

Obituary: Sol Encel, 1925-2010

Solomon (Sol) Encel, father of Australian Sociology, prominent public intellectual and activist for numerous social causes died on July 23 at 85 years of age.

Sol was born in Poland and came to Australia when he was only four years old. He was educated in Melbourne, interrupting his studies to serve as a medical orderly in the Australian Air Force. On his return, he completed his studies at the University of Melbourne, where he later taught political science. He moved to Canberra in 1956, where he was eventually appointed Reader in Political Science at the Australian National University. There he took his place in the great post-war generation of nation building public intellectuals who shaped both our public culture and the ethos of the early Australian Canberra Public Service. From these early years came his first book, *Cabinet Government in Australia*.

From 1967, Sol established Sociology in its own right, as an autonomous social science discipline, at the University of New South Wales. Under his stewardship for two decades, the UNSW School of Sociology and Social Anthropology became recognised as our oldest and strongest department of Sociology. Many of Sol's graduate students subsequently carried his knowledge and care for public culture (and for decency, moderation, fairness and respect) into a range of government appointments and teaching posts in Sociology, Social Science, Social Policy and other disciplines at universities across the nation. Sol was a broadly educated and deeply scholarly liberal intellectual who cared mightily about public ethics. He believed that a society is only as good as the way it treats its minorities. For his whole life he fought for social justice, inclusion, and honest dealing in every sphere of life. Never an orthodox socialist but an unflinchingly progressive social democrat, Sol was for many years a member of the ALP and a stalwart activist in many organisations including the Council for Civil Liberties, the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Association of Gerontology and a range of public bodies on age discrimination, science policy, education, support for the unemployed, multicultural issues, science policy and human rights. He was a prominent member of the Jewish community, a moderate Zionist and member of Academics for Peace in the Middle East who defended the national right of Israel to exist within a larger concern for peace, internationalism and universal human rights.

With his two landmark books *Australian Society* (1965) and *Equality and Authority in Australia* (1970) he was one of the first to define the scope and tenor of Australian political sociology. He was elected to the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia in 1967. Throughout his long career he was a prolific writer and presenter, whose publication list includes some 30 monographs and co-authored books, well over 100 scholarly articles and numerous government reports.

On his retirement in 1991 from the School of Sociology and Social Anthropology he became an Honorary Fellow and an Emeritus Professor at the UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre. There he was able to continue in what he prized as a second career in a first class research institute, his work researching, writing, presenting, and contributing to projects and reports. Friend Bruce Petty aptly commented that Sol was 'one of those fixtures you need in the face of so much carelessness and compromise'. In both his scholarship and his personal life

Sol abhorred sloppiness and maintained a strict regimen of study. With his generous worldly wisdom Sol would sometimes offer the gentle advice that work should be welcomed as a 'grand cure for all manner of ills'. He belonged to a generation who sought open criticism and debate in a spirit of progress, always with the expectation that power and privilege should be set aside so that only the strength of the better case should prevail. True to his own words he was working and publishing, quite literally, to the day he died; suddenly, unexpectedly and peacefully, at home, at the age of 85.

When asked about the source of much of his dynamism and equanimity he would reply simply 'Diana' to whom he was married for 61 years. Similarly when asked for the source of his greatest joy and pride he would answer 'my children'; Vivien, Deborah, John Daniel and Sarah. Diana and Sol have been wonderfully generous and hospitable to Sol's former students and colleagues and together they have embraced a huge network of friends and associates of enormously diverse interests and backgrounds.

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[Michael Pusey](#)