

## GEOFFREY SAWER 1910-

Geoffrey Sawyer was born in Burma in 1910, his father, a sergeant in the Royal Irish Rifles and his mother, a nurse. The family moved to Australia in 1913 and Sawyer's father joined the A.I.F., obtained the Military Cross, rose to the rank of captain and died on active service in 1917. The young Sawyer attended State schools and then Scotch College (on a scholarship), where he was equal dux in 1927. At Melbourne University Sawyer enrolled in law and graduated LL.B. with first class honours and the Supreme Court and Nunn Prizes in 1933. Melbourne Law School at that time had a broader approach to legal education than Sydney, so that Sawyer became acquainted with the American movement in legal realism as well as with the more traditional approaches to legal thinking.

In 1934 Sawyer took his LL.M. and was admitted as a barrister and solicitor in Victoria and of the High Court. He practised as a solicitor (1934-1938), and later as a barrister (1938-1940). Through the whole of this period he was a resident tutor in law at Ormond College in the University of Melbourne, teaching the major subjects of the law course. Sawyer became a full-time university teacher in 1940 as a senior lecturer in law, dealing chiefly with public law subjects. Along with other academics, Sawyer assisted the war effort, as officer-in-charge of short-wave broadcasts from Australia to Japan and Japanese-occupied territories (1942-1945). Sawyer returned to Melbourne as a senior lecturer in law in 1946, and was appointed Associate Professor in 1948. In 1949 he took a B.A.

Then in 1950 Sawyer was appointed the first professor of law in the Australian National University, in the Research School of Social Sciences. Thus began that phase of Sawyer's career which established him as one of the foremost legal scholars Australia has produced. His publications have been prolific, mainly in public law, but also in common law, labour relations, law reform and jurisprudence. At A.N.U. Sawyer was Dean of the Research School of Social Sciences 1951-1956; Acting Director of the School 1973-1974; Chairman of the Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies 1970; for many years an alternate Chairman and then Chairman of the Advisers on Legislation (a committee of the University Council responsible for university legislation and statutes on matters like degree and examination regulations); and Pro Vice-Chancellor 1974-1975.

Sawyer's position as a leading commentator on law, especially constitutional matters, was confirmed when he became a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences and then its President in 1971-1972 and 1973-1974. His wide reputation overseas was recognised in appointments to the editorial boards of international publications like the *Modern Law Review*, *Public Law*, the *University of Toronto Law Journal*, and in the following honours and appointments: 1949-1950, recipient of a Carnegie Grant to visit United States law schools; 1955, Visiting Professor at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of London; 1959, Visiting Professor at the Max Planck Institut für

Ausländisches Öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht, Heidelberg; July 1961, constitutional adviser to the Western Region Government of Nigeria; 1964, Visiting Professor at the Institute of Judicial Administration, New York University; 1968-1969, Visiting Professor at All Souls College, Oxford; 1972-1973, Visiting Fellow, All Souls College, Oxford and Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge.

Sawer retired from his chair at A.N.U. on 31 December 1975, but as Professor Emeritus continued his busy academic and public life. He became a Visiting Fellow in the Law Faculty and has lectured undergraduate students in constitutional law since then. In 1978-1979 he became Visiting Professor (Benjamin Recker Chair in Law and Political Science), Bristol University.

Sawer began writing "Between the Lines" in the *Canberra Times* in 1967, weekly until 1972, and fortnightly after that—a witty and thought-provoking column which he describes as devoted to "constitutional gardening, with special emphasis on executive powers, the High Court, broccoli, silver beet and the raising of early tomatoes under cloches". (A keen gardener, Sawer holds the record for picking the first ripe tomato in Canberra on 9 December.) Sawer was appointed a Special Magistrate in the Australian Capital Territory in 1957 and has always done a good deal of opinion work on constitutional matters.

In 1940 Sawer married Beatrice M. Pitcher, B.A., Dip.Ed., LL.B., who died in 1969 after a long illness. Their son Michael teaches Chinese at the Canberra College of Advanced Education and is prominent in Canberra musical circles; their daughter Elizabeth works in the Commonwealth public service and is married to John Penhalluriack. In 1971 Sawer married Nancy M. (born Bolton then Parker), "my dear wife Nancy" of "Between the Lines".