

Patsy Cronin

Reflection by SIPTU General Secretary, Joe O'Flynn, at the graveside of Patsy Cronin on Monday 4th November, Killorglin, county Kerry

It is my honour and privilege to be afforded this opportunity to reflect on the lifetime contribution to the trade Union and labour movement and his voluntary community work of our dear friend and long-time colleague, Patsy Cronin.

Patsy was born in Killorglin on the 7th March 1946 and following his education he commenced work in 1962 in Boyle and Sons in the town as a hardware assistant. From there he moved to Killarney Hoisery, better known subsequently as Pretty Polly, where he worked as a dispatch clerk. It was here that Patsy became active in the union, then the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union rising to the position of Chairman of the Section. It was around this time that Patsy also became involved with the Branch Committee, then operating out of Tralee.

In 1973, having reviewed its structures in Kerry the union decided to create a full time branch for the Killarney area.

Patsy was employed on the 12th February 1973 as the secretary of the new branch. This was unusual as he was one of the very few officials who joined the union at the promotional grade of branch secretary, but clearly from the very beginning his talent and abilities were already well recognised.

This proved to be an inspired decision by the Union as the membership of the new branch mushroomed from just over 900 members to in excess of 1600 in a short couple of years through Patsy's dedication and hard work. Specifically, Patsy spearheaded an organising campaign in the Hospitality and Tourism Sectors where he secured much improved rates of pay and conditions of employment for the hundreds of new workers who were to benefit from his organisation and negotiation skills.

He was well known for his tenacity and for the high level of support he gave to the many Shop Stewards, Activists and Members who grew so very fond of him over the long period of years that he was involved as their Official.

I also want to acknowledge Patsy's great work on behalf of Hotel and Catering Workers at national level, which involved him in national representations and negotiations with the Industrial Development Authority, CERT, which was the State Training Body at the time and FÁS, ensuring Patsy's reputation extended well beyond his beloved county. In fact, he was such a charismatic and personable character that he was very well known and hugely regarded the length and breadth of the country.

Patsy was one of those people that almost instantly commanded great affection and respect in equal measure and I never encountered anyone that ever had a bad word to say about him.

His commitment to social justice and to improving the lives of workers and their families did not just stop at the union gate as Patsy was involved in the Killarney Trades Council, he was a life-long and stalwart member of the Labour Party and also had a deep involvement in his local community. He made a significant contribution to improving the lives of his neighbours and friends and was an active member of the CYMS hall.

His role and contribution to the work of South Kerry Development Partnership, where he was chairperson up to his death, was widely regarded as making an important contribution in initiatives in addressing the economic and social challenges facing local communities. He used his vast experience and skills and his desire for social justice and fairness for the betterment of local areas in a voluntary capacity, remaining true to his strong sense of civic duty.

In 2009, Patsy was elected the first ever chairman of the Local Development Network, then a new organisation representing the interests of 50 local organisations across the country again reflecting the esteem and respect in which he was held.

Besides all of this work in helping to secure a better society, Patsy also found time to enjoy sport, especially his beloved golf. He was very proud indeed of his local club here in Killorglin and with good reason given its magnificent location. He was involved with his local GAA club and held many positions over the years and was a member of the local archive society.

Of course, we also know that he was involved with the Killorglin pantomime group and loved acting where he excelled at entertaining us with the wonderful talent that came so naturally to him. He never failed to secure a smile or a laugh even though sometimes we were at the receiving end of his wit and mimicking, including myself.

He will never be forgotten for his rendition of the story of the equal pay claim in Pretty Polly captured by Patsy in his own unique and inimitable style and enjoyed by so many when he had the numerous opportunities to welcome union conferences to his beloved Kerry. Indeed, his warm and friendly welcome always set the scene for what were wonderful gatherings of our members.

Patsy was a great friend for whom no task was too much trouble. His integrity, decency and loyalty were beyond question. Great traits in any human being. His work, commitment and dedication benefitted thousands of workers over his lifelong career as a trade union activist and union official and many a family enjoyed a much improved standard of living due to Patsy's unstinting efforts. We take this opportunity to salute Patsy's many achievements in fighting for a fairer, more equal and just society at every level where he gave of his considerable talent and generous spirit.

We in the trade union and the labour movement and all the other wonderful organisations that Patsy was involved with have lost a true comrade and a great friend.

Of course, Patsy's wife Mary Jo has lost her lifelong companion and soulmate. I know how much Patsy loved Mary Jo and indeed his daughter Murette and his son Tim who he cherished so deeply. On behalf of my fellow General Officers, the National Executive Council, the members and staff of the Union and his legion of friends and admirers, I want to express our deepest sympathy to Mary Jo, Murette, Tim, to Patsy's sisters, Teresa Marie and Eileen and brother, our colleague, Sylvester, and to the extended family on your sad loss of such a huge, unique and loveable character.