
AN ESTABLISHMENT figure and an ardent critic of the establishment that was the enigma of Harold Evans.

Four years after retiring as a magistrate in Christchurch, Mr Evans was in court, pleading guilty to a charge of obstruction, relating to a 1991 Springbok tour protest.

He carried into court an anti-apartheid banner, which was confiscated as he attempted to unfurl it, and a 50-page affidavit that he wished to read aloud and comment on. When the judge ordered a discharge without conviction, the embittered Evans objected. He wanted the opportunity to express his views.

Mr Evans' next encounter was more high profile. As a peace activist, he instigated New Zealand's case to the World Court to have nuclear weapons declared illegal. He led this campaign through its 18-year course, to a successful conclusion in 1995. He took pride in writer John Pilger labelling his court campaign a "principled audacity", as much as in the Queen's Service Order he received for it.

Reddening might seem out of character for a son of a solicitor general, a born at Christ's College, a committed Anglican who played the organ in Wellington's cathedral, a Master of Laws from Victoria University (where he achieved away from student groups), a Royal Air Force officer in World War II, the husband of an admiral's daughter, a member of New Zealand's legal team at the trials of Japanese war criminals, a secretary to the prime minister, a barrister, and a magistrate.

Even his friends found Mr Evans difficult to characterize. All agreed he was intense, authoritative and energetic. He was academic, yet more a collector of ideas than an original thinker. He was dogmatic and "hard to get a laugh out of", yet his activist stance masked a colourful personality.

He was an accomplished pianist who fell between careers in music and law. He declined the offer of a Fulbright Scholarship to study law in Washington.

A watershed in his life was the six months of World War II he spent in a Japanese POW camp recovering from a crash in a Bristol Beaufighter, of which he was navigator. A fellow patient led him socialist and liberal books to read. These strongly influenced Mr Evans' thinking.

His outlook was further formed by his involvement with the International Tribunal at the Falstaff Islands. He spoke out against the appointment (political, he said) of former prime minister Sir Keith Holyoake as governor general. He criticized the judiciary for lack of independence and raised concerns over some judgments.

"It opened my eyes" to the ways in which people and nations stood isolated, he said in an interview in Christchurch newspaper The Press to run a copy of a speech by Lord Shannon suggesting the arms race. He advocated a United Nations Day to Christchurch's Anglican cathedral, demanding the flag of nonaligned countries be removed. His activities ranged over many social issues but paramount were peace and an absence of nuclear weapons.

Mr Evans was born and raised in Wellington and returned there after leaving Christ's College, to study law. He worked in government posts before serving in the Royal Air Force, in Britain, in World War II.

He was associate to Justice Northcote, New Zealand's judge at the Tokyo war trials. His marriage to Julia Weenink was in Tokyo in 1947, was considered outrageous because her father was a German who had commanded the pocket battleship Deutschland in the war and Germany's naval attack in Japan. The marriage prompted the termination of Mr Evans' employment as personal assistant to Prime Minister Peter Fraser.


As a stipendiary magistrate in Christchurch from 1965 till 1977, Mr Evans was noted for a mildly eccentric manner at the bench and for instilling a sense of justice in his chambers. Instead of chatting with other judges during breaks, he practiced his play- ing, striking the old court building in the surrounds.

He also played in chamber groups and accompanied ballet performances. As a keen walker and long-distance runner, he became a familiar sight on the streets of Christchurch.

He is survived by his sons Paul, Nicholas and Peter, daughter Ursula and four grandchildren. — The Press