

T. H. Rigby
(1925–2011)

In memoriam



Harry Rigby, Professorial Fellow (later, from 1987 until his retirement in 1990, Professor) of Political Science in the Research School of Social Science at the Australian National University in Canberra, was for many years the doyen of Soviet and post-Soviet studies in this country.

Following military service in World War II, he took an MA in Russian and Political Science at the University of Melbourne and won a travelling scholarship to undertake postgraduate study at the University of London. He was appointed a research officer in the Foreign Office in 1953, returning to Australia two years later to take up a senior lectureship in Russian at Canberra University College (now the ANU). In 1956 he held a research post at the University of London, and from 1957–58 served as Second Secretary at the British Embassy in Moscow before resuming his academic career in Australia as Associate Professor in Russian

at CUC (from 1960 the ANU). In 1963 he was appointed professorial fellow in the Research School of the Social Science where he was to spend the rest of his career, latterly (since 1990) as Professor Emeritus and University Fellow.

His many publications in the field of Soviet (and post-Soviet) society and politics earned him an international reputation, as is attested by his appointment over the years to a number of prestigious visiting professorships at Oxford, Moscow, Washington, New York and Cologne. He was a founding member and first president of the Australian Association for the Study of Socialist Societies (now AACPCS, the Australian Association of Communist and Post-Communist Studies). The following tributes are reprinted with their authors' permission from the Association's newsletter in recognition of his distinguished career and outstanding achievement.

Stephen Fortescue

Reminiscences of Harry Rigby

The dedication in the recent book written in honour of T. H. Rigby (*Russian Politics from Lenin to Putin*, Palgrave, 2010) states: 'In honour of T. H. Rigby. Friend, colleague, teacher, mentor'. I would like to think that Harry Rigby filled all those roles for me.

The first contact I had with Harry was in 1970 in his role as teacher, a guest lecturer in Arthur Stockwin's Soviet Politics course in the ANU's Department of Politics. Harry was, frankly, not the greatest of lecturers, but I was hooked. Despite the somewhat halting presentation there was a clear but accessible structure and fascinating content in everything he said.

Our first face-to-face meeting was late the following year, as it was arranged for me (I was too shy in those days to arrange it for myself) that he supervise my honours thesis. I can't say I remember that first meeting vividly. I do remember the nervousness with which I approached the Mt Olympus of the ANU, the Institute of Advanced Studies, and one of its gods, and was genuinely taken aback that this god invited me any time I liked to come to his office and borrow his books – which meant that I had a major Soviet Studies library at my personal disposal. But I also learned at that first meeting that there was some stern steel behind the mild manner. As I came to the end of a tough third year of my undergraduate studies

and was dreaming of lazy days in the mountains and by the beach, Harry made it clear that my honours year was going to start very early indeed. In fact our first true supervisory meeting, at which my tasks for the summer were handed out, took place a couple of days after my final exam, and rather than in the mountains and on the beach I spent the summer in the bowels of the National Library reading Soviet journals. The other thing that Harry made clear with straightforward firmness was that my research was going to be almost entirely in Russian. It shows how good the teaching was of Rosh Ireland, Margaret Travers, Robert Jones/Dessaix and their colleagues that this very average student of languages was able, with some trepidation, to go off and do what he was told.

I'll backtrack slightly to our second meeting, which I do remember vividly. I decided early to take Harry up on his offer to borrow books from his office. Following instructions I knocked quietly and hearing no answer entered. I saw two legs sticking out from under the desk, and then Harry sprawled on the floor. 'My god, he's had a heart attack, what do I do, what do I do?' (and I'll admit to half a thought, 'and he hasn't even started supervising me'). A head suddenly popped up and Harry announced with a wry smile: 'Just having a nap.' 'The Olympian gods do indeed have their ways,' thought I.

And so it went from honours to PhD (the PhD co-supervised with Bob Miller). I got used to Harry's disconcerting habits of suddenly pausing for long periods and staring off into space in the middle of sentences and more often than not being unable to remember my name when introducing me to someone else. He was genuinely and always mild-mannered, but the no-nonsense firmness was also always there. You knew – through the gentle suggestion that more thought or reading might be required – when he didn't like something. As a good example of his firm guidance there is the story of the MGU exchange. The ANU had an exchange agreement with Moscow State University and it was taken for granted that I would go on it. At this time a lot of literature on the Soviet gulags, including graphic first-hand samizdat accounts, was appearing. At one moment I was so unsettled by what I was reading that I announced to Harry that I wasn't sure that I could handle being in a place ruled by such a regime. Harry declared curtly: 'Don't be stupid. Go and prepare an application *now*,' which I did.

I submitted my PhD thesis in 1976, and left Canberra and the ANU for a number of years. We certainly didn't lose contact in those following years – it's a time I'll come back to later. I returned to the Department of Political Science

in the RSSS in late 1981, this time as a colleague. It says something about the democratic spirit, not just of Harry but of the Department, that there wasn't much difference between being a student and a colleague. Harry still seriously listened to what you said, and seriously responded and presented his own view. He still gave total access to his library and wonderful card indexes. He still used seminars as an excuse to have another cigarette on top of the one a day he allowed himself at morning tea – and once set fire to the ashtray in the seminar room.

I won't go into detail here on the intellectual debt that I and my colleagues in Soviet and post-Soviet studies all over the world have to Harry. I tried to do that in the Introductory chapter to the book mentioned above, but I will mention his book *Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom 1917–1922*. It appeared in 1979 and I read it after I returned to the ANU. It's probably the book that has influenced me more than any other I have read, and in a way that was typical of Harry. Firstly, it's an absolute model of what an academic book should be: crystal clear, easy to read and understand, and with as much depth to it as you are capable of giving it. Secondly and more personally, it didn't bring a revolution to my life. I didn't suddenly turn to Soviet history, or radically change what I had been doing for the previous decade. The effect was, like Harry himself, modest but persistent. Sometimes at the back of my mind, sometimes at the front, that classic account of Lenin's struggle to set up a way of getting things done has stayed with me always.

I'd like to think that Harry was my friend throughout the time that we knew each other. But there was one time when I effectively lived with him and Norma, and so perforce we were particularly close. Harry had a study leave in Cologne – was it 1978? I was living in London, happily 'resting' between jobs. Harry and Norma invited me to come and stay with them – for about three weeks if my memory serves me correctly. They were idyllic days. I suppose Harry did some work, but I don't remember it. We seemed to spend our whole time wandering around Cologne, going to museums, galleries, churches, and so on and on – with me being taught and mentored all the time. Of course we had to be home in the early afternoon for the obligatory nap. I had a room separate from the apartment and would lie awake, hearing Sherbet's 'Howzat!' being played over and over, presumably by some young resident of the building. I don't know whether it made me nostalgic for home or not, but 'Auf wiedersehen Charlie' certainly did. The three of us would religiously sit before the TV at 4.30, to watch 'Auf wiedersehen Charlie', a children's program about the adventures of a young German travelling

in Australia. I couldn't even understand the dialogue, but it was good to see the gum trees. Harry and Norma seemed to think so too. And of course on Sunday Harry would take me to a church of a different denomination each week. This long-lapsed Catholic nevertheless experienced a shudder of foreboding as in the Catholic cathedral Harry took communion – would the lightning bolts that the nuns had promised us if a heathen took communion strike? Well, no they didn't. God obviously forgave Harry his ecumenical impertinence.

I left the ANU and Canberra for good at the end of 1984, and meetings with Harry became more sporadic, at conferences and seminars and as time went by more and more at his home on La Perouse Street. I remember very well the last time I visited him at home. I'd been warned by Richard that he was becoming very frail, and so was pleasantly surprised when over a couple of hours he joked, told stories and on one occasion pranced around the room impersonating someone or other. Richard brought me back to earth by telling me that his father tried hard to get himself up for visitors. It was indeed not long after that that I saw Harry in much less happy circumstances, in hospital and the nursing home.

Over the years as I got to know Harry better, I learned that things had not always been easy for this most gifted of men – gifted not just in the sense of his intellectual gifts, but also gifted with a wonderful family, working conditions that embarrassed him when I whinged about the lot of the hack lecturer, generally a nice and comfortable life. But there were bad times, which he revealed to me by chance over the years. Clearly they were overcome with the same mild mannered and gentle exterior combined with a tough and accountable inner core.

I fear that these reminiscences might be as much about me as about Harry. It's that way because he was a very important part of my life, a wonderful friend, colleague, teacher, mentor indeed.

Bob Miller

**Working With Harry:
Friendship and Scholarly Collaboration**

I. The Beginnings

My first meeting with Harry was in the Harvard University Russian Research Center in 1969, where I spent a summer editing my Ph.D. thesis on the Machine-Tractor Stations and Soviet agricultural controls for publication by the Harvard University Press. I, of course, knew his work and had been using his book on Communist Party membership for courses that I had been teaching at Washington University, St. Louis, at SUNY at Stony Brook and at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. I was surprised at how young and vigorous he seemed – and how approachable.

At our first meeting, we discussed the possibility of my coming to the ANU for an extended period. Under the conventions applying in the Department of Political Science, RSSH, it was his turn to nominate a candidate for the Department in the Russian and East European studies sub-section headed by Harry.

Talk proceeded over the next year or two, culminating in an offer in 1971, when I was in the middle of a Fulbright year in Yugoslavia in 1971–72. Under the terms of my Fulbright, I had to return to my home institution for the following academic year. My wife Ellen and my two little daughters, Juliet and Katya, and I arrived in late July 1973 to a warm welcome by Norma and Harry, with a stocked fridge and a bouquet of sweet-smelling daphne, which we had never seen before. We had expected to stay for three years, the minimum period for which the ANU would pay toward our household removal expenses.

The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Illinois had held open my Associate Professorship for the customary two years, but I was so impressed by the working conditions in the IAS and the warmth of Harry's friendship and collaboration that I decided to stay; I say 'I', because my wife and children did not find it quite so easy to make the change of cultures, friends and family. That came in time.

II. Patterns of Collaboration

From the beginning, Harry and I established a division of labour. Harry concentrated on Soviet domestic political and personnel matters. I worked on Soviet public administration theories and practices, on agricultural policies and foreign policy and on related issues in Yugoslavia and the Euro-communist movement.

We had substantial differences in orientation. Harry was much more focussed on conceptual approaches and classifications, attempting to link Soviet studies to more general theoretical models of politics, particularly Weberian analyses of bureaucracy. I have recently published an essay on Rigby's idea of 'goal rationality' in relation to the understanding of Soviet and Russian foreign policy.

Steve Fortescue, in his Introduction to the festschrift he edited in honour of Harry, tends to downplay the consistency of Harry's conceptualisation of Soviet politics, but I think Harry was more genuinely committed to the exercise of conceptualisation than that. Harry's critique of some of the more modish contemporary approaches, such as interest-group theory and the East-West convergence hypothesis, was not entirely dismissive, as Steve rightly points out. Indeed, Harry's adoption of some of Gordon Skillings's version of these approaches shows a sensitivity and openness that was characteristic of his scholarship. Harry took theory very seriously.

My own more modest theoretical pretensions were concentrated on analysing how Marxist-Leninist ideology informed much of the thinking of Soviet, Yugoslav, Euro-communist and other communist regimes as they tried to reform or modify practice to address the growing evidence of systemic failure in the post-Stalinist period.

Both of us took ideology more seriously as an explanatory factor than did the majority of Western Sovietologists. That was, I think, one of the main reasons for our collaboration being so close, and, for me, at least, so rewarding.

III. Some Examples of Our Collaboration

Perhaps the best examples are the series of peer-reviewed Occasional Papers published by the Department of Political Science, RSCS. Looking at some of them now, I admit to being impressed by the quality and perceptiveness we both displayed. For example, the 1976 Occasional Paper No. 11, entitled *Political and Administrative Aspects of the Scientific and Technical Revolution in the USSR*.

Harry wrote the first section on the Communist Party of the USSR (CPSU) and the STR. I wrote the second section entitled 'Organizing for the STR', which looks at administrative changes dictated by the Party leadership and its perceptions of the opportunities and potential dangers inherent in the STR because of the necessary Western influence it connoted. We both wrote the Conclusions. In the Introduction, I should add, Harry inserted a comment that the separation between party and governmental institutions involved in the STR 'is, of course, somewhat artificial', an elliptical reference to his major conceptual contribution, the 'mono-organizational system'.

Another good example is Occasional Paper 19, published in 1986, entitled *Religion and Politics in Communist States*. Harry was for a considerable period the Chairman of the International Relations Committee of the Anglican Church. He brought me in to comment on Yugoslav and other experience of communist regime control of the various national and minority church bodies. We were both active in supporting Keston College and its director, Rev. Michael Bordeaux to promote 'the Right to Believe' in Marxist-Leninist systems.

In this Occasional Paper, I wrote the Introduction and the chapter on 'The Church and State in Yugoslavia and the Spectre of "Clerico-Nationalism"'. Harry wrote the chapter on 'Regime and Religion in the USSR' and the 'Conclusions', entitled 'How Communist States Deal With the Problem of Religion'. Among the contributors, Eugene Kamenka wrote the chapter on 'Marxism and Religion'; Audrey Donnithorne, the chapter on 'Religion in China'. Others included John H. Miller, Norbert Zmijewski, Leslie Holmes and David Marr.

Another example was Occasional Paper 16, *The 26th Congress of the CPSU in Current Political Perspective*, published in 1982. This was again a highly collaborative endeavour. Harry wrote the sections on Party leadership and internal Party developments. I wrote the sections on foreign policy and current economic problems. Harry pointed out in the Preface that the Congress had at first seemed devoid of any special interest, but on reflection, much had been going on to prepare for the forthcoming transition to a post-Brezhnev era and a period when serious economic, social and political problems had to be confronted. Therefore, the fact that the publication had been delayed for a year, despite initial intentions to bring it out shortly after the event itself, was actually a virtue, rather than a shortcoming. The hagiographic treatment of Brezhnev's 'Leninist course'

and tributes to his personal 'erudition' proved to be merely a premature funeral oration.

A further case of collaboration was the book on *Khrushchev and the Communist World*, edited by myself and Ferenc Feher (Croom, Helm 1984). Harry wrote the seminally important second chapter on 'Khrushchev and the Rules of the Game', in which he argued that Khrushchev was a dictator manqué, not a despot and that his conduct in office showed that the mono-organizational system could continue to function without the personal despotism of a Stalin. My role was to write the Introduction, Chapter Four on Khrushchev and the Soviet economy and Chapter Seven on Khrushchev and Tito.

Finally, I should mention a book edited by me, *The Developments of Civil Society in Communist Systems* (Allen & Unwin, 1992). Harry wrote the important examination of the politics of the penultimate days of the USSR under Gorbachev in Chapter 2, 'The USSR: End of a Long, Dark Night?' He analysed the works of a number of Western and Soviet political scientists on whether the growing activism of some previously moribund 'public organizations' could be equated to the development of civil society and concluded that they could, particularly with the dismantling of central features of the mono-organizational system of party domination from the late 1980s.

My own contribution to the book was the Introduction, Chapter 6 on Yugoslavia, and a Concluding Essay on the legacy of the Communist system on the functioning of transitional societies and the path dependency of their subsequent changes on previous national experiences.

I should end this catalogue of our collaboration by mentioning that I dedicated my book on *Soviet Foreign Policy Today* (Allen & Unwin, 1991) to 'My friend and colleague Harry Rigby'.

IV. Conclusions

Our formal retirement from Pol. Sci., RSSS in the early 1990s did not end our collaboration, let alone our friendship. In the late 1980s, at the end of one of our semi-annual dinners with Prime Minister Bob Hawke at the Lodge, the PM asked us if there was anything he could do for us to foster the study of the changes taking place in the communist world. This was something he had long been interested in and had followed in his frequent meetings with communist politicians. This

was the genesis of the Transformation of Communist Systems Project – a fund for conferences, research travel and invitations to foreign scholars for joint work on relevant projects and to attend conferences organized by us in Australia.

This fund is still in existence, through the Contemporary China Centre and, most recently, the Division of International Politics and Security Studies. Harry and I continued to consult on the fund's use until his second stroke prevented him from coming in to the office on a regular basis.

Meanwhile, we continued to talk on the phone once or twice a week. We discussed recent events in Russia, agreeing, more often than not, on current politics and politicians. I think he tended to agree with his old mate Archie Brown on the relative merits of Gorbachev and Yel'tsin more than I did. I also used to pass on some of the rather ribald jokes my various email correspondents in Australia and overseas sent me, and I am sure his laughter was genuine.

My wife Ellen's and my visits to see Harry and Norma, first on La Perouse Street and then, in the Brindabella Gardens nursing home became increasingly discouraging. I used to bring him newspaper clippings or printouts from the Russian press and copies of *Argumenty i fakty*. However, he confessed to being less and less able to read them, because of failing eyesight and declining comprehension.

The one thing we remember most of the last few visits was the way his face would light up when he saw us coming into his room or the lunchroom for a visit. That was a flash of the old Harry Rigby, my older brother-in-arms. I miss him.