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NO.292 P.5

**SPEECH BY THE TAOISEACH MR BERTIE AHERN AT THE ANNUAL WOLFE TONE
COMMEMORATION, BODENSTOWN, SUNDAY, 19 OCTOBER 1997 AT 12.15 PM
APPROX**

The United Irishmen, of which Wolfe Tone was a leading light, were a society of democrats centred in Belfast and Dublin. The Belfast-Dublin corridor was in those days a corridor of liberty and democracy. At that time to be a democrat was to be a subversive, undermining a grossly unequal political order, based on the type of domination and privilege that was being swept away by the French Revolution.

An entry in Tone's diary for 19 August 1792 on his journey through the North records:

'Ride to Rostrevor, more and more in love with it; dinner, thirty people, many of them Protestant, invited on the occasion. Dr. Moody, the Dissenting Minister, says grace; bravo, all very good, toasts excellent. United Irishmen mentioned again, and the idea meets universal approbation; hope it may do; wonderful to see how rapidly the Catholic mind is rising, even in this Tory town'.

Our Presidential candidate Mary McAleese, originally from Belfast, is a resident of the same Rostrevor, a beautiful town beneath the Mourne Mountains. She has worked in the South in Trinity and in RTE. It has been her job as Pro-Vice Chancellor in Queen's Belfast to unite Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter, to bring together on a daily basis in a working environment people of all political and religious traditions, and to try and move attitudes forward to the Information Age and the pluralist tolerance which people nowadays expect as a right. No one has the right to question her Irishness, for which she and her family once had to suffer, or her total commitment to peace on this island.

Mary McAleese's candidacy reflects our original ideals as a party. She is someone extraordinarily well qualified, who brings together a wide knowledge and experience of working with people and institutions North and South. Her candidacy reflects our openness as a society to people from all backgrounds and traditions to play a part in the political life of this country. As President, she will be more than Head of State. She will also be the symbolic embodiment of the nation in all its extent. I know she will approach the sensitivities