

JH: A remark you passed earlier, before we started the interview was to create a job was an act of patriotism

BO'R: Yes. I remember when I was told by one of the principal civil servants that when the jets come you will have a thousand people redundant, and there will be a thousand redundancies in the airport and I remember saying something like this to my father and he said "the most important thing in life is create work for others, if you can". And I know that that comment had a lot to do with the Industrial Zone decision that I was thinking in terms first of all of employing some of the thousand that were threatened with redundancy. On the other hand I think the civil servants felt that I was doing it to get air freight instead of passengers, to a certain extent that had an effect on me because I went out to look at what was going on in other parts of the world, including between North and South America. Especially down to, what do you call the canal between, Panama. I got off in Panama and I was quite helped by what I saw in Panama although it was on a relatively small scale and it was mainly warehousing of goods that would be brought in by ship and then picked up by air and brought to South America, or to North America and I think that that and what I saw in one of the islands, the name won't come to me now, that the Americans were helping, the readymade factories in advance helped my thinking.

JH: Just to return to the Foynes of the time, the impression we would get would that, the driving force really was pride. Pride in what Irish people could do, and not only do it as well as others, but better. Could we touch on that type, that sort of idea?

BO'R: Well, I mean the secret of progress in any business is that those who were running it, not just the management of the day to day workers, are interested in it, not just interested but excited by it, and I think early on the

fact that we were giving food, which in a lovely setting actually because the good situation that we had from the point of view of the interior decor was transferred and the uniforms that they had were báinín jackets, I mean they knew what we were saying, so they said “this is Ireland and we are not ordinary people”. The staff took that to heart, I think, early on and particularly having taken over from the British successfully and having it written. Because in those days crossing the Atlantic was a big event and big people were doing it and they were saying things about it and I remember Maeve Fitzgibbon, one of the publicists that we had, produced a small brochure on *What they say about Shannon Catering* and a whole lot of comments, very good comments, so that the people that were running the catering side, and they were fortified once we got into liquor, and the first Duty Free Shop in the world, were very proud of what was happening and were anxious to make a go of it. So in this situation that Shannon is now threatened, this is what has to be done again. The staff have got to be excited about doing something that most people aren't prepared to admit can be done, they have got to find a way of making it almost a must. People used to ask, “we want to go en route to Europe but we want to stop down at Shannon”. So there is, we have had such a tragic national experience, when you come to think of it, when I think back on it, that if we think we are part of the generation that is getting us out of it, and really not going back again and that it can be done in one spot, and was done in one spot. That is what I think is the future of Shannon

JH: In introducing the last section you mentioned about going to America for six weeks on the Marshall Plan funded project. And you mention it as a period of reflection. And it struck me that you had been a very busy man, you had been working from dawn to dusk, through the night and whatever in Shannon from '45 onwards and this six week period of reflection, some would say it was almost like a retreat in a way. You were pulling away from your day to day activities, indeed your night time activities, working all hours around the clock. And this pulling away enabled you to reflect on

your situation and on the situation of Shannon. And you also mentioned something very interesting that instead of coming back on, flying back, you decided to come back on the ship. Again probably for, would I be right in saying, giving you a space, time? And I just wondered would you have some thoughts on that, on the need say, for business men, business people, the need for entrepreneurs, the need for planners to step back for a while, to get out of the day to day

BO'R: We have brains and we have imagination. Imagination is in many instances more important than brains; it is part of the creator. The Creator's vast knowledge residing there that we know nothing about, but we have been gradually been given the ability to recreate, we are creators; we are in fact, part of the Creator. If we are required, and there is a must about it then that power comes into operation and I mean, inventions, a particular one that we have touched upon here, was the massive amount of creation that had to be put in to splitting the atom. There were thousands, I don't know, as many as fifty thousand people involved in their brains and they move into that and at that time it was possible only to do it, because it was a must. There had to be a must breakthrough otherwise we may lose this war, because they will get it, the Germans will get it. But it wasn't possible to get that many brains working on it unless we had already succeeded in generating ways of communicating new methods of all kinds, in other words one invention leads to the other and the greatest invention of all was the ability to bring so many minds together. Now we are in a period when there's an immense intercom linkage and it is possible for the world to talk to one another in a way we couldn't do before. And our talk of course has been the great division between us and animals and our ability to write and our ability to communicate. So we are in a time of great creativity. I often wonder how I succeeded and I think I succeeded because I realised early on that creativity meant the exchange with others. I remember one member of the staff, he was a porter and I used to consult with porters, waiters, whoever they were, and get their ideas. He said to somebody else who said it back to me "the boss doesn't know how to get things done, he has to ask us all". So I said I would have to find some way of counteracting that. So I said "that is the most important thing that is going on here, is that we are all creators". The result of course, of that, is that I have got a lot of credit for things and ideas that would have come from

others, and particularly from the man who was next in command to me, Jack Ryan, who took over when I handed over eventually. He did an enormous amount and has never got, probably, credit for it. And indeed his wife, who had worked for me in the Falls Hotel and in the Old Ground and eventually ran the two- hundred -bedroom hostel at the airport, also. I mean there are a whole lot of people like that who were around me. Because I was head of the operation a lot of the credit is focused on me which really belongs to others, I think anyway. But we will see. I think that I am very lucky at eighty eight to have the opportunity to talk with you, John. Because when my father was eighty eight I realised he used to tell me so many stories about what happened during the war against the Tans particularly. I once got that kind of equipment and sat him down and I said "I want you to tell me some of the stories". Well he said "I have to hear the play back first". When I played it back for him he said "oh I am too old now, I couldn't do it". So I lost the opportunity.

JH: That was a pity. Just leading on a little bit from there, you mentioned a about the contribution of others and about listening to others and consulting others and of course what your porter said was quite profound because it implies that the boss had all the answers. But the boss realised that he didn't have all the answers and that he had to change that culture, I suppose. But of course that would have been the predominant view of the time. The man at the top knew everything. Because he was the head, because, he had the head. But you began to see, you saw things differently. It was very much a team thing because there were regular brain storming in the fifties of the group and it is fair to say, it is written in that book at the end, in the Bernard Share book, that the creativity came out of these brain storming

BO'R: Yes, brain storming is a very interesting one because it creates ideas coming from around the table and the competitive urge is touched as well. And somebody, who never used his brain to think creatively suddenly he begins to say "oh look, do I now have a creative brain". And they are forced into it; of course we know that the brain is a most complex operation, two sides to it, and all kinds of corners that haven't been invaded as yet by humanity. So I mean there is no doubt about it with the world ahead it is very important and that we the Irish having a lot of problems to overcome, we have got to delve into those brains of ours, to help the young

particularly get over the terrible excesses, smoking and all that kind of stuff. And I think that Shannon needs to be highlighted from time to time as a creative centre and then they will say "I'm not giving anything to it" and they will get a guilty situation, so in other words if you are working at Shannon you have to be part of its creator, you have to create it. And of course, Ireland is changing anyway, changing fundamentally on the religious side and a strange thing that you gave me the Taizé book, you know, because that is the creative person and he has attracted the young from all over Europe to it

JH: And his creativity came out of threat

BO'R: It did

JH: And that is what it came out of. It didn't come out of a comfortable peaceful situation; it came out of the threat of

BO'R: Tell me that John, what was that?

JH: Well it came out of the time when he was, out of the beginning of the war and he was on that line between occupied France and unoccupied France, and he started to help Jewish people to come out of, to get into Switzerland and there was a possibility that himself and his sister would have been arrested and would have been sent to a concentration camp. He was very close to it, missed it. But it was out of that awful time that this creativity for peace and the creativity to help people, essentially somebody said that the father of Taizé is the father of Hitler. That Taizé wouldn't exist without Adolf Hitler. I heard somebody say that in Uganda, the father of ecumenism in Uganda was Idi Amin, because it made the Christians to come together.

Could I just ask you maybe to begin to wind up. You mentioned there, creativity. You mentioned brain storming, you mentioned consultation, listening to people, you mentioned the idea of giving everybody in an organisation a sense that they can create, that their ideas are important. And that their ideas can be building blocks to the whole of the organisation. Nobody should feel left out, no matter if it is the porter or whoever, in the organisation. Would you say that as time has gone on, say from the fifties and the nineteen sixties, and that as Shannon developed and settled down,

let's say, into a more orthodox type of agency, that that side of things began to be left behind, that the sense of being pioneers, the creative urge in some way, might have been underused

BO'R: You can't have creativity without massive cooperation. Because one person is not enough for creativity and you can't have cooperation unless there is a very strong element of respect built into it. So I remember saying once to the man who was looking after the men's cloakroom, "you have the best job here really because you are giving an example that will be noted". And he did do that. I have often worried about people who have to look after men's toilets and I realised that unless management was able to give them a feeling of the importance of what they are doing, in other words, there has to be respect between the employer and the worker, particularly the worker who is doing the really dirty jobs. And that can tackle something in his mind that would be otherwise turned backwards; you know "what good am I looking after the men's toilet". So there is a question of, you know, Christ talks about it all the time, that, I can't remember now, but you know what I mean about – the possibility that in our time there is going to be a change in religious attitude, in other words that we have to love one another and respect one another could make a wonderful world, people would feel "I mustn't let the day go by without making somebody happy". Or "I mustn't let the day go by without picking up papers" and let the generation that is coming up that you shouldn't do that. That is not an easy thing to do. But you would be astonished at what that has led me to do, I mean I can't go out now for a walk without making sure, somebody yesterday who was looking at me and I said "I made a resolution, I am going to do this", and I am probably responsible for fifty less being here in the last month than the month before, there were dogs poohs, I am talking about [laughter]. Well I found an expertise having an old broken branch that had a flat thing and I am able to fire them into the hedge now and do it quite expertly! [laughter]. Well my mind says well you are eighty six, but you're doing that much anyway and these fellas who are running, they will keep running as long as this place isn't covered over with dog's poohs!

JH: It reminds me of Ghandi. There is a great story about Ghandi, and of course it was the human version of waste he was talking about. It was only the very lowest people in the caste system who were removing the human waste, but Ghandi used to do it and his attitude was you didn't preach, but

if you did it they would see you and then that was all you needed, so you remind me of Ghandi [laughter]

JH: OK, so we a lot of

CO'C: In terms of leadership style, you certainly weren't adversarial in any way, so like, what was your psychology in leadership?

BO'R: I think of course that humanity is a miracle, I mean we are, it is evident to all of us that we are part of the Creator, if we weren't part of the Creator, which we are told we are, He couldn't have become part of us. We are therefore not just humans, but we are, and we are given opportunities to do exceptional things and particularly if we love one another and I think that was very apparent between the management, we were very good friends and we were excited at what we were doing. But –

JH: The word that would come to mind with me, there are four key words that come to mind with me as we talk to you. One is quality, and the provision of quality service to people. And the need for that, that had come to you at a very early stage perhaps even in your German experience, or your experience in training in hotel management. The other, participation, you seem to put a value on getting people involved and feeling that an essential part of providing a quality service was a sense that people could play a part, that every individual had something to say. You quoted the last, a great story, of asking I think one of the porters, or somebody like that, what should be done. And afterwards it got back to you that he said, "well when the boss has to ask me what has to be done, he mustn't be a great leader" [laughter]. But that notion of participation, you seem to have grasped, that everybody could participate in the success of Shannon, and that seemed to be key

BO'R: I remember saying to one of the porters in the men's toilet on one occasion, "you know you have one of the most important jobs in this

organisation, because you can be like what no other porter is like, you can give them a smile and say something nice to him, which you really won't be done

And what was his name again, McGlynn, he became quite an important photographer after a while

CO'C: And a great theatrical talent

JH: I would like to come back to this again, we might devote a specific session to it. And the other words were, values, you identified core values in providing and working towards a service and that again that was the bedrock of good leadership, that you could refer back to core values. We will look at those again, we might ask you to even think about those in the weeks ahead. What were the essentials of your management style, we would like to sort of tap down into the bedrock of that in the future time

BO'R: I wouldn't like to put too much value on my style because I think in fact that what was happening in Shannon was a very unusual situation that the Irish were being exposed to people from abroad and that they had it within themselves, not necessarily coming from me, that they had it within themselves to realise the opportunity that arose. I find now, and maybe it comes from those days, that I try every day to relate helpfully to somebody and you will find that if you do that the other person will relate helpfully to you very fastly. And I think that's, and that might even be a smile or looking for something that has been said to acknowledge the talent of the other person. I think that is the important thing. I think the fact that we have succeeded in getting the Hotel School off the ground and that not only, and that particular idea I am talking about has a got a grip on the Hotel School and that they have succeeded in getting the University in Galway to want to regard them as a university and have brought DeValera's daughter and Garret Fitzgerald and so on, and a group of top university professors to so declare the Hotel School at Shannon, the same thing happening there, in other words, that they are being appreciated as being of great value. Well now, the value that they are, apart from running hotels well, is of course their relationship to other human beings. And the hotel that is successful can only be successful if the staff are happy and if the staff are happy they relate happily to the guests. And the guests are then happy. So there is a

power in hotel craft related to the horror that man has to overcome in his propensity for war and the fact that there are now a thousand hoteliers out of the Shannon School in the Middle East and elsewhere, who know that the School is now being branded as a School that has a university recognition is I think spreading that idea that hotels all over the world are welcoming people from foreign lands and therefore can play a major part in what has to be done worldwide to get rid of war, to get rid of war, we have to love the others who are living on this globe with us. And hoteliers have to begin it, in other words as a big movement ahead of humanity, I believe. And hoteliers, they are going to lead it where hotels are happy places no matter what kind of people are staying in them, because the staff have learned as the staff at Shannon learned this place is going to succeed if the people who are coming in hundreds every day, are happy. People smile at them and talk with them. I don't know whether I am exaggerating that now or not, but I don't think I am. I think that our future as humans on this globe is going to be greatly motivated by our ability in being friendly with other human beings. On a positive scale and I think that that is one of the things that Shannon will become known as, as the friendly airport, the friendly Hotel School training. I think that that's loving your neighbour

BO'R: I am beginning to think, in fact if we don't do something fairly startling now that we will go backwards, and that's why I think the Shannon situation is a possible, it can do possibly a second time, what I think it did before the Tiger Economy. But it has to do it in something that will be of a worldwide importance and there's nothing more important for the world than to get rid of war. And you can't get rid of it except that you are a people who know why it is caused, and it is caused by hunger and lack of knowledge, lack of education, and somebody wanting to dominate, selfishness, all of the things that are wrong. And I think that there is a great opportunity now to use the threat to Shannon, which is what got us a lot of things, and I am convinced that it is the small things that really matter. Like that welcome that we talked about, too. And I was recently in England, I know I am straying away from your -, I was recently in England and I went with my son-in-law to see one of the parks in England. There are four of

them. I think they can put up about a thousand people. This one was in the Sherwood Forest, that is what's his name, the British Robin Hood. And it was a wonderful concept really, of a place you would go and have your holidays no matter what happened to the weather. You would be alright, with a huge dome in it with a great swimming area and walks through the trees covered in, and bicycles for everybody. I can remember thinking we need one of those to take a thousand people in the Shannon area

BO'R: To be born in 1917 and see the air travel, to see the first Americans walking down the main lounge in Shannon, it was an exciting thing for me. It was extraordinary and that's why I am so convinced now that Shannon has a great future. It is why I am convinced that the people who worked there, like Cian and others, were Irishmen able to adapt quickly to a new world, imaginative, powerful, powerfully visualising a future quite different, and the most exciting thing of all I think that Shannon was the first Free Airport in the world, it was the first to set out an industrial zone, it was the first in a whole lot of things, in fact, if we started talking about it and it is going to, I believe, be the first airport that has a hotel school which is a university backed – the first airport that has adopted teaching in regard to how to get rid of, for hoteliers of atmosphere of conflict, in other words to try and make it necessary for all businesses, if they are going to survive, to do something about education in regard to human relations. And I think it is going to be the first airport that will rescue Dublin from frightful congestion, which all of us who live in Dublin now, know is happening to a degree that we won't be able to drive properly, if it keeps up. There has to be a breakdown on that which Lemass and Leydon were on to at the time that the Industrial Zone was supported. And there has to be two operations as big as the industrial zone and the new town. I could name two, I am not going to do it now in this interview, but it has to be done, not just for the sake of the west of Ireland but for the sake of all of Ireland. That is why I am reluctant to use whatever time I have and experience that I have had on the very good work that you are proposing to do

BO'R: And now when I am trying to keep going at eighty six I usually add onto a mantra which I use, Maranatha, thank you God. Because I have had a very lucky life, I feel and I am still having it. And that what we are talking

about at this interview has immense potential, I feel, for the future. And it may also prove to the money sources that we need to do the things we talk about, that there is a wonderful possibility of using those years of success in regard to Shannon. They have certainly have been great years of success, to break into new ground altogether from the position that we are in nationally, relative to the future. The backward movement we seem to be making from the Tiger Economy, we need something startling at Shannon to help the overbalance that is going on in regard to Dublin which is dreadful from the point of view of Dublin people, I believe and the only way to counter it is almost on the basis that has been suggested by the former President of Limerick University, have you seen that paper that he has produced?

JH: Would it be fair to say that as you progressed that you began to learn, that you began to see how important these interpersonal relationships were? You have touched on it before, you have mentioned it in relation to Foynes, and employing people that were well educated, who would be a credit to the country as they dealt with people from other places. And that interpersonal, that was very important, it wasn't just a case of putting good food on the table, but it was the interpersonal relationship between, say waiter or waitress and the customer and the traveller, that that began to take on quite a significance

BO'R: Well I think that point you are making now is of great importance because it is, it proved during those years, a dominant factor in the success of Shannon and I believe that it will, if it is recreated, which it can be, then it will be a dominant factor again, because generally now airports are changed from that was then. But if you have an airport that sets out to stress the human aspect of it, so that all of those who are working at it realise that their relationship with the passenger is of prime importance. That they somehow or other find a way of making the airport the friendliest and the nicest and the most human that they have experienced. Then it will become very evident and people will talk about it and – when I was recently talking in Newmarket-on-Fergus, this particular one, I said that, that the villages all around the airport who supplied the workers can take steps now that will ensure that the airport will not lose its prominence. One of the ways by which I think it will take place will be related to those who live in these villages, most of whose families would have connections of some kind with Shannon, that they will decide to make

the Shannon region a very special region from the point of view of welcoming whoever comes to stay in it and that the number of Bed and Breakfasts will double or treble once it becomes unfashionable to be doing Bed and Breakfast and then that they will be tied into the Bed and Breakfasts other entertainments of all kinds, so that the region will become a model of tourist welcome. And that can be done at very little cost, but once it has to be sold and promoted and I think that will happen

JH: Could we look just briefly at the common factors, say the factors in the 1950s and the factors today, the common thing. I suppose the most obvious is that there is a threat, and that threat was certainly there in the 1950s, they were talking about rabbits on the runways, rabbits in Rineanna. Today we have similar threat. But that threat in the 1950s gave rise to a creativity and what you are arguing is that the contemporary threat should also give rise to creativity. That there is opportunity there and it is just a question of where the opportunity lies. And you have particular suggestions in that regard

BO'R: Yes I think that we are very lucky in fact, to have the threat to Shannon arising at this time because it is evident that for the first time in world history war has got a dirty name instead of a glorious name and it is also evident that it can't continue because we have been released into the very secrets of creation with the atomic power and Teilhard de Chardin who has written the most wonderful book on the progress of mankind talk about the atomic power being a great opportunity, suddenly we are presented with a great opportunity which has come about by a great necessity and the great necessity has created another great necessity, to stop it so that it will never be used other than it was twice here. The danger is that it is not just war that we have to contend with now, but the use of enormous powerful weapons by almost non war by terrorism and then there is going to be a lot of effort put into anybody who claims fairly realistically that we have a way of doing it, we know how to do it. It was interesting last night to listen to Gerry Adams being interviewed on the Late Late Show and anybody who listened to it will realise that our position between, we will say, the victors of the past and those that have been colonised without wanting to be colonised that we have a great chance of making friendship with him, in a way that will give a need to other countries as to how to do it. And indeed Shannon already took a major step in setting up Co-operation North which is now called Co-operation Ireland, so it got that idea from cooperation at the airport, because it became

apparent you could only succeed in running an airport successfully if there was a very high level of cooperation between many races, because many races were using it, so we became an airport which found a method of cooperation of business cooperation, which made it a very successfully run airport. That is probably Shannon's great chance now

BO'R: to play with adjuncts that can be handled by NGOs like the Centre for International Cooperation, or the Irish Peace Institute, both of which were located at Shannon and are now located in the university in Limerick which has great interest in them. So for the first time we have universities beginning to think basically one of our great educational worries is now with us and that it is how to educate the world to do without war

JH: I think you will probably agree in saying that aviation

has for so long been associated with war and it developed as a result of war needs and the needs of certain kinds, has an enormous contribution to make to peace

BO'R: It has and of course it has also shown that it can make an enormous contribution to the kind of thing that happened when the towers were taken down, that in other words that they can be lethal weapons. So it has to be done and I mean it is pretty well acknowledged that anything that the human brain can get big backing on can be achieved and I suppose the kind of aircraft that have been created are the greatest proof of that, they are constantly improving and you have a situation where the brain that man has is capable once it concentrates and when he is put on any one thing such as going into outer space, I mean the kind of techniques and studies that have to be brought about now, to begin to explore the universe are all of minor consequence

BO'R: we are going to have to have small units working with county councils to do what Shannon did for the Shannon region and probably even to get over Shannon's present danger of being over-flown again. We have to get increased the number of hotel rooms in the mid-west on a big scale and

while we are waiting to do that we have got to get a dramatic improvement in Bed and Breakfasts all over the region for the sake of the airport and that has got to have built in around it what happens after breakfast. In other words, entertainment, good restaurants and entertainment at night where one can get a good dinner, so that one will know that if we get off in the mid-west there is a new situation there where the Irish have brought us close to their living situations with their organisation working to make sure the Bed and Breakfast is at least as good as the best hotels and that there is an intimate friendship. Some kind of new thinking like that has got to be arranged and that could give, that could be one of the fastest things that would hold the jobs that are at the airport and that are in those villages. I mean when the first idea of getting them to get off was the one day medieval tour, it was really a tour of medieval because they finished up at night at the medieval banquet in Bunratty which was ready then. But the actual bus tour was even more interesting in that it brought it to the small villages, Cratloe and Sixmilebridge and Newmarket-on-Fergus, Quin and Ennis

JH: And Corofin?

BO'R: No, it was too far for that run and they finished up with the medieval dinner, but they were entertained to dancing in Sixmilebridge, in Joe Keane's pub, I couldn't let it use my own pub obviously, but they did use the Old Ground for entertainment

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