

STATEMENT ON ANTHONY COUGHLAN'S RETIREMENT AS DIRECTOR OF THIS CENTRE

The accompanying media statement is the last which Anthony Coughlan will issue as Director of this Centre as he is retiring from this position forthwith to concentrate on his work as literary executor of the historian C.Desmond Greaves (1913-1988), and in particular to edit the latter's two-million-word Journal, an important historical document, for publishing on the internet at www.desmondgreavesarchive.com

He will however continue to be available to give interviews, write articles and speak on EU matters in a personal capacity, as well as continue private lobbying on the EU.

Anthony Coughlan's writings as an economist and an authority on the national question have been invaluable over many years to the group of EU-critical lawyers, economists and political activists who constitute this Centre. His colleagues in it would like to thank him for that and wish him well for the future.

They summarise below his many years of work on EU matters:-

Anthony Coughlan has been opposed to supranational EU integration on democratic and internationalist grounds all his adult life. His first political action when he came to work as a lecturer in social policy at Trinity College Dublin in 1961 was to organise a collective letter that was critical of Ireland's original 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 and it was only after De Gaulle's resignation in 1969 that the UK's application to join the EEC was revived, and Ireland's and Denmark's along with it.

Coughlan has been actively involved on the anti-supranational-integration side in the nine EU-related constitutional referendums that have been held in Ireland between 1972 and 2012. 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.

He was also closely involved in the 1987 Crotty case, the 1995 McKenna case, the 2000 Coughlan case and the 2012 Pringle case – constitutional actions before the Irish High Court and Supreme Court that stemmed from the concern of the various plaintiffs at the implications of EU integration, or which sought to establish fair procedures in constitutional referendums.

He was himself 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 these were to be fairly and democratically conducted.

In 1974 he wrote to British MP Enoch Powell congratulating him on his call to British voters to back Labour in the General Election of that year as offering the best means of frustrating UK membership of the EEC, and he received a friendly reply. This election led to the defeat of Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath, who had led the UK into the EEC, and Powell's leaving the Conservative Party to join the Ulster Unionists.

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 the UK's accession to the EU. On that occasion he shared platforms at No-side meetings with the Labour Party's Tony Benn in West London's Acton Town Hall and with Conservative Sir Richard Body and Labour's Peter Shore in East London's Beaver Hall.

In the 1990s he attended several conferences of the European Research Group (ERG), London, the lobby-group of UK Brexiteer MPs and others which had been founded by the late Michael Spicer MP. He has been friends for decades with Bill (Sir William) Cash MP, who is chairman of the House of Commons EU Scrutiny Committee and is a veteran Brexiteer and a member of the ERG.

Last month Sir William Cash responded to receipt of this Centre's congratulatory statement on the UK election results by writing to Anthony Coughlan: "Thank you so much for your analysis and helpful emails, which is why we have always agreed with one another. As you know, I have been saying this for years and you have played a great part in the whole argument."

In the 1990s Coughlan was also chairman for some years of the international TEAM network (The European Alliance of EU-critical Movements). This linked together a wide range of democratic EU-critical bodies, mostly Scandinavian and British, on both political Left and Right.

In the 2001 Nice Treaty referendum Ireland's statutory Referendum Commission still retained the function of setting out the pros and cons of referendum propositions. Following discussion with Alan Dukes as chairman of the European Movement-Ireland and Anthony Coughlan as chairman of the National Platform, retired former Chief Justice Mr T.A. Finlay who was chairman of the Referendum Commission on that occasion, put the names and addresses of these two organisations in the Commission's booklet that was posted to all households in the State, as reputable bodies that could give citizen-voters information on the arguments for and against ratifying the Nice Treaty.

When Irish citizens voted No to ratifying Nice the then Government amended the Referendum Act to take away from the Referendum Commission this function of setting out the pros and cons of referendum propositions in order to push through this treaty unchanged in the second Nice Treaty referendum in 2002, which undid the result of the first.

In 2005 Dr Vaclav Klaus, then President of the Czech Republic, wrote a lengthy introduction to a booklet which Anthony Coughlan had written criticising the EU's proposed Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. Dr Klaus's think-tank, the Centre for Economy and Politics, published this booklet in the Czech language.

In May that year President Klaus chaired a lecture by Coughlan on the proposed EU Constitution in the Automobile Club, Prague. This was attended by several hundred people, including much of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Czech Republic. There were questions from the audience following the lecture, at the end of which Dr Klaus said that he had not an iota of disagreement with any of the answers Coughlan had given.

Shortly after this event the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe was rejected by the French and Dutch peoples in referendums, following which some 99% of its provisions were repackaged in the form of amendments to the existing EU treaties, so that their effects were virtually impossible for lay people to understand (The 1% omitted referred to the EU flag, anthem and annual "Europe Day", 9 May, which therefore to this day have no legal basis in the EU treaties).

This repackaged "Constitution for Europe" was titled the Treaty of Lisbon. The French and Dutch peoples were denied referendums on this however – the only EU State to be allowed a referendum on Lisbon being Ireland. When Irish voters rejected the Lisbon Treaty on a turnout of over half the electorate in 2008, the Irish Government pushed it through unchanged in the second Lisbon Treaty referendum held the following year, 2009.

Anthony Coughlan debated the pros and cons of EU integration with the late Dr Garret FitzGerald (1926-2011) on numerous occasions over the years, but especially during the 1972 EEC Accession referendum. A year or two before he died Dr FitzGerald met his erstwhile antagonist at a public lecture in TCD and on greeting him the former Taoiseach wagged his finger facetiously and remarked, "You are the enemy"! Dr FitzGerald was one of the founders of the European Movement in Ireland and remained a dedicated champion of supranational euro-federalism throughout his political career.

Successive editions of Coughlan's "Critical Notes on the EU: A handbook for European democrats whether politically centre, left or right" have been widely used by Irish, British and continental EU-critics for decades.

People have been urged to use this and translate it into their own languages without any need of reference to or acknowledgement of its source. Copies of the most recent version of this document may be obtained from this EU Research and Information Centre for €20 to cover the expense of photocopying and postage.

Anthony Coughlan has collaborated over the years with his friend, former Danish MEP Jens-Peter Bonde, in particular in assisting with the compilation of the invaluable Index to the latter's Reader-Friendly Edition of the Lisbon Treaty/Consolidated EU Treaties and Bonde's lexicon of EU terms, for which see www.EUABC.com

Issued by the National Platform EU Research and Information Centre, 24 Crawford Avenue, Dublin 9, on the occasion of the UK's "Brexit Day", Friday 31 January 2020