

Colin Oxenham Gardner (1934–2013)

PROFESSOR Colin Gardner died in Pietermaritzburg on 10th October 2013, at the age of 79, and is remembered not only as an academic and teacher of English literature, but also as a man whose deep convictions led him to a life of social and political activism, and of selfless service in different spheres.

Colin Gardner was born in London on 26th June 1934, and by the age of ten had experienced the rigours of wartime Britain and the bombing of London in the Blitz. In 1947 his family emigrated to South Africa when his father was appointed as senior lecturer in English at the Natal University College, two years before it became the University of Natal. Having begun his secondary



Colin Gardner
(Photo: Alan Paton Centre, UKZN)

education at the Richmond and East Sheen Grammar School, Colin continued it at Maritzburg College, where he excelled, and in his matriculation year of 1950 was dux of the school. After completing an honours degree at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg he went to Oxford, and while there learned that he had been awarded a Rhodes Scholarship. He easily met the requirement of the Scholarship that recipients should have not only academic but also sporting credentials, as he had played football for Maritzburg City and South African Universities. Returning to South Africa from Oxford in 1957 he held a university teaching post at the University of South Africa in Pretoria and then in 1959 at his alma mater in Pietermaritzburg, where thirteen years later he was appointed Professor of English, and later served as Head of Department and Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1975 to 1979. In 1981 he was appointed University Orator, and for many years his superb introductions of honorary graduands were a notable feature of the annual graduation ceremonies. He served for many years on the council of the English Academy of Southern Africa, and was one of its vice-presidents.

In 1957, as a young man of 23 committed to the struggle for justice and democracy, he joined the Liberal Party of South Africa, which was soon to adopt the principle of universal suffrage and become less and less tolerated by the Nationalist government. His growing involvement in political action coincided with the disappearance of any government tolerance that might have remained, increasing harassment of the party's members, and its eventual banning in 1968 – at which time Colin was acting as its national chairman. During

this time he had worked closely, and formed lasting friendships, with leading liberals like Peter Brown, Alan Paton, Sam Chetty, Norman Middleton, Leslie Weinberg and John Mitchell. The Christian Institute was founded in 1963 by English and Afrikaans clergy to focus Christian opposition to apartheid, and when it too was banned in 1977 Colin Gardner was serving as chairman of its board of management. He thus experienced, time and again at first hand, the actions of an increasingly paranoid, fearful and ruthless government. Other organisations that lived under the constant surveillance and threat of the apartheid state were the South African Institute of Race Relations, the Pietermaritzburg Detainees' Support Committee, the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness, and, when the regime in its death-throes was more ruthless and dangerous than ever, the United Democratic Front. Colin was an active member of all those bodies.

He joined the African National Congress when it was unbanned in 1990, and two years into the new democratic dispensation and by then about to retire, he agreed, with the university's approval, to his name's being placed on the party's list of proportional representation candidates in the 1996 municipal elections. It was not very high up, and he thought it likely he would be below the cut-off point. In the event, the ANC did even better than expected, and Colin found himself beginning a new career as an elected public representative. Not only that, but recognising his experience and standing, the new Pietermaritzburg-Umsunduzi Transitional Council elected him as its Speaker. It was a demanding role to which his abilities, as well as his qualities of tolerance and fairness, were more than equal. He

was a member, and often office-bearer, in many other bodies, and in all of them his grasp of essentials was clear and his firm principles and opinions were advanced quietly, even self-effacingly.

Colin had many articles published in literary journals, and from 1993 until shortly before his death he wrote regularly on political and social issues for the *Witness*, a Pietermaritzburg newspaper. When the Liberal Party was banned, its journal *Liberal Opinion* disappeared, and was replaced by *Reality: A Journal of Liberal and Radical Opinion*. Colin served on the board of *Reality* throughout its existence, from 1969 to 1993.

Although his Roman Catholic faith did not remain uncritical in recent years, his life clearly displayed the Christian virtues, most notably in his charity and humility. The kindness and gentleness

of his nature were as clearly evident in his public life as in his family life and personal friendships. Many, such as his former students, or those who came to know him in his more public roles, may remember mostly his quiet seriousness; but, equally, many knew and enjoyed his wit and humour. In recent times, when his health was deteriorating, he faced death with equanimity, as shown by some lines he wrote, and they are not without their own touch of humour:

I must try to get my life's dilemmas
into a richer, wider view.
An old man dying. There's nothing tragic.
It's what old men are meant to do.

Colin Gardner married, in 1958, Mary McCauley, who survives him with their three daughters, two sons, and their families.

JOHN DEANE

Timothy Patrick McNally (1938 – 2013)

ADVOCATE Tim McNally (74), the last of the old-style attorneys-general of Natal, died in Pietermaritzburg on 25 July within three months of being diagnosed with cancer. That, despite the handicaps of being both an English-speaker and a Roman Catholic, he should have been appointed by the Nationalist Government to high office in the Department of Justice, speaks much for his ability.

The son of a British army doctor, McNally was born in Faisabad in India (the colonial Fyzabad) in 1938. Although his father was a doctor, the family had strong links with the law: his maternal grandfather had been a judge in Ireland,



Tim McNally