

## Not Yet an Irish University

DEADLOCK has been reached in the discussions for uniting Trinity College, Dublin, and University College, Dublin, into a new University of Dublin. Since the grandiloquent announcement by the Irish Government, in April 1967, that the two colleges would merge, there have been endless discussions, arguments and a national debate caused by the religious and historical differences between the two colleges. Trinity College, already Dublin University in its own right, founded by Elizabeth I in 1591, traditionally a part of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, has often seemed so indifferent to Irish affairs as to earn the comment "the prop and pillar of the oppressors". University College, founded in the mid-nineteenth century, has been since 1908 the largest of the three colleges in the National University of Ireland. (The others are Cork and Galway.) With 10,000 students, it also understandably considers itself a university in its own right.

The merger springs from a report of the Commission on Higher Education, which suggested in 1967 that the three colleges should grow independently so as to accommodate 27,000 students by 1975. With what has happened in the past two years, it is impossible now to tell whether the original motives for the merger proposal were educational, economic, religious or political.

Trinity has been a stumbling block from the beginning. Although the college is open to Catholics, the Catholic Hierarchy forbids it to Catholic youths "under mortal sin". The result is that the student population at Trinity has not been representative of Ireland; only 40 per cent of it was drawn from Eire in 1965-66.

What can the colleges hope to gain from the Government's decision to side-track the Church and form a new multi-denominational university? UCD is keen for both colleges to disband completely and start again as a new university. Different faculties would exist in each college, arts chiefly in Trinity and science in UCD. In this scheme, UCD would dominate the 4,000 students of Trinity whose traditions of free speech and original thought might well be lost. In any case, such specialist colleges would not be educationally sound and the merger would also become a take-over bid, for Trinity requires financial aid and government support if its academic standards are to be maintained. This is why Trinity only favours a

merger in which the identity of the two colleges is maintained.

Both colleges are unhappy about the Government's announcement in August 1968 that the administrative board of the new university would have representatives from both colleges and also from the Government, which would thus gain a measure of control over the faculties, their staff and buildings. Thus the colleges would lose a great deal of independence and the Government would gain power in the university. Under this scheme, liberal arts and science would be taught in both colleges, while medicine and law would be in Trinity, and engineering, agriculture, social science and business studies would go to UCD. But UCD does not want to lose two professional schools, particularly medicine, which is one of its oldest faculties.

Another problem is the choice of teaching hospitals. At present, Trinity and UCD give clinical teaching in specific Dublin hospitals and it was suggested that one of these should be developed into the main teaching centre. Unfortunately, the new St Vincent's Hospital is geographically unsuitable for Trinity. The alternative, of developing a large medical school at the College of Surgeons, now a small school independent both of Trinity and UCD, would mean moving medical education from the strong university science departments.

This particular case illustrates the enormous technical difficulties of a merger. Particularly offensive to Trinity is the suggestion that the new university would include Maynooth (a college for Catholic clergy), training colleges and technical colleges. The majority of both Trinity and UCD staff are at the moment against the merger and favour good relationships and liaison between two independent universities.

What will happen next is a matter for conjecture. So far, a Higher Education Authority has been set up to legislate and plan for an eventual Irish University Congress which will implement government decisions. There is a General Election next summer. The opposition party, Fine Gael, has influential supporters in the powerful UCD. Should Fine Gael win, the position might change very quickly. Meanwhile, nothing happens. The Government and the Church have nothing to say, but the two camps are far from reticent among each other.



Front Square, Trinity College.



One of the new buildings at Belfield, University College, Dublin.