

## Graduation 2011

### Acceptance Speech by Honorary Graduate Chris Mullin

Chancellor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman, watching the parade of students, graduates coming up to shake hands with the Chancellor, two thoughts occurred to me, the first was that today's students are rather more respectable than those of my generation. I was at university in the late 1960's. And secondly, of a conversation I had with an actress called Prunella Scales, who played the queen in the Allen Bennett play, A Question of Attribution. And she played her brilliantly, some of you may remember it and I asked her, had the queen ever indicated to her that she'd seen this performance and she said, well the queen didn't come to the play and the theatre but she did get invited to a big reception at Buckingham Palace where they all had to queue up and shake hands with the queen in rather the same way as today's graduates have been doing. And she said, just as she was pulling away, the queen whispered in her ear "I suppose you think you should be doing this".

Thank you for the honour, conferred upon me. As we have heard I am by birth an Essex man, I was born in Chelmsford, a few miles down the road from here and attended secondary school at Ipswich in Suffolk, a few miles up the road from here. However, my ambition was to be a labour MP and given the general shortage of labour votes in Essex, it made sense to move further north. Although people in the north are very hospitable, rejoicing at my selection in 1985 was not unconfined, a couple of days after I was selected, an editorial appeared in the Daily Mail and it was headed 'poor Sunderland, at first its football team is relegated and now comes even worse news'. I would just like to make three short points if I may?

First, to express satisfaction at what I hope is the implosion of the Murdoch Empire. This has been a good week for democracy, as the Chancellor mentioned in his opening remarks, we've had our difficulties recently but this has been a pretty good week for democracy it seems to me, when the great Oligar, a man who until now has always operated in the shadows, has had to go to parliament and prostrate himself before the elected representatives of the British people. The free flow of information is the life blood of democracy and you cannot have a free flow of information where a handful of mega rich individuals and corporations own most of what we see and breath and shamelessly abuse their power. Sixteen years ago on January 11 1995, I introduced into parliament, the media diversity bill which would have restricted newspaper earner ship to one daily and one Sunday per proprietor and limited the amount that the percentage ownership of a television company which anyone who owned national newspapers could have and vice versa, there were not many takers for that at the time but it's good to see that the idea is becoming fashionable again. What goes around comes around, although actually the Oligarchs took the bill rather more seriously than my political contemporaries and one by one they each invited me to lunch to discuss the matter.

My second point is this and it's addressed in particular to the younger folk here today, never lose sight of your good fortune in having been bought up and educated in a democracy, we take for granted the fact that we live in a Country, where for all its imperfections, we elect our rulers, where we can hold them to account albeit imperfectly and ultimately should we choose, dismiss them, without bloodshed and the fruits of democracy are considerable, we take it for granted in this country that if we turn on the tap, clean water will come out, we flick a switch, and light comes on, such things cannot be taken for granted in much of the world and it was not always so in our Country here as in most of the developed world.

Democracy has delivered universal primary education and secondary education, free health care, old age pensions and in the work place, a revolution, paid holidays, sickness pay, redundancy pay, a minimum wage, maternity and paternity leave, above all, democracy has given us freedom from fear, we can speak our minds without a visit from the thought police. And in short, democracy and yes that stained word, politics, has brought us most of the things we take for granted and the essential ingredients of civilised life. Defend it, nourish it, play your part in it, but above all, avoid cynicism. Cynicism is a corrosive disease which I urge you to resist and finally to all those of you who are graduating today, my best wishes for a long, happy and youthful life, remember education does not finish on the day that you leave university, you will be on a learning curve for the rest of your life. And that's not to be regretted, it is to be enjoyed. And if as many of you will, you achieve success in life, make sure you put something back into the world, don't just take, take, take and I leave you with one final thought; there is more to life than shopping.