

CITATION DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR J. GOLDRING, DEAN OF THE
FACULTY OF LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG, ON THE
OCCASION OF THE ADMISSION OF GEOFFREY SAWER TO THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LAWS, HONORIS CAUSA, ON 10 OCTOBER
1991.

Chancellor, I present to you Geoffrey Sawer.

Geoffrey Sawer was a child of the old Empire, born in Burma in 1910. His family moved to Australia in 1913 but his father did not live long enough to enjoy his new country for he was killed as a member of the first AIF in 1917.

Geoffrey Sawer's life has spanned most of this century. He could well say with a contemporary Irish poet:

"I have lived in important places, times
When great events were decided: who owned
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land
Surrounded by our pitchfork - armed claims"

(Patrick Kavanagh, *Epic*)

Geoffrey Sawer sought understanding and resolution of claims and conflict through the law, especially in the areas of jurisprudence, constitutional law, labour relations and law reform. He did so predominantly as a teacher, an outstanding scholar and a commentator who made conflicts and complexities clearer to his students and to the ordinary public.

Professor Sawer has an enviable educational record. He was dux of Scotch College, Melbourne and, in 1933, he attained his Bachelor of Laws at Melbourne University with first-class honours and the Supreme Court and Nunn Prizes. In 1934, he took out his Master of Laws degree and practised as a solicitor from 1934 to 1938 and as a barrister until 1940. Geoffrey Sawer then embarked full-time on the career in which he was to excel. He joined the University of Melbourne as a senior lecturer in law.

His early days as an academic were broken by war service during which he was officer-in-charge of short-wave broadcasts from Australia to Japan. After the war, in 1948, he was appointed an Associate Professor in the Melbourne Law School and, shortly after, qualified for his Bachelor of Arts degree

In 1950, Geoffrey Sawer began his long and rewarding relationship with the Australian National University. He was appointed as foundation professor in law in the ANU's Research School of Social Sciences. From 1951 to 1956 he was Dean of the Research School and became Chairman of the Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies in 1970. After a period as Acting Director of the Research School, he was appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor of the ANU in 1974.

Professor Sawer's students over his long academic career have testified to his particular flair and intellectual vivacity. One of them was the Honourable Sir Ninian Stephen, a Justice of the High Court and later Governor-General of Australia. In an appreciative article, Sir Ninian paints a portrait of Sawer in the lecture room: a slightly eccentric, humorous teacher who was able to inject drama into the driest legal disputes. Geoffrey Sawer carried these skills into the written word and

excelled as a commentator and columnist. His column "Between the Lines", which he began to write for *The Canberra Times* in 1967, was a fine medium for his anecdotal style and keen awareness of the way the law should relate to the everyday context of society. He wrote once in a more "learned" publication that "the task of the courts ... is to provide within the law itself a logically consistent system of propositions, but to depart from this system, and to build on the wider logic of life as a whole" when the law is at odds with the demands and realities of society.

Professor Sawer was appointed to the editorial boards of international journals such as the *Modern Law Review*, *Public Law* and *The University of Toronto Law Journal*. He is a Fellow and a former President of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences and has been Visiting Professor at a number of leading Law Schools around the world, including the University of London's Institute of Advanced Legal Studies; the University of New York; All Souls' College Oxford; Fitzwilliam College Cambridge and Bristol University. He was appointed a Special Magistrate in the Australian Capital Territory in 1957

After his formal retirement from his Chair in 1975, the ANU awarded Professor Sawer an Emeritus Professorship in recognition of his services to the study of the law and to his University. He remained actively involved in the ANU Law School as a Visiting Fellow and a lecturer in constitutional law. For many years he continued to be the mentor and inspiration to his colleagues - including several who are now at this University.

It is appropriate that one of Australia's youngest Law Schools has sought, in its first full year of operation, to pay tribute to someone who has made

academic law in Australia his own bailiwick. Professor Sawer was generous in his support of the Faculty of Law at this University, travelling a long distance to celebrate its launching. With his knowledge of and love for the law, his humane views on society and its foibles, and his witty teaching style, Geoffrey Sawer is a fine model for the Dean of any Law School to hold before his staff. Students of the law may still seek out his wise opinions in his publications. His influence on the teaching of law in Australia is immeasurable and continuing.

The University is proud to honour this great scholar and this fine Australian who came to "the colonies" in the early part of this century and stayed to interpret for his fellow citizens the constitution that made us a nation and to illustrate for generations of law students the law's powers and limitations. In all this, he found time to tend his garden and to be a kind adviser to all who sought his opinion.

Chancellor, it is my privilege and great pleasure to present to you Geoffrey Sawer for the award of Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa.