

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Lessons For Wik

*Frank Brennan**

The Johnston Achievement and Approach to Law and Politics

I thank the Flinders School of Law and the Yunggoorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research for the invitation to be here. I acknowledge the presence of Associate Professor Anthony Moore, Dean of the School of Law and Dr Paul Hughes, the Director of Yunggoorendi. I am delighted to acknowledge the presence of Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue who, it should be noted, given the political pedigree of him whom we honour tonight, just recently launched Professor Stuart Macintyre's *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality*.

We honour tonight Elliott Johnston who came to national prominence in 1988 after a lifetime of service to the law and involvement in Communist Party politics. Here in Australia, most of his activities before 1988 were confined to South Australia. We are pleased to note that he became a very respectable post-Communist contributing much to the life of the nation. I do not know whether he classes himself as an ex-Communist. The one we honour became a Queen's Counsel once the merit principle was upheld; he was a judge of the Supreme Court of South Australia. After his outstanding perseverance in bringing to conclusion the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody commenced by Justice Muirhead, he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia and rather than retire, he made a wonderful contribution to the founding of the Law School of the Flinders University.

The irony will not be lost on the one we honour that the official inaugural tribute is to be paid by one who, being a Jesuit priest, boasts no Communist credentials; and by one who claims no heritage in this State founded as a free colony. In fact, I come from rowdy Irish stock from the eastern colonies which had less becoming beginnings even for those who were not Indigenous. But I am honoured and I trust the one to whom we pay tribute is sufficiently at ease that I have the opportunity to express your appreciation of the Hon Elliott Johnston AO QC.

* This lecture was delivered in 1998. It was published in (1998) 2 *Flinders Journal of Law Reform* 183.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.