

CIB honours Professor Anthony Coughlan, lifelong champion of British and Irish sovereignty

The CIB committee has unanimously resolved to award honorary life membership to **Professor Anthony Coughlan of Trinity College Dublin**, in appreciation of more than fifty years of support for the cause of British independence from the EU. Prof. Coughlan's writings as both a professional economist and an authority on the threat of European integration to national sovereignty have for decades been invaluable to EU-critical lawyers, economists and political activists. A regular contributor to this website, he has recently retired as director of the Irish National Platform EU Research and Information Centre to concentrate on his work as literary executor of the historian C. Desmond Greaves (1913-1988).

Prof. Coughlan has been opposed to supranational EU integration on democratic and internationalist grounds all his adult life. His first political action when he became a lecturer in social policy at Trinity College Dublin in the early Sixties was to organise a collective letter criticising Ireland's (first) application to join the then EEC along with the UK. This was carried in the *Irish Times* on 12 February 1962. Twice during the 1960s French President Charles de Gaulle vetoed the UK's application to join the EEC. It was only after De Gaulle's resignation in 1969 that the UK's membership application was revived, and Ireland's and Denmark's along with it.

Ireland has held no fewer than *nine* EU-related constitutional referendums between 1972 and 2012 – and Coughlan was actively involved in all of them, opposing European integration on each

occasion. These were the 1972 EEC Accession Treaty referendum, the 1987 Single European Act referendum, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty on European Union referendum, the 1998 Amsterdam Treaty referendum, the 2001 and 2002 referendums on the Treaty of Nice, the 2008 and 2009 referendums on the Treaty of Lisbon / EU Constitution, and the 2012 Fiscal Compact referendum.

In 1975 he was invited to speak on behalf of the 'No' side in the UK's first ever referendum – that held by Harold Wilson's Labour Government on whether the UK's should remain in the then EEC. He shared platforms at 'No' meetings with the Labour Party's Tony Benn and Peter Shore, and with Conservative Sir Richard Body, who was of course a long-serving co-president of CIB. In the 1990s he attended several conferences of the European Research Group (ERG), and has been friends for decades with Bill (Sir William) Cash MP, chairman of the House of Commons' EU Scrutiny Committee and veteran Brexiteer.

Prof. Coughlan was also closely involved in numerous constitutional actions before the Irish High Court and Supreme Court on the implications of EU integration, including seeking to establish fair procedures in constitutional referendums. These included the 1987 Crotty case, the 1995 McKenna case, the 2000 Coughlan case and the 2012 Pringle case. Coughlan himself was the plaintiff in the third of these cases, in which the Supreme Court laid down that there should be broadly equal free broadcasting time between both sides in Irish referendums if they were to be fairly and democratically conducted.

Such were the strength of Prof. Coughlan's eurosceptic arguments that the Irish government even changed the law to prevent voters accessing them. Ireland's statutory Referendum Commission used to have the function of setting out the pros and cons of referendum propositions. In the 2001 referendum on the Nice Treaty, the Commission produced a booklet that was posted to all households in the Republic, setting out the arguments for and against ratifying the Nice Treaty. The

booklet included contact details for Coughlan as chairman of the National Platform, and for Alan Dukes as chairman of the European Movement-Ireland, as two reputable organisations where voters could access further information on the two sides' arguments.

But when Irish citizens voted 'No' to ratifying Nice, the government amended the Referendum Act to take away from the Referendum Commission this function of setting out the pros and cons of referendum propositions. They then held a second referendum on the Nice Treaty in 2002, to undo the 'No' vote of the first and enable them to push through the treaty unchanged.

Prof. Coughlan was a lifelong antagonist of Irish political leader Dr Garret FitzGerald, an ardent euro-federalist and one of the founders of the European Movement in Ireland. The two debated each other fiercely during Ireland's 1972 referendum on EEC Accession, and on numerous occasions thereafter. Dr FitzGerald became Minister for Foreign Affairs soon after Ireland joined the EEC in 1973, and served as Taoiseach for most of the 1980s. He remained a dedicated champion of supranational euro-federalism throughout his political career. A year or two before he died in 2011, Dr FitzGerald met his erstwhile antagonist at a public lecture in Trinity College Dublin. On greeting him, the former Taoiseach wagged his finger facetiously and remarked, 'You are the enemy!'

We can think of no greater accolade than to be regarded as 'the enemy' by one's country's euro-enthusiast political elite. We thank Prof. Coughlan for his tireless work for the independence cause in both Ireland and the UK, and wish him every success in his new project.

*The portrait of Prof. Coughlan illustrating this piece is by the renowned Irish portrait artist **Robert Ballagh**, and is*

reproduced here with the artist's kind permission. Ballagh designed the final series of Irish banknotes before the country adopted the euro. His portrait of scientist Francis Crick – who was the joint discoverer of the DNA's double helix with James Watson – was unveiled by the Queen at the opening of new Crick Institute in King's Cross last year.