

In August 2008 I was fortunate enough to be selected to attend the annual Samuel Griffith Society Conference in Sydney. I had become interested in the Samuel Griffith Society ever since conducting research during my constitutional law studies. In particular I found interest in the papers from the 2006 Samuel Griffith Society Conference that discussed the *Workchoices* decision. The *Workchoices* decision extended the interpretation of the corporations power of the Constitution to allow the federal government to legislate in relation to employment conditions. This debate over the wider interpretation of the powers of the federal government occurred at the perfect time to extend my knowledge of constitutional law and in particular the history of the Australian constitution and the intention of the founding fathers when they drafted it. The Samuel Griffith Society promotes the preservation of the constitution to its initial purposes and disapproves of the widening of interpretation of the document to increase the powers of the federal government.

I found it fascinating to see and hear an interest group dedicated to one purpose – the protection of the constitution. One of the most important cases I recall during my constitutional law studies was the *Tasmanian Dam Case*. The case found that the external powers of the Constitution allowed the federal government to legislate in regards to issues to which it had entered into agreement with internationally. I was lucky enough to be introduced to recently retired Justice of the High Court Ian Callinan. Callinan gave an introductory speech in memorial of former High Court Chief Justice Harry Gibbs who dissented in the decision of the *Tasmanian Dam Case* and was concerned with the potential danger it posed to the federal balance. Having frequently seen the decisions of these Justices it was interesting to hear of their personal thoughts in relation to the interpretation of the constitution, their interactions and the rationales for their important decisions.

At the dinner I was introduced to John and Nancy Stone who head the organisation. They were two very friendly, passionate and dedicated people who graciously introduced me to Judges, Barristers and Academics from around the country. On the second day there were talks from Dr Nicholas Aroney from the University of Queensland who gave a historical background into the Constitution. This was followed by a presentation by academic James Allan and then journalist Paul Sheehan who discussed the behaviour of lawyers and justices and the culture of litigation. It was fascinating to hear the thoughts of Academics, Journalists and Senators on the law and in particular the impact on the constitution. That evening I was lucky enough to be introduced and seated next to Justice Dyson Heydon of the Supreme Court and Professor Kenneth Wiltshire from the University of Queensland. I was suddenly confronted with the difficulty of knowing how on earth a second year law student could engage with a Justice of the High Court and a Professor of Politics over dinner. I realised the fortunate position I was in as a student and found justice Heydon to be a perfect gentlemen and entertaining dinner companion. I asked him about his history leading up to being appointed. I also engaged him on his insights into the *Workchoices* decision, which I more than once realised was probably not so well regarded by the rest of our dinner companions. When recalling his experience to me I could imagine him sitting on proceedings as a Justice wanting to jump into the place of the barristers before him and

passionately argues both sides of the case. But instead he was the intelligent, thoughtful and considered Justice who made his decisions based on what was presented to him.

I am extremely grateful to Mannkal and the Samuel Griffith Society for this wonderful opportunity. It was an interesting learning experience and rare opportunity to meet people I had respected and only read about in my law textbooks. Each of them was as gracious, passionate and fascinating as I had imagined them to be.

I would strongly recommend applying for a scholarship to attend the conference to any law or political science student. One of the prominent things I noticed was a lack of young people or students in attendance. I think it is so important to understand the organisations and interest groups that support and oppose legislation and government in order to gain a wider understanding of the needs and wants of our community in order to make informed decisions in the future. And it was a rare opportunity for young people entering into law, academia or politics to rub shoulders with those who had excelled in their careers. And for them too it was an opportunity to understand the expectations, desires and experiences of those who will follow them. I thank Mannkal for providing so many students these wonderful opportunities.

Many thanks,

Jessica-Mary Aslan.