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Vale: Jim Hagan

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Vale: Jim Hagan

Abstract

His PhD students finally reduced it to three letters – the BJQ. He often smiled when he heard it because he knew he had made an impression and penetrated the chaos and confusion that is the lot of the doctoral student. The letters stood for the Big Jim Question. In other words, what is your central defining question? He argued that without it you were wasting time and you lacked a point around which you could and should organize your research. Yesterday, Wednesday 21 October 2009, we heard of the sudden passing of Emeritus Professor Jim Hagan. It was a moment few of his former colleagues or students thought would ever come – he was always here. He came in the early 1960s as a lecturer to the new History Department at the Wollongong University College with his newly completed PhD thesis on the printers union. It later became a book, *Printers and Politics*. He then set about doing what a good historian should do – ask questions and get answers. Occasionally his questions meant that then Vice Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, Professor Baxter would be irritated. More importantly though it meant that his students would be irritated, enlightened, enthused and attracted to historical scholarship.

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He later applied this approach to a broader canvas – getting money from trade unions to fund the research of doctoral and post doctoral research into industrial organizations – there are at least a dozen of these projects. And he supervised honours theses, masters theses and doctoral theses. And he taught, administered, ran and researched all the while. He organized conferences such as the one on comparative industrial relations in Japan and Australia and when asked by one prominent academic, ‘Jim, who in the hell here knows anything about Japanese industrial relations’, Jim replied with a very straight and serious face, ‘You mean, apart from me?’ Yes, he had a healthy ego which went with his voracious appetite for research and enquiry.

He produced more than 20 books, including a two-volume work which celebrated the sesqui-centenary of responsible government in NSW. This looked at every election, in every electorate, between 1856 and 2006. This alone would be an impressive legacy.

He *loved* research and he inspired and created a generation of scholars. His passing leaves a gaping hole in social and labour history. It also leaves a wonderful legacy of which we should be all proud. Vale Jim.