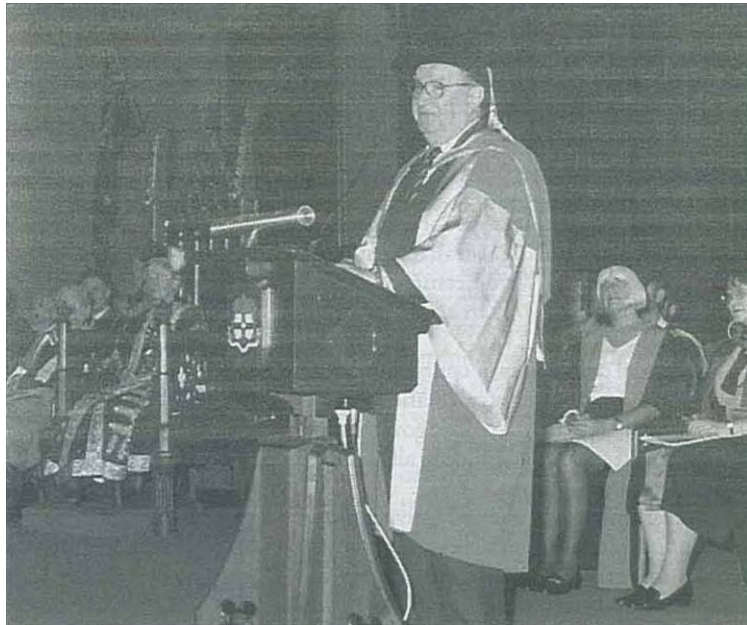


Sir Arvi Hillar Parbo, AC

The degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*) was conferred upon Sir Arvi Hillar Parbo at the Economics ceremony held on 27 October 2000.



Sir Arvi Parbo giving the occasional address at the ceremony, *photo*, 'The University of Sydney News', 16 November 2000, University of Sydney Archives.

Citation

Arvi Hillar Parbo grew up on a dairy farm in Estonia, which, at the time he was born, was a republic that had fought for its independence against the Red Army and the German Free Corps only six years before his birth. He remembers his boyhood as "a happy time in the pleasant and peaceful Estonian countryside", and the excellent education he received until his secondary schooling was interrupted by the Second World War.

The Soviet Union and Germany fought over Estonia and, in 1944, Arvi Parbo was one of the 80,000 Estonians who escaped the Red Army. His parents remained and, in 1949, were sent to Siberia, and his brothers to labour camps. He went to Germany where he entered a Displaced Persons Camp, finished his secondary education, and, at the end of 1946, enrolled in the Clausthal Mining Academy in West Germany.

Arvi Parbo, having decided to emigrate, arrived in Melbourne in 1949. Why not Brazil or Canada? "Well," he said, "I was in a hurry and the queue of applicants to go to Australia was shorter than for any other country."

At that time, migrants were required to perform specified work for two years. His job was in a quarry near Adelaide. He taught himself English so that he could continue his mining degree, and after five years of study, graduated from Adelaide University with 1st Class Honours in Mining Engineering. He supplemented his Commonwealth Scholarship by working as a tram conductor.

All this was Arvi Parbo's hard-won preparation for a remarkable career. It is not surprising that his many talents were recognised early on, and he made rapid progress up the ranks of the mining industry in Western Australia and then in Melbourne, from technical assistant to managing director and Chairman of WMC. He retired from this position last year after forty years of distinguished work, recognised in Europe, the USA and Asia, as well as throughout Australia.

He has received distinctions and honours for his tireless contributions to the mining industry and to trade, commerce and the community - many from the 22 professional organisations with which he has been associated. He was Chairman of Alcoa of Australia Ltd, and of the Zurich Australia Insurance Group, and a Director of Hoechst Australia Investments and the Sara Lee Corporation. It is not surprising then that he was the inaugural President of the Business Council of Australia.

His reputation as an international businessman was recognised by his appointment to the Chase International Advisory Committee, the China International Trust and Investment Corporation International

Advisory Council, and the Egon Zehnder Global Corporation Governance Advisory Board, and by high honours awarded by Australia, Germany and Japan.

We honour Sir Arvi today for all these accomplishments, but also for his sense of history, his analytical approach to problems and his emphasis on simplicity and clarity of language. He is unimpressed by rhetoric or the pretentious jargon so common today in business and elsewhere.

In describing his belief in the need for a strong and prosperous economic base and the free enterprise system he has said, "These beliefs are not a matter of ideology, but arise from observing the plentiful evidence available around the world, including the personal experience of having lived under a very different system." He put these beliefs into practice as chairman. His insistence on knowledge and observation applies also to members of the boards he chaired. Regular visits to the operations in Australia were part of directors' responsibilities. When there were prospects to be investigated abroad, extensive briefings on the politics, culture and history of the country were provided in advance of site visits. These procedures are a reflection of a man who values knowledge above opinion, and reasoned debate above passionate conviction.

His interest in history makes him sceptical of predictions, and he quotes Robert Millikan, who won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1923, "There is no likelihood man can ever tap the power of the atom", and Harry Warner, head of Warner Brothers Silent Pictures, who asked in 1927, "Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?"

In retirement, Sir Arvi is writing a history of the life and times of his family in Estonia, in both Estonian and English.

Chancellor, I present to you Sir Arvi Parbo, distinguished business leader, miner, historian, linguist, collector of wine, and carpenter.