they *are* disadvantageous in any way, they can be changed.

All in all, this Dublin view of Connacht, in its obsession with England, with agriculture and with the agricultural quality of land, is clearly the product of colonial, provincial and pre-technological thinking—or rather feeling, for it is not really based on *thought*. Stuck in an internal British Isles mentality, it is blind to the Atlantic, to Europe and the wide world. In a peculiar way, probably going back to the English embargoes on Irish shipping and foreign trading, it is insensitive to the sea. Above all, this view of Connacht is blind to *man* and, quite concretely, to man in Connacht and what Connachtmen, taking thought, might or could do. For it takes certain factors of a purely physical or material kind and endows them with illusory powers of utterly and inexorably determining Connacht's future, as if the people of Connacht were *not* people but so many puppets. Thus the possible role of human skill, knowledge and vision in Connacht is ignored: Connachtmen are assumed to be a different species than, say, Norwegians or Icelanders, Finns or Swiss. Thus, too, the possibility that Connacht might change radically and

fundamentally, and change Ireland with it—as it has changed Ireland before—is utterly discounted; for man and his skill is the *agent* of change, never more so than today. What is now, must remain so; there can be no change of any importance—we have heard Mr. Lemass. Small wonder that the resulting outlook is morbidly conservative and backward-looking—that it is a view of Connacht such as colonial Dublin might have taken centuries ago, before the industrial revolution, before the Irish revolution, before even the discovery of America. Yet for lack of an independent view of its own circumstances and possibilities, this is what Connacht must live by—if living is the word.

What would have happened Switzerland if it had let somewhere else estimate its possibilities and do its planning for it? We think of Switzerland as a country of mountains. In fact, a mere quarter (26%) of its land is arable, a quarter suitable only for rough pasture and a quarter covered by forest. The remaining quarter is totally unproductive. Over half the farms are of less than 12 acres, and the average farm size is 17 acres. The total area, by the way, is roughly equal to Connacht and Munster combined.

If Switzerland's possibilities had been estimated in Paris, Berlin or Rome, the Swiss might well have been advised to "concentrate on tourism"—as the people of Connacht have sometimes been told to do, only with much more reason in the Swiss case. In fact, however, Switzerland's thinking has been done not in some remote capital city which saw only its mountains—and not even in a Swiss capital city—but in the 22 cantons of Switzerland, each with its own parliament and government, its own laws and budget, all linked together in a federal republic.

If its thinking had been done for it, Switzerland would be the assisted "poor relation" of somewhere else. In fact, however, it is the fourth richest country in the world, with a gross national product per capita more than twice that of the Irish Republic. Of its employed persons, 40% work in manufacturing industry and trades, 19% in commerce, banks, transport and communications, 11% in agriculture and a mere 4% in its famous tourist industry. Though it has a population more than twice that of this Republic, its largest city, Zurich, has 140,000 inhabitants *less than Dublin*.

Look at a map of Scandinavia, with Sweden on the east and Norway occupying the mountainous western coastline. Norway was subject to Sweden until 1905. A booklet published by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs states: "Although only slightly more than 4% of Norway consists of arable land, farming and its subsidiary occupations were the dominant economic activities until the end of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, however, Norway has undergone a comparatively rapid process of industrialisation and developed into a market economy". Between 1866 and 1913, when its population was about half that of Ireland's then, 700,000 persons emigrated.

If Norway's planning and thinking had continued to be done in Stockholm,

on the Swedish east coast, facing the inland Baltic Sea, the possibilities of Norway, as an Atlantic country, would never have been seen. Stockholm would not have seen that Norway could have the third largest merchant fleet and the fifth largest fishing fleet in the world and a shipbuilding industry which is at present building over 300 ships, while other Norwegian ships are being built in Japan. But since the Norwegians did their own thinking, these possibilities were seen and exploited. It is hardly a mere coincidence that the transformation of Norway into the fifth richest country in the world has taken place largely since it severed its link with Sweden and obtained control of its own affairs in 1905.

More than 60% of Norwegian export revenue is derived from the freight earnings of its merchant fleet and from the sale of fish and fish products. Of its employed persons, 27% work in manufacturing industry and mining, 15% in commerce, 11% in agriculture, 4% in fisheries and 4% in sea transport. Though the population is a million more than that of the Irish Republic, the largest city, Oslo, has 300,000 inhabitants *less than Dublin*. Significantly, local government is carried out by 407 rural municipalities and 47 urban municipalities—all elected and all with considerable local powers—grouped together under county councils to which they send delegates.

The Shannon Development Authority, let us notice in passing, may not be democratic but at least it has and gives local control; Shannon's possibilities and opportunities have been discovered by people living and working in Shannon who have scoured the world for this purpose or sent others out from Shannon to do so. They have had their own, their very own view of Shannon's circumstances and possibilities. This being the case, it is no accident that, though Shannon began from empty fields in south Clare, it has become the Republic's only new town and its major new industrial centre. Nor is it an accident, ladies and gentlemen, that the place where this has been possible is on Ireland's west coast. In contrast, you doubtless know, Galway's new industrial estate is not controlled by Galway city, but by Dublin; and far from being oriented westwards or to the wide world, it is oriented eastwards and largely to England.

I think you will agree that the European facts and figures I have just been offering to your consideration have a certain relevance for Connacht. (They are relevant if we assume—as we are indeed assuming—that what Swiss and Norwegians have done, Connachtmen can do.) But you will also have noticed that they are facts and figures which are never brought to bear on Connacht's situation—neither in Dublin nor by Connachtmen themselves. Instead we have the poor view of Connacht which sees no better future for it than that of a comfortably depopulated, largely agricultural, slightly industrialised suburban parkland of an Ireland where all eyes look east. Do you imagine that such a prospect will fire the energies and the creativity of Connacht's ambit-

ious youth, or that it will hold them here at all?

Consider what they are up against. Not merely is the thinking and planning for Connacht based on the depressive pseudo-reasoning which we have exposed, but there is an active anti-Connacht propaganda which, accepting this poor view as basic dogma, goes far beyond it. Look what has happened to the words *west* and *western* in Irish official and newspaper parlance. They have come to be used in a general way for any part of the country—north, south, midland or east—which is economically backward relative to the more prosperous oarts of the East. So there are now twelve so-called "western" counties in official parlance, and these include the three Ulster counties of Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, the Leinster county of Longford, the Munster county of Kerry and the Munster half-county of West Cork. All these are termed "western", so that no shadow of backwardness or poor possibilities falls over "the East", or "the South" or "the Midlands", only over "the West", and therefore to an extreme degree over Connacht, which everyone (quite rightly) regards as "the West" *par excellence*. How pleasantly this is arranged for some people, but how disadvantageously for Connacht! In a similar manner, in the nineteenth century, when the English had decided that "Ireland" and "the Irish" were a hopeless case, they got into the way of using these words, quite unreflectively, in a generally pejorative sense. Thus were the Irish, thus is Connacht now, given in the most literal sense a *bad name*. Cromwell began the work of giving Connacht a bad name; Dublin is continuing it.

Then again, just as the English developed a shorthand way of visualising and referring to Ireland as "bog"—all Irishmen were imagined to come from "bogs"—it has now become quite usual in Dublin to visualise and refer to Connacht as "rocks". In both cases, what is felt to be the most negative element in the region in question is made to stand for the whole. Finally, there is the fashionable exaggeration and glib slander which depicts Connacht as a peasant slum and a dreadfully *poor* place, where the only important occurrence is emigration. With a patronising or accusing phrase—both are fashionable—all these bustling and well-built towns, all these warm and smiling farmhouse kitchens, all these people and this beauty are written off.

I call this kind of thing hostile propaganda not because it is always deliberately meant as such, but because it tends to work as propaganda does, seeping even into the minds of Connachtmen and affecting their view of their province or at least their feeling about it. Certainly it works discouragingly on Connacht's youth.

Indeed, in all that I say about Dublin's view of Connacht, I am not suggesting that it arises out of evil intent. Basically, in its origins, it is not due to malice, but to distance, mental lethargy and mental insulation, the same factors which made it impossible for the English ever to recognise the essential *difference* of the Irish from themselves and to think about us accordingly in

a creative, unprejudiced manner. But, of course, a poor view of a neighbouring region gives a sense of superiority to those whose privilege it is to take it, and this makes the poor view into a breeding ground for contempt and arrogance. The manner in which Dublin's press and television treat the Bishop of Galway, Galway Corporation, Ragoon and so on is an obvious public example of such attitudes at work. In this instance, Galway, as the West's major city, stands for the West in general. But many Connacht representative or voluntary bodies and private citizens have had their own experiences of this sort of thing.

We have been looking at some of the consequences arising out of the poor view of Connacht on the Dublin side. But there are also many serious consequences on the Connacht side, even apart from the pall which this self-view throws on Connacht initiative, self-confidence and enterprise. It is necessary to look them in the face. There is, for instance, the fact that Connacht people accept many humiliating things as a matter of course, or at least without any effective reaction. Having a poor view of their province tends to lessen people's self-respect and to lower their expectations of being treated as responsible adults, well aware of what they are about and capable of conducting their own affairs.

A Mayowoman setting up a factory in a Mayo town goes to Dublin to negotiate a grant. She meets a smart young official who asks her "But do you really want to start it out there, among all those rocks? You'd do ever so much better in Dublin, you know". What does she say or do? Nothing in particular, for there is no office nearer home to give her the grant. Or again, people in Belmullet, say, accept that they must trek up and down to Dublin to get a new school, that they must apply to Dublin to get a bull licensed, that the sale of an acre of land (I speak from personal experience further south) can be held up from before Christmas to the following summer because the Land Commission in Dublin tells the solicitor they haven't the appropriate map available in the office. If Belmullet were in Norway or Switzerland, these matters would all be dealt with by an authority either in Belmullet town or a few miles away. Living in Connacht, however, people accept that, by a sort of natural law, these things must be done in Dublin. Doesn't it seem obvious that they could be done better, more cheaply and expeditiously and more humanely, if done in the various districts of Connacht? Likewise Castlebar accepts that it has no say in the provision and organisation of secondary school facilities in Mayo, though this would be its right, along with the right to collect the necessary taxes, in either of the countries mentioned.

We all accept that, while it is easy to phone Dublin, making a call to the neighbouring Connacht county can be a lengthy and nerve-wracking business. We accept, in other words, that while we may communicate easily with teacher, talking among ourselves in class is not facilitated, to put it mildly.

Just examine sometime, as a matter of interest, how the public transport arrangements serve internal communications within Connacht—as distinct from travel eastwards. Put bluntly: we accept that Dublin, far from welding us together, is entitled to set us competing against each other—town against town, county against county, organisation against organisation, individual against individual—for Dublin's favours, so that none of us, or no group of us, takes thought or care for Connacht's *general* interests. Small wonder, then, that it is precisely our *general* fortunes in this province which are declining and chronically ailing.

That brings us to the final consequence of accepting this poor view of our possibilities: the "sinking ship" mentality and the Dermot McMurrough or "West British" syndrome. When it is felt that this place where we are—whether it be province or county, town or rural parish—has no great future, has become a threat to our own security, a sort of creeping panic leads to selfish and disloyal opportunism. Then this individual or that town forms a Dermot McMurrough-like alliance with Dublin, drawing on Dublin's power to sustain him or it against the threatening home environment. Dublin's political parties are used in this manner when Connachtmen, individually or in groups, use them to build themselves positions of sterile local power—for nothing but the power's sake. Connacht newspapers do this when they seek circulation by headlining gloomy news or views of the West's doom or decline, thereby deepening the depression around them. (In passing, let me say that the *Connacht Telegraph*, for some years past, has been an outstanding example of a paper taking the opposite course.) Or again, a Connacht businessman, urban or rural, invests his money at a distance, derives interest and security from a Dublin or English bank, uses his land for nothing but selfish security's sake—opts out of his people's common weal and his proper role in furthering it. I say "West British" as well as Dermot McMurrough, because the underlying principle in all of this is that *primary allegiance* is withdrawn from one's environment or one's own people and given to an *outside power and ally to the detriment of the life near at hand*.

As this spirit of selfish opportunism spreads, people begin to doubt each other and to live in mutual distrust. Is So-and-So for the Party or for this place? Is Galway, is Sligo, for Connacht or against it? Are they climbing on the Dublin bandwagon, selling out on the West's general, long-term interest for short-sighted gain? Why has Galway's port been let decline, while its increasing production flows to east-coast ports? Is Roscommon still with us, or has it—despite being decorated with the title "western county"—gone east? Justified or unjustified, these are the kind of doubts and suspicions which Connacht's poor view of itself generates, as creeping panic spreads through the ship and selfish opportunism grows rampant.

Such, then, are the consequences of this depressing illusion we are discussing. It does good to look them in the face. A whole trail of depression,

decline and disintegration flows from it, as puss from a sore. At this stage, if I put it to you that it would be in Connacht's general interest—in the general interest of all of us—to reject this depressing illusion and to forge a new, true vision of Connacht's real circumstances and possibilities—I think I am only stating the obvious. For it is obvious that only such a new, true vision can pull Connacht together again and set its people, young and old, moving with confidence and ambition into the years ahead. It is obvious, moreover, that such a *vision will do just this*. Complaint will not do it: we have seen that fifty years of complaining got the Six-County Catholics no further than when they started. And complaint has so far got Connacht nowhere either. As for people "saving" us, I think we have had just about as much as our stomachs can stand of *that*!

But how do we get this new, true vision? How do we at least dispel the clouds? We here tonight may see that the present orthodox view of Connacht is a tissue of depressing nonsense, the product of insulated, out-of-date attitudes and so on. But where do we go from here, how does one spread the gospel and get it accepted throughout the length and breadth of Connacht? I leave that to your ingenuity and imagination. But for a start it would certainly help if those who have already rejected the Dublin view of Connacht would find their way to each other, put their heads together and give a lead. That is why I have suggested elsewhere a Conference of Connacht composed of just such people—of whom there must be quite a few in Castlebar.

One thing, however, is certain, if the new gospel is to be spread convincingly, we must have a firm grasp of it; and that means getting knowledge of the world and of Connacht's place in it. It means starting, quite simply, with geography and world trade—especially as it relates to Europe (including the British Isles) and the Atlantic world—and then going on from there to look closely at such countries as Norway and Switzerland which have much in common with Connacht's basic circumstances, even though their points of departure were less advantageous, economically speaking, than Connacht's is now. Dublin cannot supply the knowledge that Connacht needs: Connacht can see its chances only if Connachtmen look around at the world and at their own circumstances on their own account. When they have done this, their situation will seem very different—they will *have* their new, true view.

The first fruit of this view, as it spreads, will be nothing vast or spectacular. It will be simply as if a green light had gone on for enterprise and enthusiastic work of all kinds. People will start wanting to do difficult things, such as acquiring new skills or doing what has never been done before in their town or locality. Small industries will appear in abundance. (Remember that, even in Norway, with its highly developed economy, 70% of industrial undertakings have less than 10 workers, 94% less than 50.) Precision engineering, the electronics industry, plastics, chemicals and so on will come to be regarded as normal elements of the Connacht scene. Fisheries, boat-building and agricul-

ture will start developing in new, more purposeful directions. Ports will begin to increase their traffic. Connacht society will begin to draw together again, united by a new sense of common hope and purpose. It will begin to look seawards and westwards rather than inland and towards the East.

Out of such beginnings come the new towns, the great industries, the shipyards, the transshipment ports, the publishing houses and all the rest. This has always been the way. People on the west coast of Britain didn't wake up one morning and say "Let's make the villages of Liverpool and Glasgow into great ports and shipbuilding centers!" But neither did they wait idly for some Mr. Childers, Minister for Transport and Power in London, to see that these were possibilities and to tell them so. On the contrary, it is quite certain that wherever there is great achievement today, wherever there are great works of man to be seen, some boy, who had not been forbidden to believe in great possibilities but encouraged to do so, stood alone one day and looked where there was nothing, and saw everything already there. Indeed, I know some busy young men in Iarconnacht who are beginning to look around them and see such sights where there is nothing—whenever they have a moment to spare.

Obviously, if Connacht does its own thinking, it will leave hospital and cease to be a burden on those who now pay its hospital costs. It will cease to be a bore to Dublin officialdom and a tedious subject for Dubliners in general. Connacht will be a profitable place to be associated with and a magnet for adventurous youth and middle age—Ireland's "Frontier", "Land of Opportunity", "Gateway to the World" and "Tir na nOg"! In these respects, by serving itself well, Connacht will be serving Ireland well, and especially the East. But these are trivial considerations alongside the other ways in which Ireland stands to benefit by Connacht's getting itself a new mind. Let me explain.

By reason of its geographical position, its terrain and its considerable Irish-speaking districts, Connacht is *different* from the rest of Ireland and especially from the East. It is also the part of Ireland most different from England, and especially from the English South-East. Dublin regards this difference of Connacht as its misfortune and curse. Connacht, persuaded to believe this, *has been killing itself in an attempt to become a second-rate East*. The point is that in getting a new, true view of itself in the modern world, Connacht will say yes to its difference from the rest of Ireland and especially from the East; for it will see that precisely this difference is Connacht's opportunity. Then Connacht, by striking out on its own terms, will be enriching Ireland by adding a new and different element to Irish life. In a sense, too, because it is the part of Ireland most different from England, it will be manifesting to an ultimate degree what the Irish struggle for independence has been about—thereby justifying that struggle fully.

Once Connacht has realised that its difference is its greatest asset and that

Dublin thwarts it by giving this difference a negative interpretation, it will have no alternative but to win control of its own affairs. By so doing, it will be encouraging all Irishmen to do likewise. It will be striking a decisive blow against that system of monopolistic centralism—an imperialist legacy—which is a chief bane of Irish life. It will be leading all Irishmen towards a new and very ancient dimension of freedom: that of communities controlling their own affairs directly in a community of communities. Thus even Dubliners will be encouraged to emulate Berlin or Brussels and make their sprawling city into a community of self-governing districts. And the fact is that, if Irishmen are to achieve this full dimension of civic freedom, a lead from Connacht is their best hope. For Connacht, as the largest area most grievously thwarted by the present system is the natural place for the first breakthrough to be made. Connacht will once again take the initiative in Irish history with the slogan: "Power for the provinces and the parishes!"

Thirdly, by achieving its own destiny, Connacht will be serving as an insurance policy for Ireland as a whole. Because of its present orientation eastwards and towards England, Ireland, and in particular the East, needs such insurance badly, and precisely on its west coast. If England's economic decline continues, if the English economy goes broke, think of the panic in Dublin and the East generally! It will be useful, then, to have Connacht beckoning in another direction and opening other doors. Or again, if there is another great war in which England is devastated and Ireland escapes, the West of Ireland will probably be the only hope for the survival of the Irish people and name. I do not speak of impossibilities. But in the meantime, at all events, it makes obvious good sense to render Ireland less utterly dependent on the Sick Man of Europe by playing the Connacht gambit.

Finally, and in a way that matters urgently to us all, Connacht will be serving Ireland by leading us back into our place in Europe and the world—by making us aware of our place there. In this way, Connacht's awakening will end our Pale-dominated history, the direct antithesis of world-awareness. Connacht discovering its place at the centre of the west coast of Europe, Connacht facing towards the Atlantic lands with the British Isles and the rest of Europe behind it, will be achieving that intellectual liberation of the Irish people which was, and remains, the overriding purpose of our revolution—read Hyde or Pearse or Connolly, MacSwiney or Yeats, Mellowes or Collins. Then, taking our place in the age, we shall begin to *think* about it freely and to contribute to its thought, as we have never done before and as Dublin has not taught us to do in fifty years of so-called Irish independence.

In this way, the resurgence of Connacht will mark the final overcoming of the Conquest; more specifically, of that mental conquest which began when Ruairi O'Connor was routed at the gates of Dublin, and which our Connacht-inspired cultural renaissance of two generations back made a first attempt to overcome. For this most urgent purpose, Ireland, and especially the East of Ireland, needs Connacht to forge itself a new, true view of itself—and to succeed.