

*Citation read on the occasion of the Granting of the degree of
Honorary Doctor of Laws to
James Lockyer
by the Senate of the University of Victoria*

November 9, 2009

Mr. Chancellor, it is an honour to introduce James Lockyer.

In the summer of 1974 a lanky lad with shoulder-length hair and a winning grin, alighted from a train at Windsor, Ontario. He had graduated in law from Nottingham and was already an English barrister. I was there on the platform that day to meet him, having had the good sense to have offered James his first full time job, at Windsor's Law School.

From the start, James Lockyer's strong commitment to social justice was front and centre in his teaching and in his work as faculty mentor in the poverty law clinic. Windsor's groves of academe, however, were never going to fully satisfy those energies so he soon took up practice as a criminal defence lawyer in Toronto.

Propelled by a profound desire to fight injustice and to act in the cause of vulnerable people considered despicable by the rest of society, but wrongfully convicted, James showed both determination and courage in taking on a number of these individuals as clients, to argue their innocence before the courts. Moreover, he pressured the Federal Department in Ottawa to recognize the existence of miscarriages of justice in these instances and to take action to redress them. Through James's efforts, a number of wrongful convictions in Canadian murder trials have been overturned – the cases of David Milgaard, Guy Paul Morin, and Steven Truscott represent but a sample. In a very real sense he has been the leading advocate for the unjustly condemned in this country.

James Lockyer represents his clients with exemplary dedication and skill. When he speaks of the demands of justice, he does so with a firmness of purpose and eloquence that are impressive, moving and, not least, persuasive.

The most powerful testimony to his achievements comes from former clients. Steven Truscott writes: "From the onset I viewed Mr. Lockyer as a diligent, hard working and compassionate human being and he never let me down in the ten years of battle which ended in my acquittal." Joyce Milgaard, mother of David Milgaard writes: "There is absolutely no doubt that James Lockyer due to his tenacity, vision, diligence, intellect, and understanding of the law is a champion leading the charge to end wrongful convictions . . . He is hard working and tireless in his pursuit for a better and fairer justice system."

From the academy Professor Gerry Ferguson adds that James Lockyer's work has had a major impact "on the teaching, practice and reform of criminal law in Canada."

James continues his mission both in court and in pressing the Canadian state to follow the lead of the United Kingdom in establishing an independent panel to review claims of wrongful conviction. Moreover, for twenty five years he has devoted time and effort to the improvement of the lives of developmentally challenged young people, through volunteer work on the board of New Leaf. The agency provides rural residential homes for and vocational and social services to this marginalized group.

James Lockyer's remarkable record of passionate service to his fellow human beings has earned him the G. Arthur Martin Criminal Justice Medal by the Law Society of Upper Canada, an award for distinguished humanitarian service by the John Howard Society of Ontario, and honorary Doctor of Law degrees from that same law society and from Assumption University in Windsor. It is fitting that the University of Victoria, whose school is committed to furthering social justice, should select James Lockyer to join the distinguished ranks of its honorary graduands.

If it is the mark of a civilized and humane society to strive to do justice impartially and fairly, and to hold up its system of justice to scrutiny, then James Lockyer is the embodiment of those values. Canadian society as a whole benefits from the presence of lawyers who, when presented with instances of injustice, examine their consciences and say resoundingly: "This cannot be."
Mr. Chancellor, I am proud to present James Lockyer for the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

*Written and presented by
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