



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

Peter H. Russell, CC, FRSC

**Professor Emeritus, Department of Political Science, and Innis College
University of Toronto
(1932 – 2024)**

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Council of the Faculty of Arts and Science mourns the passing of Professor Emeritus Peter H. Russell, CC, FRSC. Leading scholar of Canadian politics, university citizen, and engaged citizen, Russell passed away on January 10, 2024 at the age of 91.

Russell's life was interwoven with the University of Toronto. He attended the University of Toronto Schools, then completed his undergraduate degree in philosophy and history at Trinity College. Awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, Russell studied philosophy, politics, and economics and captained the Oxford hockey team. Upon his return to Canada, Russell worked for a year in the private sector. Then in 1958 – lacking a graduate degree but possessing enormous intellectual promise – he was asked to teach political philosophy in the Department of Political Economy. He never looked back. Russell worked his way up the academic ranks, becoming full professor in 1968, was named University Professor in 1994, received an honorary Doctor of Law from the U of T in 2001, and remained deeply engaged in the life of his department and his university until shortly before his death.

Russell stood atop several related areas of study within Canadian politics. First, Russell was a pioneer in the study of Canadian courts considered as political institutions. One of the founders of the Canadian Law and Society Association and its second president (1985-87), his book *The Judiciary in Canada: The Third Branch of Government* (1987) instantly became the authoritative account in the field. Characteristically eager to translate his ideas into action, Russell also played an important role in transforming Ontario's judicial appointments process.

Russell's interest in the judiciary connected seamlessly with his larger interest in constitutional politics, and during the thirty-year "mega constitutional" era in Canada, Peter became our chronicler-in-chief. His *Constitutional Odyssey: Can Canadians Become a Sovereign People?* – first published in 1993, then twice updated – remains definitive. The sequel – *Canada's Odyssey* (2017) – is his finest work. It is a magisterial narrative of Canadian constitutional history, the first to give equal standing to all three "pillars" of the Canadian political community – French, English, and Indigenous.

Russell's inclusion of Indigenous people in Canada's "odyssey" was the product of long engagement with Indigenous questions. In 1974, the Dene nation asked him to help them understand the bewildering and oppressive provisions of the Canadian constitution. This encounter propelled Russell down another scholarly path that led to Australia (*Recognizing Aboriginal Title* - 2005) and back to Canada (*Sovereignty: The Biography of a Claim* – 2021). Here again, Russell's scholarship is only half the story. Having gained the trust both of Indigenous nations and Canadian governments, he frequently served as an interlocutor and bridge between Ottawa and Indigenous peoples.

Finally, Russell was both a scholar and advocate of parliamentary democracy. The title of his 2008 monograph - *Two Cheers for Minority Government* (a revised edition will be published posthumously) – telegraphs one aspect of his contribution to understanding Canada's central political institution. His invaluable service to numerous Governors-General in clarifying their roles (for instance, about when to prorogue Parliament) exemplifies another. His work with the McDonald Commission in holding the RCMP accountable for its security and intelligence operations is yet another.

Leading scholar of the judiciary, the constitution, Indigenous-Canadian relations, and parliamentary democracy: It is small wonder Peter Russell was named University Professor, honoured for his lifetime contribution to Canadian political science, elected fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and made Companion of the Order of Canada. There is no Canadian political scientist whose scholarship combines the breadth and depth of Peter Russell's corpus.

Russell also served his university with distinction, and his instincts for innovative thinking found fertile ground within the college system in particular. An inaugural member of Innis College Council in the earliest days of that college, he went on to serve as its Acting Principal four years later in 1968, and then as Principal from 1971-76. Beyond overseeing the construction of Innis's permanent home at 2 Sussex Avenue, he championed forward-thinking academic programs, solidifying Innis's reputation as an incubator for curricular inventiveness. Two of those programs, Cinema Studies and Urban Studies, will celebrate their 50th anniversaries this year, a fitting testament to Russell's influence as an inspired university administrator.

Later in his career, Peter Russell was the founding president of Retired Academics and Librarians of the University of Toronto, and in that capacity took up the challenge of creating a meeting place for retired faculty and librarians. The resulting body, Senior College, still thrives today, and, under Russell's leadership, formed a lasting connection to University in the Community, a program dedicated to serving adults who have been unable to follow a traditional path of higher education. That worthy mission is reflected in Peter Russell's lifelong and avid commitment to teaching and learning, further consecrated in his dedication to the Arts & Letters Club.

In many ways, Peter Russell was an exemplar of John Stuart Mill's liberal citizen: Deeply sceptical of passing intellectual fads and fashions, he blazed his own intellectual trail. Deeply committed to pluralism, he strove to open Canadian political institutions to a broader array of participants. Deeply persuaded of the virtues of "government by discussion," he both encouraged debate and held his ground. May his example be a lasting legacy to his department, his discipline, his university, and his country.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT this Resolution be inscribed in the MINUTES and a copy sent to his family with the Council's sympathy.