



Photograph courtesy Beryl Rawson

Allan William Martin AM
(1926-2002)

Allan Martin is recognised as the author of two of the most important Australian political biographies, but his intellectual influence extends beyond this literary and scholarly achievement. As an unobtrusive but dedicated and innovative teacher and mentor of young scholars, always generous in recognition of their work, Martin challenged current orthodoxies and encouraged generations of grateful students.

Following service in the RAAF, he intended adopting his schoolmaster father's profession, entering the University of Sydney on an education scholarship. Before completing his Sydney Master's degree he taught in schools and obtained a Diploma of Education. This was the golden age of travelling scholarships, when young pilgrim graduates took a passage to Oxbridge. Allan already defied convention and opted for the infant Australian National University and a future in Australian national history, as the first doctoral student in the Research School of the Social Sciences.

Continuing his long apprenticeship in nineteenth century NSW political history, Allan's supervisors were Laurie Fitzhardinge and Robin Gollan. He published an article in 1953 that proved of sufficient interest to be included in a much-republished volume of *Historical Studies* articles. He completed his doctorate in 1955 and thereafter lectured at the University of New South Wales until transferring in 1959 to a senior lectureship at the University of Melbourne, followed by a Readership in Hugh Stretton's University of Adelaide History Department in 1965.

While many post-war researchers looked to the 1890s and extolled the rise of Labor and the ethos of bush radicalism as crucial formative factors in the forging of national character, Martin challenged this authorised version. He traced continuities in political life during decades before 1890 and recognised a diversity in radicalism that not always foreshadowed Labor.

In collaboration with his close friend Peter Loveday, he analysed individual characters, patterns of factional grouping and the emergence of political parties during the late 1880s. This was assisted by his publication with P. Wardle of *Members of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, 1856-1901* (1959). Martin and Loveday demonstrated the advantages of combining history and political science with a sociological slant. Their *Parliament Factions and Parties* (1966) and its reshaped sequel (with R.S. Parker), *The Emergence of the Australian Party System* (1978), were meticulous products of an interdisciplinary sociological approach, tracing the detailed fabric of individuals and situations in context, rather than

generalised patterns of progress and ideological affirmation. Such research directions would seem unexceptional today, but they were criticised then.

At Melbourne University I was fortunate that my office adjoined Allan's. I noticed the procession of students to his door, whom he not only patiently encouraged with their research, but in some cases acted as a welfare advisor. I know how much he felt the criticism for his implied 'conservative' line. To some, this thoroughly sincere and humble man was a dangerous counter-revolutionary. He and Loveday were stung to respond in *Historical Studies* (1968), concluding that 'when the subject is a changing system of power, the resources of history and political science can be profitably combined'. Simply because they proposed a different interpretation of the political scene did not stamp them as conservative historians.

Martin's conviction that sociological history and political sociology were essential tools reached a brilliant culmination at La Trobe University. An imaginative package deal resulted in Allan accepting the Foundation History Chair, while his first wife, the late Jean Martin (Craig) became Foundation Professor of Sociology. The years 1966-73 established their departments as vibrant and innovative. Allan believed that staff should be versatile, in addition to their research specialisms; history was global rather than national. He set an example and taught a popular unit in Mexican history and convened a graduate seminar on political biography. Early staff appointments included Inga Clendinnen, Greg Denning and Rhys Isaac. The Martin Social Sciences Building is a fitting memorial to Jean and Allan.

Across the years, Allan wrote eight distinguished biographies for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, co-edited *Historical Studies* and played a significant role in the Bicentennial History Project, co-editing the *Australians from 1939* volume. His work on Parkes culminated in 1980 with the massive biography and its by-product, *Letters from Menie* (1983). A comparable and significant offshoot from his Menzies study was the edited 1941 Menzies diary, *Dark and Hurrying Days* (1993) (with Patsy Hardy whose premature death affected him deeply).

R.G. Menzies dominated Martin's retirement years. It proved a fraught period because the deeper he immersed himself in the evidence the more he perceived that his shaping of the biography would conflict with long-held opinions of his colleagues, while he suspected that young post-modern historians preferred to hold firmly to formulations regardless of the evidence. In his preface to the first volume of *Robert Menzies*, he ruefully reflected that "'Objectivity" is now an unfashionable aspiration'. Consequently, when researching the young Menzies he 'tried to distance [himself] from the prejudices and preoccupations of a later period.'

On some controversial issues the evidence forced him to favour Menzies, probably against his own preconceptions, and certainly aware that many colleagues would disagree. In my opinion it chiefly was this issue of intellectual honesty that delayed volume two until 1999. He knew that his colleagues were wrong. Dissenting readers, however, would find sufficient documentation included to argue for a contrary viewpoint should they wish to take the trouble.

Martin was elected to the Fellowship in 1983, having been an Academy of Social Sciences Fellow since 1967. Membership of the Order of Australia honoured his career in 1998. He married Beryl Rawson in 1983, following Jean's death in 1979. During his long and debilitating illness Allan never complained, although his last months were cruelly saddened by the death of his youngest son David. He continued to the end with a public social service, by reading on Canberra radio for the visually impaired. Allan wrote an appropriate conclusion to this obituary, with the final sentence of his monumental Parkes biography: 'It was all over'.

John Mulvaney