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SUNSHINE & SHADE

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BOOK REVIEW

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David Miles Connolly was born in Sydney in 1939, the year that John Howard and I were also born not far away. Our lives intersected at university and occasionally thereafter. But in the nature of those who went on to diplomatic and political service, the overlap with judicial life was relatively confined and appropriate to our different vocations.

Connolly had his upbringing, moving with his mother to join his father who was working in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). After the outbreak of war, Connolly and his mother returned to Sydney. She worked hard and helped give her son a privileged education at Riverview, a Jesuit school in Sydney. He went on to a diplomatic life. He soon met his wife Monique and later formed a happy marriage, blessed with children and grandchildren.

Now 83, David Connolly has looked back on his life and recorded the main events of his service for the Liberal Party of Australia; in various diplomatic appointments; and as a member of the Australian House of Representative. In 1996 he lost preselection for the constituency of Bradfield in Sydney's northern suburbs (one of the safest seats in the Liberal Party's gift). He returned to the diplomatic service as Australian High Commissioner to South Africa. By this time Nelson Mandela, had risen to President, ending his

country's discriminatory policy of apartheid. As recounted in this book, he formed a renewed friendship with "Madiba" , Mandela's tribal name, when the later came to Australia to fulfil invitations coinciding with the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000.

The book includes insights and occasional (but not many) private recollections of things said and done in his varied life. He was never to serve in a senior ministerial positions in the Federal Parliament. John Howard has said that it would have been different if he had not lost preselection. He was generally a moderate. His upbringing in the Catholic Church was, at the time, unusual for safe seats of the Liberal Party, led for so long by R G Menzies, a "simple Presbyterian". Up to that time many Coalition politicians comprised Anglicans and Protestants, suspicious of Roman Catholics.

Securing an early appointment to undertake research work for the Liberal Party, under the watchful eyes of [Sir] John Carrick, Connolly played a cameo role in suggesting ways by which the Liberal Party could become more congenial to Catholic electors. These included giving more federal funds to help (at first) science laboratories and needy parochial church schools, catering for aspirational voters who, until then, had generally supported the Labor Party. He supported the creation of a Liberal Forum, to focus attention on future political issues. But apart from political experiences, (an old student friend declared, in a play on his name, that he "smiles cunningly ") there was not a great deal to suggest a life worthy of a biography.

Yet, Connolly's book is readable, interspersed with well-chosen poetical fragments, some of them self-written. Like many before and since, he was well taught by the Jesuits. Connolly also offers a well-written account of the machinations of the Liberal Party, which has been the most politically successful party in Australian federal politics since it was founded by Menzies in December 1944. From his work in the engine room of the party, in Ash Street Sydney, he helped to make good its common boast of offering a "broad church". A number of Connolly's political judgements are undoubtedly controversial. They include the success or otherwise of the Whitlam Government, which was in power briefly when Connolly first arrived at Parliament in 1974. He claims credit for a few economic policies, including on superannuation during the latter phase of his ministerial and parliamentary service. His defence of refugee policy would seem somewhat distant from the policies against racism and in favour of universal human rights which he espoused in his engagements with Mandela. The book is relatively silent on universal human rights in all of its diversity with future issues like global refugee policy, and human rights. He is proud of supporting women in politics and interacted with Aboriginals to some degree.

In the carve up of responsibilities for ministerial and parliamentary engagements, David Connolly was usually on the "Dry" and not the "Wet" side of the Liberals. Connolly's embrace of change to the White Australia policy was influenced by the views of his grandfather and father (and some of his own early experiences in Ceylon with local non-white nannies). But he knew well the conservatism of many Australians on race. He seems to have been surprised by the impact on the Australian people of Mandela's 2000 visit to Australia. He appears starstruck by Mandela's powerful

advocacy, aimed at educating the Australian people on the legal rights of our First Nations peoples; and our hostility to foreign “strangers”. Still, Connolly's good relations with Madiba were clearly mutual and sincere.

At times, I yearned for more details on the role that Monique, Connolly's greatly admired spouse, played in his political assessments and public life. During his decades in Parliament, the Liberal Party was led, for most of the time, by Fraser and Howard, offering differing poles on many policy values. Connolly was closer to the Howard pole than to that of Fraser. Perhaps in the end, because the national mood was changing for a time, Connolly paid the political price by losing party endorsement. Most Australian politicians get to know, in the end, that their acceptability hangs on a thin thread. Disloyalty and thanklessness are often their common reward.

Connolly's book could have given a more detailed insider's insights of the handiwork of Carrick and [Sir] Robert Cotton as they worked to make the Liberal party more sellable to the community. The attitudes that faced aspiring Catholics have their counterparts in Australia today, including (but not confined to) the conservative side of politics. Refugees, especially if they are Muslim, still face hostility that Connolly might recognise from his youth.

He could have revealed more about his diplomatic life, especially when he held such a senior post in the diplomatic service in Africa, once the unlamented Presidents Mbeki and Zuma departed political office. I hoped for a few more quiet thoughts-inner voices-that questioned the motive forces that did - or did not - propel Connolly, with one of the safest electoral seats in Australia's national parliament, to chance his arm on reform.

Given the now uncontested defects of Australia, it would not take a great deal in 2020 to only “leave the world a better place”. So what are the secret dreams that Connolly brought to his political and diplomatic lives? What did he set out to achieve in his career. Did he reach his own (and Monique’s) expectations?

Perhaps Sir James Plimsoll (in the diplomatic service) and Sir John Carrick (in the Liberal Party) have beaten all such subversive thoughts out of Connolly, like the Jesuits' strap of his schooldays, to suppress them whenever they dared to raise their heads. He therefore remains, at the end of this book, as one commentator estimated, a person who had a “mild, somewhat vague air about him”. If the historian asked him what lay behind his mildness, I suspect that David Connolly would just flash one of his broad smiles and think of Patrick Connolly's poem, from which the title of this book is taken. “He vow'd he'd be true “ to the values he had been taught by his family and the Jesuits in his youth. Even though he would occasionally pay dearly for doing so, “he would fight in the sunshine; his foes in the shade”. This book is an attempt to show what David Miles Connolly believed were, for him, the sunlight. And what he considered the shadows.

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