

Roy Douglas 1924-2020

We are sorry to record the death on 11 December of one of our founders and former Chairman, Roy Douglas, at the age of 95.

Roy was something of a polymath, with an early interest in dinosaurs long before they were popular. He took a degree in Zoology at King's College London and a doctorate in Zoology at the University of Edinburgh. He then became a tutor in Biology at Battersea Polytechnic, but due to a reorganisation of the courses this came to an end and he decided to read for the Bar, being called in 1956 as a Member of Gray's Inn.

He was starting to practise when changes at Battersea Polytechnic (by then Battersea College of Technology) led him to resume his career there, although he made use of his legal knowledge in his first book – Law for Technologists, published in 1964. When Battersea College became the University of Surrey, Roy was appointed as senior lecturer in General Studies (of which Biology and Law formed a part), at its new campus at Guildford, eventually becoming Emeritus Reader until his formal retirement in the late 1980s. However, he continued to give lectures until he was in his late 80s.

Roy had a lifelong interest in politics, having joined the Liberal Party when he was sixteen. While at King's College London he served as Chair of its Liberal Association. He later became President and then Chair of the National League of Young Liberals. He stood for the Liberal Party at five Parliamentary elections: in Merton and Morden in 1950, Bethnal Green in 1951 and 1955 and Gainsborough in 1959 and 1964. Roy's interest in land value taxation was a natural part of his interest in classic Liberalism as it had developed in the last years of the nineteenth century, the cornerstones of Liberal economic politics being land value taxation and its complement, free trade; of his many books, the one that he was most proud of was a survey of the Land Question in the UK called Land, People and Politics. Land value taxation and free trade remained as key and distinctive elements of British Liberalism until the early 1970s. At that time, Roy was serving on the council of the Liberal Party, and in the run-up to the 1975 United Kingdom European Communities membership referendum, he chaired the Liberal "No to the Common Market" Campaign. That was probably the last occasion when the Liberal Party made a stand for what it had so long championed. A new generation had grown up which no longer understood its significance, paving the way for the merger with the then recently-formed Social Democratic Party, an alliance which would previously have been unthinkable.

Roy and a group of like minded people then set up the Campaign at some time around 1985, originally within the Liberal Democratic Party, but it was soon decided that the Campaign should break away to become a free-standing campaigning organisation, which he chaired until a few years ago.

Roy married Jean Roberts on 1 January 1955 and they had four children and four grandchildren. Roy was always friendly, approachable and hospitable, and a lucid speaker who would argue his case convincingly. He wrote extensively on political and economic history. His books provide important insights into the state of current politics and deserve to be better known.

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