

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **PROFESSOR JAMES WALSH**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth on 1 December 2011 in the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **KIERAN MULVEY**

A Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Kieran Mulvey is a most worthy recipient of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*. Mr Mulvey has had a distinguished career in the field of labour relations, and is widely recognised as a creative, courageous and visionary leader who has provided an outstanding contribution to public service in Ireland, particularly in his role as Chief Executive of the Labour Relations Commission over the past twenty years.



Kieran was born in the early 1950s in Roscommon town. His childhood years were dominated by the ravages of emigration which enkindled in Kieran a keen sense of justice and equality, and an ambition to make Ireland a better place for future generations. Kieran was also strongly influenced by the expertise and perfectionism that his father brought to his work as a highly skilled mosaic craftsman, and he is particularly proud of his father's work on the mosaics in the Garden of Remembrance, Galway Cathedral, and the terraza floors that adorn the National Museum.

Following second level education in Roscommon, and with the benefit of a scholarship, he entered UCD in 1970 to study History and English. Kieran soon became active in student politics. He was elected Deputy President of the UCD Student Council and also Deputy President of USI. I was a student in Belfield at that time and recall vividly the dark haired, bearded activist with a deep rural accent making strenuous efforts to mobilise student interest in matters such as grants and the need to widen access to higher education. In 1973 he led us from Belfield to the city centre to join the largest ever protest involving over 20,000 students.

After UCD it was no great surprise that he would seek to develop a career in the trade union movement. The first opportunity came in June 1975, when on his 24th birthday he became the youngest General Secretary ever appointed to a national trade union when the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) hired him as their first General Secretary.

He underwent a baptism of fire, as IFUT found itself on a collision course with the trustees of St Patrick's College, Maynooth. In a landmark case he led the IFUT defence of the fundamental values of academic freedom and tenure. A decision in favour of IFUT was handed down by the High Court, only to be subsequently overturned by a qualified decision of the Supreme Court in 1977.

Undeterred by the Maynooth experience he later obtained a signal victory for IFUT in a dispute against the State on the transferability into the Universities of the Devlin awards already provided to Higher Civil Servants.

In 1980 Kieran was appointed as Secretary General of the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI). Leading the ASTI at this time was no easy task as the Association was still struggling to escape from the legacy of the 'flower-power' era. However, his contemporaries still marvel at the way in which this 'loveable rogue', as they described him, managed to charm the members to move in from the fringe. The ASTI became a trade union and quickly began to gain influence within the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

The 1980s was a period of economic crisis in Ireland which was accompanied by a climate of poor industrial relations, including a bitter and protracted teachers' dispute with the government during which Kieran made his first high profile visit to Croke Park in 1986 where he addressed a crowd of 25,000 angry teachers.

Kieran Mulvey was among the first in the trade union movement to realise that a new approach to the resolution of industrial disputes was needed. On the advice of the National Economic and Social Council, in which ICTU were key participants, the concept of a national social partnership was launched. He was associated with the negotiation of the National Agreements in 1987 and 1990 which, many agree, were a significant contributor to the economic recovery in the 1990s.

The consensus-building experience acquired through the negotiation of the early national agreements prepared him well for his next career move in December 1991 when he was appointed as the first Chief Executive to the newly established Labour Relations Commission. Over the past twenty years he has been reappointed by governments comprised of all shades across the political spectrum, and is now in his fifth term of office. This must surely be one of the great survival records in the modern era and is an eloquent confirmation of the consistently high esteem in which he is held by representatives of workers, employers and government alike.

It was his commitment to consensus building that prompted him in late 2009, following the collapse of the national social partnership process, to volunteer his expertise to coordinate a new experiment in social dialogue. The outcome was the 'Croke Park Agreement' which has become a fundamental mainstay of the international agreement with the troika of the IMF, EU and ECB.

In addition to his role as CEO of the Labour Relations Commission Kieran has undertaken many other public service assignments in the areas of industrial relations and human rights both in Ireland and internationally. In 2010 he was appointed Chairman of the Irish Sports Council following his successful resolution earlier that year of the very complex dispute between the Cork GAA players and their county board.

In conferring the Degree of Doctor of Laws on Kieran Mulvey today the National University of Ireland recognises his sustained and outstanding public service contribution over many years. He has shown an extraordinary capacity to find solutions to very complex issues, and in so doing he has contributed to the emergence of a more stable society that has the resilience to grapple with the deep challenges that Ireland is now confronting. He is widely recognised as an independent and original thinker, a man of deep wisdom, commitment, courageous leadership and superb negotiating skills, and also as a person driven by a value system that prioritises the public interest and strives for solutions that achieve appropriate balances. I conclude as I began, Kieran Mulvey is a most worthy recipient of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

*PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:*

*Presento 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 totique Academiae.*