OBITUARY: EMERITUS PROFESSOR COLIN ANFIELD HUGHES, 1930-2017

Paul Reynolds[*]

Emeritus Professor Colin A. Hughes passed away on 30 June 2017, aged 87.

Colin was born and grew up in the Bahamas, where his father was a senior public servant in the British colonial administration.

Colin successfully studied for the Bar, graduated from Columbia University and then from the LSE with a PhD in the newish discipline of Political Science. He then came to Australia, initially to the ANU. In 1965 he was appointed to the newly created Chair of Political Science in the Department of Government at the University of Queensland. Around Australasia in the 1960s a number of such departments were being created, drawing from a variety of existing disciplines – Economics, History and Philosophy among others. Colin in part based his new department on that at Sydney University and established it as a tripartite venture: Australian politics, Asian and Southeast Asian politics (Vietnam and all that), and Public Administration, the last with its own Chair.

At this time Australian universities were primarily undergraduate teaching institutions. In the Humanities and most Social Science disciplines there was a smattering of coursework Masters programs but very little doctoral research. Colin's contribution was the Master of Public Administration specifically designed for state and federal public servants, police officers and, to some extent, the military. Interesting to recall is that International Relations was not taught because Colin had a gentleman's agreement with the History Department under the formidable Gordon Greenwood, that they (History) would continue to teach Diplomatic History with Glen Barclay, and Government would find other fields to plough. How times change.

Colin left UQ at the end of 1974 to take up a research position at the ANU which he duly occupied for the next decade. However in 1983 the Hawke Government was elected with a mandate, among others, to transform the electoral landscape and put electoral matters firmly beyond the grasp of politicians. This was tasked to Mick Young as Special Minister of State and his UQ Government Department graduate assistant Wayne Swan. The substantial result of their efforts was the establishment of the Australian Electoral Commission as a statutory authority and, because of his peerless reputation as a psephologist, the appointment of Colin as the first Commissioner. It was an extremely successful appointment and precedent for those to follow.

In 1989 Colin's term had expired and, as it happened, the Politics Chair at UQ was vacant. Colin applied and was duly appointed, but political developments once more intruded. That same year the Goss Government was elected and, in line with one of the recommendations of the Fitzgerald Inquiry report, established the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission under Tom Sherman with Colin as one of the panel of 5 experts to implement their mandate. Their first task was to end the hated gerrymander or, more accurately, the zonal system of vote weightage. This they did expeditiously and, while Colin protested (to me) that it was a joint effort, it had his fingerprints all over it.

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[*] Dr Paul Reynolds was Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Queensland, and until recently was Honorary Research Fellow at the Queensland Parliament.

Colin retired from academic and public life in 1999, but continued to advise, supervise and be an inspiration for those who sought him out. Always a modest, if not shy man, Colin was the last of the great generalist scholars, someone to whom the adjective 'erudite' could truly be bestowed. On a personal note, I was 29 when he appointed me to lecture at UQ in Australian politics and mentored me thereafter until he went to Canberra.

Vale Colin A. Hughes. You leave behind many in your debt.

Dr Paul L. Reynolds
Brisbane, July 2017

Emeritus Professor Colin A. Hughes was interviewed in 2011 for the 'Queensland Speaks' oral history project at the University of Queensland. Access his interview recording [here](#).