



The University of Sydney NEWS

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Sir Hermann held in high esteem Our 'greatest supporter and finest ambassador'

Impressive but never awesome, wise and astute, an inspiration, thoughtful, kind and courteous, commanding respect and attention wherever he went — these are among the qualities many of his closest friends and colleagues identified in their tributes to Sir Hermann Black who died on Wednesday 28 February. He had been Chancellor for almost twenty years.

Sir Hermann Black was a 'visionary who understood the need of the University', a great orator, a superb teacher, and an academic who understood the work and aspirations of other academics. All spoke of his total commitment to the University.

In 'Notes in the News', on ABC Radio National on Wednesday 7 March, producer Brian Furlonger paid tribute to Sir Hermann.

'Hermann Black,' said Mr Furlonger, 'was always discovering something new and wonderful about the world and for decades he projected that enthusiasm to his audience. He had a wonderful sense of humour and whimsy combined with his great breadth of knowledge and perception. He was always impressive but never awesome.'

'He was also a producer's dream — always on time and his comments were always perfectly timed. In the twenty years since we first worked together, I came to appreciate Sir Hermann Black as a courteous, gentle man who was as good a listener as he was a speaker.'

'I'm sure that the world to which he has now gone will be the better for his presence there. That world's gain is very much this one's loss.'

Mr David Selby, Deputy Chancellor for twelve years during Sir Hermann's Chancellorship, knew him since their undergraduate days together, a period of sixty years. A closer association began in 1965 when David Selby first became a Fellow of Senate (Sir Hermann had then been a Fellow since 1949).

Mr Selby said that Sir Hermann was a 'shrewd judge of character'. He recalled the patient and polite way in which he allowed people to speak during Senate meetings — although 'on rare occasions when anyone overstepped the limits of polite debate he put them down with a firmness that left no room for argument'.

At graduations he shone

But it was at conferring of degrees ceremonies that Sir Hermann was at his best, said Mr Selby. 'The warmth of his concern for individual students shone brightly,' he said. 'The worried, sometimes apprehensive graduand — even the sometimes defiant one — would instantly relax and smile when Hermann took their hand and spoke to them — as though they were meeting an old friend.'

'He loved those occasions and it took something of the greatest gravity to keep him away.' In the twelve years that Mr Selby acted as Deputy Chancellor he was only called upon on three occasions to stand in for Sir Hermann — twice when he was in hospital and on another occasion when forbidden to attend on medical advice. Indeed Sir Hermann awarded more than 60,500 degrees — about half the total awarded at the University since 1856 — in his twenty years in office.

'Chancellors will come and go,' said Mr Selby, 'but Sir Hermann will long be remembered as one who had a deep and abiding love of the University and one to whom the University reciprocated that love.'

Memorial Service

A memorial service for Sir Hermann Black will be held on Friday 23 March in the Great Hall starting at 11am. Those speaking will be the Deputy Chancellor, Emeritus Professor Dame Leonie Kramer, the Premier of NSW, Mr Nick Greiner, former Vice-Chancellor, Emeritus Professor John Ward, ABC radio producer, Mr Brian Furlonger, and the Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, Mr Justice Gordon Samuels.



Sir Hermann leaves the Great Hall after a graduation ceremony in 1988. Left is University attendant Bevis Apps and right, Joe Trassari, one of Sir Hermann's attendant-drivers who worked for him for twelve years. Mr Trassari said Sir Hermann had treated him like 'one of the family', had always been kind and never got upset — not even when stuck in the traffic.

Emeritus Professor Dame Leonie Kramer, the current Deputy Chancellor and acting as Chancellor until 2 April when a new Chancellor is elected, said: 'Central to Sir Hermann's life, as I knew him, was absolute devotion to the idea of the University as a custodian of learning and the home of high endeavour and civilised discourse. His faith was balanced by a tactical grasp of University life, and the many threats to its integrity. He was both

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Election Policies

The *News* will next week summarise the education and science policies for the three major parties.

Sir Hermann held in high esteem

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wise and astute and I suspect he was rarely caught unawares by events or circumstances likely to affect the University's wellbeing.'

But the many qualities he developed through knowledge and experience, she said, were directed by his natural disposition. 'His guiding principle was deep concern for others. He valued the human being and was profoundly affected by any assault upon the person. For him courtesy and good manners were not the empty rhetoric of social life, but an expression of care and respect for his fellows.'

The recently retired Vice-Chancellor, Emeritus Professor John Ward, said of Sir Hermann, his 'oldest friend in academic life': 'I knew him as a great public figure, as the guardian of all that is best in academic life and as a most ardent defender of the University to which he devoted himself with such distinction. We have lost an inspiring leader and must now continue to support the principles for which he stood.'

Sir Bruce Williams, Vice-Chancellor prior to Professor Ward (1967-81), believes that Sir Hermann's finest years were his last twenty years as Chancellor. 'Great orators are now rare,' he said, 'but Hermann was one and his speeches were admired by and often inspired those who heard them.'

Yet when as Vice-Chancellor Sir Bruce proposed Hermann Black as Chancellor, 'There were many within and outside the University who doubted my judgement'.

'I knew that H.D. Black, the splendid radio commentator, would be warmly welcomed by the community. I wanted a Chancellor who understood, as Hermann did, the nature of both the academic and the political processes and I was intuitively certain that the role would inspire him to call on the great qualities of mind and character and powers of expression that had lain part dormant in him. His response to the challenge was an inspiration to all who worked with him, met him and heard him.'

'His great influence will remain with us.'

Professor Sam Ball, Chairman of the Academic Board, said there were 'several different Sir Hermanns'. In addition to the thoughtful and kind person, he was the person with a 'brilliant mind, wit and voice, who could speak on a variety of subjects, rationally and intelligently'.

It was no accident, he said, that he was adviser to the national government over a long period of time, nor accidental that he was able to give clear commentary on the national news to two generations of Australians.

'As the figurehead and symbol of the University he was instantly recognised in a range of situations across Australia and overseas.'

'Moreover, he could articulate the mission of a university better than anyone I have ever known.'

Professor of Economics, Warren Hogan, recalled Sir Hermann's 'remarkable performance' in lecturing at the University. 'His first lectures were in 1933 and his last were given in 1989: this will long stand as a record of duty in this University and a witness to his personal sense of service.'

Both within and beyond the University Hermann Black was a teacher, said Professor Hogan. In the 1930s H.D. Black was one of a number of outstanding scholars on the Economics staff at this University. But while students 'may have welcomed his breadth of vision, he defied some of his peers with his less than fervent enthusiasms for the conventions of research and publication and his fostering of community understanding of policy issues'.

Sir Hermann had a 'steely determination' and neither personal strains nor professional frustrations deterred him in his endeavours.

Emeritus Professor Bill O'Neil, Deputy Vice-Chancellor from 1965-78, described Hermann Black as a 'superb public teacher of economics, international affairs and politics'.

Sir Hermann and Lady Black.



Sir Hermann Black in 1983 with a group of Aboriginal Teachers' Aid's graduates. Sir Hermann was a staunch supporter of the University's ATA program which was launched in 1975 and which has since become the Aboriginal Education Assistants' Program and he officiated at many graduating ceremonies.

'His golden voice became well-known and eagerly listened to on the radio, in adult education classes and from many public platforms from the mid-1930s. He was at his best when throwing light on some individual topic on a specific and relevant occasion.'

'His addresses to new graduates were always full of wit and wisdom.'

'As chairman at Senate and at Senate committee meetings, he always did his homework and fully understood each item of business or was ready to be guided by some better informed Fellow. He was always tolerant and gave every Fellow a chance to speak. I was often amazed by his patience with some belligerent and at times rude Fellows.'

The NSW Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Dr Terry Metherell, said: 'Sir Hermann has left an extraordinary legacy of academic excellence through his 60 year association with the University. He was a man of high ideals and great integrity.'

'He had strong convictions about the direction of reforms for the University and he always presented his arguments with great strength and dignity.'

'Sir Hermann was a visionary who understood the need of the University to be accessible to the community beyond its walls. He used his remarkable speaking gifts to clearly bring his own insights and understanding to hundreds of thousands of Australians.'

'He was the University of Sydney's greatest supporter and finest ambassador.'

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Sir Hermann presents an honorary degree to Emeritus Professor P.O. Bishop in 1983.

