H.K. Lücke[*]

OBITUARY
ALEX CASTLES

In July 1959, travelling to Australia on the migrant ship, *Castel Felice*, I read in an Australian Department of Immigration newssheet that a certain Alex Castles, of the University of Adelaide, had established a Comparative Law Association to enable lawyers from Continental Europe to retain some sort of link with the law. Alex's interest in comparative law was kindled by Hans Leser at the Melbourne Law School and later was greatly boosted by the great Max Rheinstein at the Chicago Law School. Both were German lawyers who were forced to flee from the Nazi madness and had become prominent in the common law world. I am grateful that Alex encouraged me in the 1970s to offer comparative law at the Adelaide Law School, for this proved very helpful in 1989 when I applied successfully for a position in the Max-Planck-Institute in Hamburg, which conducts comparative studies in private and commercial law, and again in 1999, when I was asked to teach the subject in the Adelaide Law School at a graduate level.

During 1959 and 1960 I worked as a tutor in torts and contract and also studied a range of undergraduate courses in order to supplement my European and American qualifications. In 1960, I became one of Alex's students in Australian Constitutional and Administrative Law, a course for which he carried the main responsibility. He had compiled a well-organised set of materials and made us work very hard. Howard Zelling, later a Justice of the Supreme Court of South Australia, gave some of the lectures and was also Alex's co-examiner. Alex's lectures were energetic and very lively. His liveliness and his great passion for communication became proverbial in the Law School. *Obiter Dicta*, a student publication, listed under 'Alex Castles, Recreations': 'Standing still for more than five seconds'. Once Alex had buttonholed you, the next 30 minutes, or perhaps more, were dedicated to listening to him. One story must suffice to illustrate Alex's communicatory passion.

In 1965, Alex and I were both promoted to Reader and about a year later, we applied for chairs in the University of Queensland. Alex seems to have wanted to move to that Law School with an ally in tow, for it was he who persuaded me to

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apply. We were called for interviews. He must have performed much better than I did, for he viewed his chances optimistically, while I was pessimistic about mine. Accordingly, I gave little thought to our prospects, whilst Alex took a lively interest in the developing situation. He had a number of Queensland sources of information. He rang me at least twice a week with the latest news. These calls must have given him, passionate communicator that he was, at least as much satisfaction as they gave me. One of these news items had been communicated to him in the strictest confidence. Poor Alex! How could he break confidence? How could he bear not to tell me? Having found a compromise, he rang me. I remember his exact words: 'Something very important has just happened in Queensland. I am not allowed to tell you what it is, but I thought I'd let you know'.

In the event, we withdrew our Queensland applications, for the University of Adelaide decided to keep both of us in Adelaide by appointing us to chairs here. I never found out about the important event which caused Alex so much communicatory anguish.

Alex worked in public law and I worked in private law, so that our academic contact was not close. However, in the early days the Law School was still fairly small, and there was much personal contact. Alex and his wife, Florence, were very hospitable and entertained their colleagues and their wives on a number of occasions. In 1960/61 the O'Connells,[1] the Howards,[2] the Castles, the Kavasses[3] and the Lückes all had daughters within the span of a few months. Even our academic visitor at that time, Brian Hogan,[4] later a Professor in Leeds, and his wife Pauline, were blessed with a daughter. To Brian, this was unexpected, for he kept telling us that he was suffering from 'lawyers' impotence' (supposedly due to prolonged sitting).

During 1968 I was in Oxford. Early in 1969 Arthur Rogerson, the Dean, had gone to England on study leave and Alex had become Dean and Acting Head of Department. Alex presided over staff meetings which were held frequently. Like many colleagues in other departments, our staff members were keen to change the system of University and departmental government. Out of all the turmoil grew the

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1 Daniel Patrick O'Connell was Reader and Professor of Law, University of Adelaide, 1962–1972, and Chichele Professor of International Law, University of Oxford, 1972–1979.

2 Colin Howard was Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Adelaide, 1960–1964 and Hearn Professor of Law, University of Melbourne, 1965–1990.

3 Igor Kavass was Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Adelaide, 1959–1963, and then Professor of Law at Northwestern University, Duke University and Vanderbilt University until 1997.

4 Brian Hogan was Professor of Law and Chair of Common Law, University of Leeds, 1967–1994.

participatory form of government, which then operated for a number of years. To involve the staff formally in the making of important decisions seems very sensible to me; it is certainly vastly superior to the now prevailing opposite trend. However, when Arthur Rogerson, then in England, heard of these events, he understandably saw them as a sign of dissatisfaction with his personal style of leadership. It was an anxious time for many of us, and particularly for Alex, who was in the driver's seat when all this unrest occurred. I still admire Alex's skill in dealing with these difficult situations. When the students were threatening to get out of hand at Adelaide University as they had at a number of others, Alex became an advisor to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Geoffrey Badger. An avid reader of US publications, Alex had informed himself of the problems on American campuses. His political skills told him how to react to these problems. Advised by Alex, the Vice-Chancellor called together the staff and the students and announced a number of reforms in the government of the University, including student representation on faculties and on the Council. The initiative deprived the radicals on campus of much ammunition and kept things relatively quiet, at least compared with other institutions of higher learning.

Amidst all the student and staff unrest, Alex not infrequently enlisted my help in administrative matters. Together, we worked out a plan to gain access to the University's ample equipment funds, from which such expensive items as electronic microscopes, computing or engineering equipment were purchased. We drew up a long submission detailing numerous back runs of legal periodicals which the Law School did not have. We argued, in the name of justice, that this was 'literary equipment' which we badly needed. Instead of pointing out that the Library fund was available for such purposes, the Equipment Committee granted our request. After all, compared with the cost of the equipment for which they usually had to find money, our request was very modest. In this way we were able to obtain many US journals for the Law Library.

The student and staff unrest in the late 1960s and early 1970s made the administration of university departments rather difficult. Alex and I probably had our closest association at that time. During some of that period, Alex was Dean and I was Head of the Department and we ran the Law School together. We conducted a lively correspondence and wrote memoranda together concerned not only with Law School matters, but also with such things as the reorganisation of the University's committee structure. A detailed account of this would be out of place here. Suffice it to say that our cooperation was exceptionally harmonious. Our backgrounds were very different. He had grown up in the Australian larrikin tradition; I had had obedience to authority drummed into me in Nazi Germany at a young age. Despite these differences, our partnership remained free from conflict and friction, probably because we had much the same academic ideals. I had acquired mine in post-war Germany and his, I imagine, were acquired in the Melbourne Law School led by Zelman Cowen.

Academic ideals were not the only things we shared. Hunting for a cheap suit at a fire sale at Cravens, a clothing store, I ran into Alex who was there engaged on the same quest. He loved a bargain. He glowed with pride whenever he had managed to pick up some wonderfully inexpensive thing in New York.

Another weakness, if that is the right expression, which I shared with Alex was an unwillingness or perhaps inability to live in the country. Having described the property in Mount Compass to which his daughter, Margaret, moved in 1996, he commented: '. . . not my style, I am strictly pavement as Woody Allen would have it'.

Over the years, Alex tried his best to awaken my interest in Australian Rules football. Occasionally, when his beloved Hawthorn Football Club was playing in Adelaide, he invited me to witness the spectacle with him at Football Park, as that venue was called at the time. I resisted these efforts, for I was afraid I would become intensely interested and would then waste too much time. If only I could tell him that I have finally succumbed! Ruth and I live in Port Adelaide and, in recent years, have been gradually seduced by the charms of the Port Adelaide Football Club.

I learnt a lot from Alex's egalitarianism — an attitude to one's fellows which simply did not exist in Germany when I grew up there. To Alex, a Vice-Chancellor and a caretaker were equally respected and equally entitled to his conversational talents, provided only that they were honest and conscientious in attending to their respective jobs. When I mentioned this quality of Alex in a letter to Justice Michael Kirby, he responded:

> You put your finger on a special characteristic of Alex that I should have mentioned – his egalitarianism. He constantly took the mickey out of any pomposity into which Zelman, Gerard Brennan or I occasionally strayed.

In January 1972, Florence, Alex's wife, had a terrible motorcar accident near Hamilton in Victoria, in which their daughter, Susy, was killed. I saw Alex shortly afterwards in his room at the Law School. I have seen much misery in my life, but the despair, grief and anguish which had taken hold of Alex were of awful intensity. I shall never forget that scene, or my dreadful sense of helplessness.

When Alex developed his passionate interest in Australian legal history, our academic contacts became a little more frequent. Although my historical interest related more to English than to Australian law, I did come across interesting old Australian contract cases and would pass references on to Alex if I thought he might find them useful. Examples are *Stewart* v *Byrnes* (1858) 2 Legge 1091 (showing that litigation was a form of public entertainment in the mid-19th century), *O'Brien* v *Joplin* (1882) 4 NSWLR 14 (showing early reliance on US cases) or

Magill v *Bank of North Queensland* (1895) 6 QLJR 262 (showing that the use of cheques was more common in Australia than in contemporary England). When his book, *An Australian Legal History*, was published in 1982, he gave me a copy with the inscription: 'With best wishes. A touch of tradition with more than a sprig of wattle'.

In early 1978 I spent three months as a visitor to the Hamburg Max-Planck-Institute. Alex wrote to me from London regretting that he would be unable to visit me in Hamburg before his departure for Canada and the US. Apparently he had lost too much precious work time because of the British closedown during the Christmas/New Year period. His interest was focused on the Scottish attempt, in the late 17th century, to establish a colony on the Isthmus of Darien in Central America, a venture which has entered the history books as the Darien Disaster. The following entry appears in the Internet:

> Scotland briefly had a disastrous colony on the Mosquito Coast of what is now Nicaragua. It pretty nearly bankrupted the country and was one of the things that precipitated union with England.

Alex was familiar with the English approach to colonial settlements and to the law to be applied in new territories and he was fascinated by the different approach of the Scots to these issues. Being of Scottish descent and anti-colonial in outlook, he pointed out, presumably not without pride, that Scotland had only ever tried to establish this one colony. One wonders whether he ever published on this subject or, if not, whether there are papers concerning it which could be published posthumously.

Alex's letter also mentioned contacts with Bill Cornish and Mary Daunton-Fear. In Ely, on New Year's Day, he visited Derek von Abbé with whom he had been active in adult education in Adelaide. This was yet another of Alex's many and varied interests, which he pursued with great passion and success. It is amazing how much he was able to fit into his life. He played a major role in the establishment of the University radio station. He was a member of the Australian Law Reform Commission from 1975–1981. At various times and in various capacities he was a member of the Council of the University of Adelaide, the SA Committee on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation, a Committee of Review of the ABC, the Australian Institute of International Affairs and the South Australian Division of the United Nations Association of Australia. The media held great fascination for him. He acted for many years as one of Australia's most recognisable broadcasters on state and federal elections. He taught media law in the Adelaide Law School for a number of years. Had he not chosen to be an academic, he might well have become one of Australia's most prominent journalists.

When I retired in 1984, the Faculty graciously offered me a very moving testimonial dinner in the Staff Club, at which most of our colleagues with their spouses were present, as well as John Bray, Don Stranks and John Portus. Alex made a wonderful speech — full of exaggerated compliments.

During the 1990s my wife and I lived in Hamburg. Alex, who spent a good deal of time overseas was our guest in 1992 and again in 1996. In 1992 he was with us for almost a week, although he spent a day and a night in the recently reunited City of Berlin. Army clothing, Soviet medals, even Kalashnikovs could be bought there from cash-strapped members of the Red Army. Alex returned from his tour with a Russian Army cap and sundry medals. We took him to Schwerin, the capital of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where he admired the great Castle and was impressed by the contrast between the old East German ways and the beginnings of Western modernisation. In Lübeck we also introduced him to the Niederegger Marzipan shop, which I regarded at the time as an incarnation of German post-war prosperity. They make the best Marzipan in Europe. Alex was duly impressed: 'I have, as you might imagine, a new, heartfelt appreciation of Marzipan — German style. Ditters' Marzipan potatoes pale into insignificance in comparison.'

Ruth took him to the elegant Mövenpick Restaurant in the Hanse Passage in the heart of Hamburg. To reach it, they had to take a glass lift down to the level of the Restaurant. Unfortunately, the lift got stuck half-way and had to stay there for some time. Poor Alex became increasingly distressed. It appears that he was affected by claustrophobia. In a letter he commented on this experience:

> Since my visit to Hamburg I've refused point blank to travel in glass containers that pass as lifts. I gather there are some large hotels in America that only have these. Fortunately, as I can never afford to stay in such places I don't have to decline any opportunity to [use] them.

In the same letter, he expressed his approval of our transfer to Hamburg:

> It was also good to see you both thriving so much in Hamburg. The 'retirement' from the University of Adelaide has had much going for it. Some say there are times when you should re-invent your life. You both seem to have done this marvellously. I think I should have followed suit.

From Hamburg he went to Scotland, Ireland and then to the US. He was able to attend a class reunion in Chicago, gave lectures in Charleston and visited his fellow legal historian, Alan Watson, in Athens, Georgia. Alan took him to his farm and they went hunting together. Alan managed to shoot a rattlesnake and Alex sported a Beretta. In his letter, he did not report that he managed to shoot anything so I must conclude that he did not worry the Georgia wildlife too much.

On the second occasion, Alex stayed with us from 9 to 13 May 1996. He travelled to Hamburg from Holland by train via Osnabrück and Bremen. We took him to Haithabu near Schleswig, an excavated Viking settlement near the Danish border, where one can admire a restored Viking longboat and many Viking artefacts. On our way there we had to cross the East-West Canal, which links the Baltic with the North Sea. The car ferry, which took us across the Canal, does not touch the water; instead, it is suspended from long cables and moves along rails attached to the railway bridge. Alex was a great railway enthusiast and I suspect that he enjoyed this experience rather more than he did the longboat of Haithabu. It must have been during this second visit that I introduced him to the Director of the Max-Planck-Institute in Hamburg, Professor Drobnig. I did not attend the interview, but I know that Alex enjoyed his talk. He was also delighted to discover that the Institute's small Australian law library contained his book on Australian legal history.

After our return from Hamburg in late 1998, Ruth and I did not see Alex as often as we would have liked. He occasionally came to dinner in Semaphore and we once met in a restaurant in Norwood. His association with Flinders University had become close and we did not see him often in the Adelaide Law School, where I was teaching when not in Hamburg. Alex also had substantial commitments in Sarawak and spent a good deal of time there. When we did meet, it was obvious that our old friendship had not lessened. Alex's death on 1 December 2003 in the midst of his still very active academic life came as a dreadful shock. He was one of my closest Australian friends.

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