

**TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS** delivered by **DR E. CAROLINE HUSSEY**, Registrar, University College Dublin - National University of Ireland, Dublin on 25th April, 2002, in St. Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **PETER CASSELLS**.

Chancellor and Members of the University,

History will probably record the final quarter of the twentieth century as the second industrial revolution. Not only was it a period of dramatic technological advancement, but in Ireland it was also marked by significant social and political development which revolutionized the workplace and changed the lives of ordinary people. Peter Cassells played an important part in fomenting this revolution.

Peter Cassells joined the Irish Congress of Trades Unions in 1973 to the new position of Protective Legislation Officer. He was subsequently Economic and Social Affairs Officer and Assistant General Secretary, before becoming General Secretary in 1989. During Peter's time in ICTU, under the leadership of Donal Nevin and, during his own term as General Secretary, the trade union movement itself underwent major changes. It is surprising now to recall that Congress opposed Ireland's application to the EEC and canvassed actively for a No vote in the 1973 referendum, warning against a drift of jobs and capital away from the periphery to the centre of the proposed economic union. One of Peter's first tasks in Congress was to reverse this negative attitude and develop a European policy for ICTU. His success can be gauged by the enthusiasm with which Congress subsequently embraced European economic policies and social thinking. Peter himself became active on ETUC, and an Executive Committee member, the European Competitiveness Group and the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions.

At home, Congress increasingly recognised the importance of national legislation to underpin social progress, and Peter Cassells had a major influence on legislation for Equal Pay, Employment Equality, Health and Safety, Rights of Part-time workers, a Minimum Wage and Maternity Leave. He also played a key role in effecting cultural change on issues such as tax evasion, community development and social inclusion. The contribution of the trade union movement to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Congress, one of the few political entities with all-Ireland membership, has been consistent in opposing sectarianism and promoting conflict resolution.

As General Secretary of ICTU, Peter Cassells was a member of countless committees, Commissions and Authorities; a list of the more important is itself a social history of our times; the Employment Equality Authority, the Barrington Commission on Health and Safety, the Commission on Social Welfare, the Culliton Review of Industrial Policy, the National Economic and Social Council. With this range of experience, it was appropriate that Peter should be appointed Chairman of Forfás in 1999.

Perhaps the most tangible evidence of Ireland's social development has been in the area of industrial relations. The seventies and early eighties were characterized by serious industrial unrest and a multiplicity of strikes which sapped industrial energy and competitiveness. The advent of centralized bargaining and national wage agreements in 1987 began to restore harmony to the workplace and to foster the concept of partnership between workers, employers and government. Initially, national agreements were concerned principally with pay and conditions, but as the

philosophy of partnership evolved, and the influence of the voluntary sector increased, the agreements expanded to embrace much wider concepts of social inclusion, and address issues such as access to education, better health services and childcare.

The establishment of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance was a natural outgrowth of this philosophy, and Peter Cassells was a natural choice as its first executive chairman. Speaking at its launch last October, the Taoiseach, Mr Ahern, described the Centre as *an important driver for change at organisational level*, and said of its new chairman that *his experience, reputation and contacts will be an invaluable asset in embedding partnership and performance in the enterprise and the workplace*. There could hardly have been a worse juncture at which to undertake such a task: Ireland's economy was trembling with uncertainty in reaction to local and global events; the near-collapse of the "dot.com" sector, the global downturn in economic growth, the aftermath of September 11th and, closer to home, the foot-and-mouth crisis. However, with his characteristic phlegmatic courage, Peter has been working quietly and effectively to set out his stall, so that, as the green shoots emerge after the economic winter, the Centre is positioned to assist business, trades unions and the public sector to respond quickly to change and challenge.

With his multiple commitments to policy development and implementation, the question of spare time interests might be redundant. Yet Peter finds time to be Vice-President of the Peoples' College, and a board member of the Irish Wheelchair Association and the Bridge Project for rehabilitating young offenders. Horseracing and football have been lifelong passions; Peter is neither an ABU nor an ABM and sees nothing incongruous in being an ardent supporter of both the Meath county team and Manchester United.

*PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:*

*Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totaeque Academiae.*