This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation Don Dunstan History Project interviewing Mr Andrew Bishop on the area of his work in the Premier’s Department in the late 1970s. The date today is 19th June 2008 and the location is the Don Dunstan Foundation.

Andrew, thanks very much for doing this interview for the project. Can you just talk a bit about yourself, your education and how you worked your way into the Premier’s Department?

Yes, George. I was born in 1948 and I went to kindergarten at Mrs Colquhoun’s kindergarten – and that’s relevant because at that time her, I think foster son, I don’t know whether he was a biological son, was Des Colquhoun, who was a cadet journalist at The Advertiser at that time. I had primary schooling from reception through to grade four at Rose Park Primary School, which has the proud record of having produced a British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who was a child here in Adelaide when his father was at Adelaide University. And then from grade five through to leaving honours I was at St Peter’s College. Went to Flinders University, did an honours arts degree majoring in Politics, a DipEd and subsequently was a postgraduate student there, did a bit of tutoring and did a Master of Arts in Politics.

And you started work in the Premier’s Department in the mid-’70s. How did your education and work experience lead into that, your awareness of what was going on in South Australian society at the time, political issues, that sort of thing?

Yes. I went through with a group of students at school who were quite interested in the political process and, as I may mention later, we actually got exposed to Don’s views when he visited the school. And then of course at Flinders University, majoring in Politics, I became aware of some of those processes and it heightened my interest in what was to become my work. However, in the first instance I had been trained as a secondary teacher and did a couple of terms of teaching at Croydon Tech in 1972, then got a fellowship and went back to university.

Now, at university at that time there were a number of people who I think would have made me aware of what some of the possibilities were in the state public service, particularly the Premier’s Department. For a period, for example, I had Neal Blewett as a supervisor. A colleague and friend of mine through that time was and still is John
Summers, who knew Don well and was quite active in the Labor Party at that time. And, interestingly, also in my honours year in 1970 I chose to do an elective at Adelaide University on Australian foreign policy, and there were a number of people in that class who were involved in the Labor Party. I mentioned John Summers, his then wife Anne Summers; Mike Duigan was part of that class; Greg O’Leary was in that class. This was a group that was taught by Bob Catley, so that was an exposure of interest.

Also, of course, 1970 was the year probably at the height of the whole Vietnam Moratorium experience, and so I was involved in that to some degree. I wasn’t an extreme activist but I certainly marched and participated in those events and was exposed to a lot of the discussion that went on at that time.

So you’d heard about Don as well. You mentioned he’d come to the school.

Yes. That’s probably worth elaborating on because it had become the practice at the school, which taught Current Affairs as a non-exam subject, to have – each year, I think, for many years, there’d been a visit to the school by Don Dunstan speaking from the Labor Party perspective and Robin Millhouse speaking from a Liberal Party perspective. And I actually was given the task of introducing Don before he addressed our class. I was a bit in awe of the man, I’ve got to say, and didn’t feel like I’d quite got the introduction fluently and accurately across, and I don’t think I was all that encouraged in the effort that I’d made when I said, ‘I think that’s right’, and Don said, ‘Yes, something like that’, (laughter) in that way that Don could.

Right, yes.

Sometimes I think Don could have the effect of putting people down when he didn’t necessarily intend that to be the case. That’s how it felt to me, though, as a young bloke at the time.

The gist of Don’s address is still quite fresh in my mind, because he spoke very much about the concept of small-L liberalism and made the point that the Liberal Party was no such thing, it was a conservative party. And what came across then was the moving influence in Don’s thinking of individual liberty and libertarianism, even, as something that was important to him, rather than pushing the more democratic socialist line or even
the socialist line. So that was interesting. Amusingly enough, when subsequently Robin Millhouse visited for his turn, he said, ‘Well, I suppose Don talked about the fact that he’s a true liberal and the Liberal Party’s no such [thing]’, (laughter) so that they knew each other’s lines pretty well on that. So that was an interesting perspective at that time.

The other thing – and this may anticipate questions that you were going to ask in a while, George – but having been brought up in a fairly conservative environment and a conservative school one could not fail to be aware of the widespread antipathy there was towards Don from conservative quarters in Adelaide, and it was almost pathological at times. I felt it was quite alarming. And bear in mind also Don’s sons went to the school at that time – his elder son, Andrew, was probably a young boy in the senior school – and had to put up with a fair bit of unreasonable behaviour.

So how was that expressed to you? Like you’d introduced Don, and did some of the boys come up to you later and say, ‘What are you doing?’ or – – –?

Oh, no. I think that we were in a class that was I’d like to think quite progressive. You know, there were such people as Bevan Morris and Geoff Wells and they probably came from educated families that were much more open-minded and reasonable and encouraging of our exposure to the range of political views.

One of the reasons I’m asking, I’m just trying to place where Don got his radical ideas from and where there was a reaction against the Establishment, and of course he went to Saints: whether you’ve got any view about any of that, the sort of environment the Saints-type school might put on somebody and they’d want to be different?

I think both aspects are available at the school, both the conservative, reactionary aspect, but there was always a sufficient core of people who had educated, progressive ideas and that reflected in their work. So bear in mind that people like John Bray had been to that school. But in the time that Don was at the school – and, of course, that must have been in the 1940s – they were different times and with the Depression being followed by the War I think there were quite a few people around who had slightly different ways of looking at things. I think overwhelmingly I’ve got no doubt that Don’s experience at the school wasn’t all that pleasant for him.

One of the other reasons I was asking was you mentioned Andrew got a bit of a hard time –
Yes.

— because he was Don’s son —

Yes.

— but you’re also talking about some of the students were progressive.

Yes.

So how did all that work out?

Ah, well, by the time Andrew was progressing through adolescence I know that would have been the early 1970s and there’d been a lot of, well, mild revolution in the schooling system at large, both independent schools and government schools you’ll remember at that time, and I think that actually caused a conservative backlash. The other thing about Andrew is, being his father’s and his mother’s son, he probably wasn’t inclined to take a backward step on some issues and may have aggravated the situation a little for himself, too.

And you mentioned the Establishment was coming out against Don particularly as he worked his way into stronger and stronger power as Premier in that. What were some of the things that you were hearing about — not necessarily going into his private life, but — — —?

Well, it’s hard to answer that question without acknowledging that often comments were about his private life.

I see, right.

And you know all the lines: the ‘half-caste Melanesian bastard’ line was commonly used. And at that time issues relating to Don’s sexuality, too – he was still married to Gretel at that time, albeit. I’ve mentioned the private life stuff, but that’s often what it had to do with. Very rarely did people get into issues of political substance in their criticisms of him, as far as I can recall.

So it wasn’t a battle of ideas, it was more of a — — —.

No. Not that I recall, anyway. I mean, these memories are hazy.
So before you started working in the Premier’s Department and leading up to it you had some ideas about Don’s ideas and his style and his broad achievements. What was striking you about them at the time?

Well, bear in mind that I only started in the Premier’s Department in 1975, so there’s a little period that’s already occurred, and of course he’d had those couple of years as Premier in the late ’60s. I’d need to get into a time machine to get precise recollections, but I think that certainly some of the initiatives that were emerging to do with the arts – the impression was there was a fair bit of progressive work being done in relation to social policy, too, but I don’t know how much this is the wisdom of hindsight or how much I was aware of it at the time, but so much of the socially-progressive initiatives were pretty much doing what existed in every other state, and it was the bridging between the Playford Era and basically the twentieth century, for heaven’s sake, you know. And so sometimes the social progressivism was more of a catch-up nature. But I’m not sure how much I was conscious of that at the time.

So how did you get interested in the job, how did it come up?

It wasn’t a vocation that I’d set myself on. Frankly, for quite some time, I probably aspired to an academic career and it became apparent to me that that wasn’t well-suited to me in the sense that I needed to be in more interactive, social environments in terms of interpersonal environments rather than the slog and hard grind of academia. So certainly through talking with my colleagues at Flinders University and Neal Blewett – and David Corbett, of course, by that time was fully into the Corbett Inquiry into the Public Service¹ – so there was a sense in which my training was suited to that stream.

The other thing that I had looked at at that time was the possibility of getting into policy development in the education sector, and so I had made approaches to the South Australian Council for Educational Planning and Research at that time, that you’ll recall was headed by Doug Anders, and worked pretty closely with the Premier’s Department in many instances and relied on the Premier’s Department, as you know, and Policy Division in particular, for research and administrative assistance. So those were the sorts of things

¹ Committee of Inquiry into the Public Service of SA, chaired by David Charles Corbett and reporting in 1975.
that headed me towards -- (probably something like) working in the policy development area of the State public service.

**So was this job advertised, was the Committee Secretariat job your first one?**

I basically put in a general application in 1974, expressing particular interest in the Policy Division. Now, the job market actually, even back then, had dried up in the public service very significantly in the mid-'70s and it was many months before I was rung -- I think round about ten o’clock at night on a Friday night -- by John Stock, ‘the graduate’s friend’, as we called him, saying that there could well be a possibility in that area; and he then mentioned the Committee Secretariat, and I wasn’t even aware of the existence of the Committee Secretariat at that time.

**So what did you find out about it, at what stage?**

About the Committee Secretariat itself?

Yes.

Oh, well, I made it my business to find out and talked with David Corbett, for example, and then discovered there were a couple of people who worked there that I knew and talked to them about it: Michael Forwood springs to mind.

**And what was its role?**

The role of the Committee Secretariat was to provide research and administrative assistance to committees of inquiry. Now, ‘committees of inquiry’ sounds like a fairly grand title, but frequently the investigations were conducted as properly-constituted committees of inquiry with terms of reference that were formally recognised; bound reports that were tabled in parliament; even such things as Committee of Inquiry into the Bread Industry is one that springs to mind that you’ll vaguely recall. So it covered a wide range of activities. And I can mention the stuff that I became involved in.

**Yes, if you want to talk about that.**

Okay. Because you asked what the Committee Secretariat did. So it was populated almost exclusively by base-grade graduate officers -- in other words, people who’d emerged from university with sound degrees, frequently honours degrees -- and it was a
good training ground, too, because you learned public service systems, how to keep proper files and document records and take notes of meetings: the minutes of meetings was something that one did just through handwritten notes. But also then the research, and that varied from inquiry to inquiry. Some of the principal inquiries I was involved with: one was the East End Area Redevelopment Steering Committee, which I believe you were actually on that committee.

Yes.

I was actually an assistant to the secretary to that committee, Vicky Lainson.

Vicky Lainson, yes.

Quite an interesting exercise. You’ll recall that the East End Area Redevelopment Steering Committee covered a lot of the things that Don would have been interested in, which was inner-city regeneration. His dream was that it should become a student and university precinct, you’ll recall, so that there would be university accommodation, also nurses’ accommodation, but try to get some vibrancy in the area given his interest also in things like restaurants and the food and wine industry. So that was one committee.

Yes, and what happened to that?

Eventually I think it just fell away because the level of public funding that would have been required was too great. This may anticipate a later question, too, but I found it interesting, and this is a little bit of an observation about Don’s personal style and the acquaintanceships he made. But I remember being given the task, because Lawrie Curtis, who had worked with I think the West Lakes development and was quite a prominent developer and seemed to have developed good acquaintance with Don, I was instructed as the research assistant to secure every title of every property in the East End area. Now, that was no small task. It often occurred to me what the actual need for Laurie to have that information was, in terms of the business of the committee, and it sat that difficult line that you tread between needing the involvement of development investment versus how you balance that against the public interest versus the private developer’s interest.

Yes, that’s right. It’s interesting.
Yes, that was an interesting one. Couple of other committees, very quickly: the Steering Committee for a South-East Community College was really not something that was a Don initiative, it came more from the Education Minister, Don Hopgood, but the Committee Secretariat, as I intimated earlier, would provide support to the South Australian Council for Educational Planning and Research. It was a very high-powered committee, it had the Vice-Chancellors of both universities and other eminent academics and other such people; and it was driven by, to some degree – and this is what Don would have been interested in – the political imperative of yet again trying to find means for securing the seat in Mount Gambier which, as he points out in one of his books, was never successful. The more they spent there, the bigger the Liberal margin became. (laughter) But there was this dream amongst many people in Mount Gambier of having a university there. It was patently obvious it was never going to happen from the outset, but there was this notion of community colleges as providing bridging courses between the post-secondary TAFE\(^2\) sector with the emerging CAE\(^3\) sector and the university sector.

**To this day there’s still no – there’s a TAFE but nothing beyond that.**

Yes. Well, ultimately, the concept of community colleges got appropriated by the TAFE sector and they weren’t, in my opinion, great years for TAFE in the 1970s, I think they lost their way a bit.

**And what about any other projects or committees?**

The other committee that would have took most of my time was the State Disaster Committee. Now, in 1974, on Christmas Eve, there’d been Cyclone Tracy. The response to that emergency was one that caused both the Commonwealth Government and all state governments to revisit their preparedness for major emergencies and disasters. The result of that was that in round about September, I think, 1975, a State Disaster Committee was got off the ground. My involvement in it was quite interesting because, as was his wont, the ‘permanent head’, as he called himself, of the Department, Bob Bakewell, wandered

---

\(^2\) TAFE – Technical and Further Education.

\(^3\) CAE – College of Advanced Education.
down from his office, came up and thought that I looked a likely type – because I was a bit older than a lot of the other graduate officers there – and asked me whether I’d be interested in being secretary of the committee, which of course I was. But the dynamic of the committee was quite extraordinary because the Commissioner of Police at the time was Harold Salisbury, and perhaps more of him later. But Salisbury, as Commissioner of Police, really should have been chair of the committee, but he was designated the Coordinator of State Disasters, which means state counter-disaster effort, but the chairing of the committee was left to Bob Bakewell.

I see. Did you get any sense of why that was the case?

It was seen, probably from the Premier’s and the Premier’s Department perspective, that really Harold Salisbury just didn’t have the oomph administratively and in terms of his initiating energy to steer that in the right direction. It involved the politics of coordination across the public service and it can be invidious for one of the department heads, namely the Commissioner of Police, to be trying to pull other heads of department into line, so in that sense it was some good reason for Salisbury himself to hesitate to take on the chairing role and for the Premier’s Department likewise to push him into that.

Just in terms of the style of the thing, it might be of interest to be aware of some of the dynamics that occurred there –

Yes, sure.

– given what happened with Salisbury later in the piece. But one little anecdote I could relate is that the old Police Building in Angas Street there, since demolished, Salisbury used to fly the Union Jack on it –

Oh, really?

– and it was left to Bakewell – because this was able to be seen from the State Administration Centre – it was left to Bakewell to (laughs) gently suggest to Harold Salisbury that he might consider flying the State flag as well as the Union Jack; and I don’t know, they might have encouraged him to fly the Australian flag as well, I don’t recall. But that’s just a little bit of a flavour of the thing. Which Salisbury did – to my
observation, anyway – with good grace and slight amusement. It wasn’t as if there was a bitter struggle evident at that time.

**How did the committee work? Did it work smoothly, or did you sense a lot of territorial stuff going on?**

Oh, well, that’s an excellent question, George, because some of the members of the committee included the Deputy Director General of E&WS,\(^4\) Bob Oliver, a very experienced and capable, old-fashioned public servant, so he was very good at pulling together the requirements of the various infrastructure departments, which was interesting because they always saw themselves as the senior engineering department, and you’ll recall that the head of the E&WS used to be called ‘Engineer-in-Chief’, and that meant engineer-in-chief of the state public service, so that was always looked on with great concern by the Highways Department. So, such people as Bob Oliver.

The most conservative political influence on the committee was the Commander of the Fourth Military District, Brigadier Willett. He made no attempt to conceal his dislike of Dunstan, and some of the things that were said in committee were quite inappropriate. And one sensed that he always felt that Harold was on-side, Harold Salisbury; but Salisbury, to be fair, was a bit more circumspect and probably a little bit more reasonable on those issues, at that time.

There were, of course, though, talking about the dynamics of this committee with other committees, other people who were not on the State Disaster Committee, and I well remember, for example, Ian Cox, head of the Department for Community Welfare. Now, he was summoned – and ‘summoned’ is the correct word – to visit the committee and Willett went for him in a most ruthless fashion; and Ern Aston – who was later to become head of the SES\(^5\) and was the senior support person from the Police Department, who I worked very closely with, a lovely man – had the task of taking Ian Cox out, showing him out? After the meeting, and he tells me that Cox was almost in tears and affronted that he wasn’t being treated as a fellow permanent head of a significant government agency.

\(^4\) E&WS – Engineering and Water Supply [Department].

\(^5\) SES – State Emergency Service [of South Australia]
Really? What was the animosity there? Or view, then.

The animosity I suppose had to do with the fact that Cox was clearly one of the new breed of recruits that the Dunstan Government was bringing in to head government departments.

So what was the military’s concern: that it was some State takeover of all these services or something?

I think it had to do with notions of political style, political values and political ideology. I don’t think it was a technical turf war, as such.

And Bob Bakewell’s role, how did he work it? He was head of Premier’s and the chief co-ordinator, if you like.

Yes. He was a most interesting character. I thought he did it very well in those days and he seemed to be able to work well across the board with the different interests that the committee represented. And I do recall Bob Oliver once described Bakewell as having – and it’s not a word I’d ever have thought to apply to him – but Bakewell as having charisma. Well, I suppose you could call it ‘charisma’: he had a certain sort of energy and enthusiasm and a slightly lateral approach at times.

Perhaps an aura of power, as well?

Oh, I think that’s right. Oh, yes, he knew how to exercise that. And he exercised it in an implicit rather than explicit fashion, I always thought. So he was quite clever at handling it.

So he never had to wheel in the big stick.

No.

That’s right. And I think even the story about the flags that I mentioned earlier illustrates that.

Yes, that’s interesting.

The other thing that should be mentioned, though, about Bob Bakewell – and this is a matter of style on his part and you may have wanted to ask questions about this later – but from my point of view he was an incredibly – he had a very light touch. He let the project officers get on with their job and back what they came up with, and I found that really
interesting because we finished up having to prepare all the material that underwrote the writing of the state disaster legislation.

So what did you actually do? You did the minutes as secretary, and what else?

Yes, I did the minutes.

Drafting?

Wrote the State Disaster Plan, which I’m not saying it was written straight off the cuff; what it involved was getting different departments to write down their stratagems and operational plans but to pull it together and synthesise it into an overarching plan that was at the centre of the exercise.

And were your ideas coming through as well, or were you simply transcribing other people’s thoughts.

I’d like to think so, yes. I found it quite astonishing that that sort of opportunity was given, and I think you’ll have heard that from others, too; and that was very much the ethos that prevailed in the Policy Division, too, which we’ll come to in a moment, presumably.

Yes. I wanted to go back through the Committee Secretariat, and one of the areas was there were a lot of young people there, and you’ve just mentioned that you were given what you’d see and probably is seen now as a fair amount of responsibility. When you discussed these things around your group there, what were the sort of things you were talking about in terms of, ‘Wow, this is really giving me a chance to have some influence’?

Yes, I think that was very much part of it. This may be a slightly self-serving statement, but I think that it depended a bit on the individual, too. So those of us who were perhaps a little older and more able to deal with those environments were given more opportunities than perhaps some other people were, I don’t know. That’s how it appeared to me at the time. But certainly we talked about that opportunity. I’ve mentioned Michael Forwood: he certainly saw it that way and did a lot of the writing of the reports even though, ostensibly, the Secretary of Committees was the head of the Committee Secretariat. Now, that had been Henry James, who was before my time.

Henry James.
And then, by the time I got there, the Secretary of Committees was Brian Hill. And it’s fair to say that a lot of the work in Committee Secretariat occurred without Brian’s direct involvement.

**Okay. And did you talk about research methodologies, or ——?**

There was a certain degree of that, and I think, given that a lot of these sorts of inquiries subsequently tended to be influenced by American management consulting methodology, back then it was much more organic but it also seemed to me to allow much more for comprehensive literature search and not just going out and interviewing and working out what the straw poll was, what the politics was, as to whose views were what, without testing the ideas of those people. I think there was much more emphasis on testing the content of the ideas, veracity of the ideas, based in terms of proper research and proper literature searches.

**Yes, that’s good. So how many years were you there?**

I started in August 1975. By late 1976 it was clear that Committee Secretariat had run its race, for a couple of reasons, probably: one was that the season of full-on committees of inquiry or the years of those had passed. You get fashions of that and it’s like the early days of the Rudd Government, you see. So that, I think it became more an emphasis on projects rather than full inquiries; and probably also it was considered that Committee Secretariat could most usefully be absorbed within the Policy Division, which was being redefined quite significantly in late 1976. A new Intergovernmental Relations Unit had started up, headed by Andrew Strickland, and Bruce Guerin had stepped into Bill Voyzey’s shoes, and the notion of units and secretariats was being replaced by a more conventional, larger, divisional public service structure.

**So you joined the Policy Division. Where did you go into?**

I was basically, in the first instance, a graduate officer. Some of the work, quite a bit of my work, was brought with me, because the State Disaster Committee was still going; certain involvements in education matters with the Board of Advanced Education; and so a lot of the work came with me.
However, shall I move onto the actual work I became involved in within the Policy Division? The first piece of substantive work that arrived on my desk – and it was very much like the experience I had with the State Disaster Committee – Bruce Guerin asked me to prepare a cabinet submission on the establishment of a Pitjantjatjara land rights working party and to work up some terms of reference for it. Now, I was quite taken aback to be given a responsibility of that sort and I had to call on my own networks to actually inform myself as to what the issues were, and I got into it fairly quickly because I was lucky enough to have some contacts who really knew their stuff in that area, and I’m talking about people like John Summers, talking about John Tregenza who was a community adviser in the Pitjantjatjara Lands and I’d been at university with – I’m talking about Andrew Collett as an eminent lawyer in that area – and so I was able to put together a draft cabinet submission with terms of reference and a proposed membership that I’d been very much guided by (others in writing), and I was I must say astonished to find that the thing, save for one aspect, basically went through virtually unchanged as a cabinet submission.

Right – right through to the cabinet and endorsed.

Yes, and approved and so on. However, I did say there was one issue that came out of it, and this was a very interesting one because this had to do with the politics of the public service and the politics of cabinet, and frankly it was very clear that Bruce Guerin’s desire was that the working party be very much driven and supported by the Policy Division and the Premier’s Department. This caused a substantial reaction by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Ron Payne, also the Minister for Community Welfare, and in the Department for Community Welfare, and a turf war seriously did break out on that such that it was resolved with the executive officer to that committee being Brian Headland, who was the senior policy person in the residual Aboriginal affairs capacity of state government, because at that time remember the responsibility for Aboriginal affairs was very much with the Commonwealth. So that was interesting, and that was a real struggle. The chair of course of the working party was Chris Cocks.

And did you pull out of that or were you involved?
Well, to be honest, I was still (merely) a new graduate officer. The suggestion I made to Bruce as to who might be executive officer – and bearing in mind the tensions with DCW had started – a new project officer was about to commence in the Policy Division from DCW, and I thought that might straddle that problem, and that was Dennis Ryan. But that did not prevail.

So did you monitor what was going on?

So I finished up being the desk officer and worked very closely with Brian Headland and got on well with him, and that became a substantial responsibility for me over the succeeding years.

And what did you do with the information as the desk officer?

I was in regular contact with Bruce Guerin on it. I’m bound to say that my exposure to Premier Dunstan was very limited on those sorts of matters. Occasionally one would be involved in a briefing with the Premier on that matter. And it’s worth recording that the thing about Don that I was in absolute awe of, and I’ve never understood this or comprehended it, it’s often the case with public servants, particularly in the policy arena, that they have to modify and moderate their language, so it’s not too highfalutin when they’re dealing with disadvantaged groups and citizens.

And cabinet ministers.

And cabinet ministers, it should be added – indeed. (laughter) Don seemed to have the capacity not to compromise his language one iota when he was dealing with Aboriginal people, but it was as if they understood every word he said by osmosis. There was never any sense that they were perplexed or flustered by what he was saying; they just felt comfortable with the man. It’s quite extraordinary.

Amazing.

And the message got across.

That this guy would listen and respond –

That’s right.

– in the way he would with just about anybody else.
That’s right.

That’s interesting.

It was a gift, actually.

So how did that play out, that working party: did you have to sort of send messages through to Brian Headland about what the Premier or Bruce or somebody thought –

Oh, yes.

– and what ought to be in there?

Oh, to some degree. But Brian, to his credit, was the servant of the committee rather than the servant of his department on that.

Who chaired that?

So Chris Cocks, of course, was chairing it.

Chris Cocks, sorry, yes.

And they did an enormous amount of research in the field up there. And I think that it would have been a fantastic experience for Brian Headland. I went up there a couple of times. But also on that committee was David Hope. Now, David Hope was an academic at what was then the [South Australian] Institute of Technology, and involved with – I think they called it the ‘Aboriginal Task Force’, which was a unit within the Institute of Technology that provided bridging education within a tertiary educational environment for Aboriginal people. David Hope was quite extraordinary: he’d had experience as a patrol officer in New Guinea, experience in the Pitjantjatjara Lands.

The other thing that needs to be commented on – and this is something that was a hallmark of Don’s premiership, too – Don was prepared to stand up and be counted in certain situations rather than going for the soft option or no option at all when there seemed to be irreconcilable differences between groups that he was dealing with. And I’m referring specifically to the tension there was between the Aboriginal Lands Trust, which Don had basically created, and the special treatment that it was perceived that the Pitjantjatjara were being accorded. But he understood that there was a concept involved there that had to do with the homelands movement and Aboriginals taking charge of their
own culture. I mean, we were all great believers in it at the time; I guess what’s happened in more recent times we’ve had reason to pause and reflect on whether the ideal was quite achievable.

**And where were the miners and the pastoralists in on all of this?**

The pastoralists weren’t necessarily all that happy, but I think – you see, Kenmore Park was a McLachlan property, Granite Downs was a McLachlan property. I’m not certain they weren’t comforted to get out of there. Now, that’s one thing.

The miners was a completely different issue. In round about 1978, late in Don’s premiership, opal was found at Mintabie. It was known to have been there from a long time before, but for the first time a serious opal rush occurred in Mintabie, which was near a little kink in the road called Marla Bore, and this created enormous difficulty because some of the people who were most into opal mining were poorly-educated Europeans, a lot of Croatians, and in fact a lot of them were members of Ustasha, because I remember seeing that literature on the wall of their tin shed up there that was also covered in fifty-dollar notes. But the point that I’m coming to is that, while it might be the case that some of those European groups looked at the Aboriginals as being somewhat primitive, there was equally some fairly superstitious beliefs held at the miners’ end, too, such as a belief that there might be a coincidence of sacred sites with likely rich opal sites and the like. Now, of course, it’s also true that some people cynically felt that every time opal was found the Aboriginal people would say it was a sacred site. So this was one of these little projects that one got involved in, which was a specific-purpose project to resolve a problem rather than being a wider inquiry such that a small working party was put together to investigate the establishment of a new town to keep people away from Mintabie, on the soon-to-emerge new Stuart Highway. The Stuart Highway was still just a dirt track in those days. And so that was a working party that involved myself, someone from Environment and Planning whose name escapes me at the second (post script: the person was Phil Cooper), and the person who was the driving force in it was a bloke called Bruce Evans, who was an officer with the Pastoral Board. Now, he knew his stuff because he’d been the first policeman in Oodnadatta after the Second World War, went in
there on a camel, spoke fluent Pitjantjatjara – a very, very interesting man. Great knowledge of the botany of that area.

**Gee, interesting.**

Anyway, that’s a bit by-the-by, but it’s an example of how fit-for-purpose, short-term, task-oriented project groups were put together. And Marla was indeed created on the Stuart Highway. Didn’t keep people away from Mintabie, though; that’s a flourishing town, basically.

**Just one other question about that: there was no Premier’s Department member on that working party in the end, is that right or not?**

Yes, that is right, there was no Premier’s Department [member].

**Why was that?**

Oh, that was how that politics had fallen out. But I think the fact that I was able to work closely with Chris Cocks in particular – and Chris was pretty well-known to Bruce, so Bruce kept on top of this stuff pretty well, too.

**Okay, that’s interesting. What other sort of areas did you work on when you came into the Policy Division, before we get into the intergovernment one?**

Okay. Because of my emerging involvement in Aboriginal matters, I became involved with the ill-fated Wardang Island Working Party. Now, that was an example of how Don sometimes took on good ideas from lobbyists that weren’t such good ideas – Wardang Island, just off Port Victoria or near the Point Pearce Aboriginal Mission – and I think someone had visited him and suggested this would be a really good venue for developing Aboriginal businesses and I think they were looking at rabbit farming and then tourism and hospitality, and it was all ill-fated, it just was a disaster. Graham Foreman was the person from Policy Division on that group. I went along to assist and in time I think Graham basically became the chair, if I’m not mistaken, and I became a member of that working party. It eventually fizzled out.

**Fizzled out, yes.**

I think when whatever that virus was – the calicivirus? – eventually did clean out the rabbits on Wardang Island for a while.
And what was the view when you were on this: was this a crazy idea of Don’s, or you had to critique proposals and develop feasible options.

There was a lot of that thinking around.

But you still had to work through it.

And I think Don probably knew that it was a lemon in the end, and what we were trying to do is manage our way out of it and try and contain the expense. Because it was one of those projects that had all the potential to be a money sink, particularly from the TAFE sector.

But did Don give it any specific instructions

Not that I was party to.

Okay.

Anything I’d say on that would be hearsay.

All right. And were there any other areas you worked on?

Well, now, this was after my time in Intergovernmental Relations but sometimes I would become involved in one-off projects. Another example – and this is later in the piece, by which time Hedley Bachmann had become the Deputy Director General to Graham Inns, and this is how Don’s network and friends would put him in a situation that could be difficult. And Geoffrey Dutton wanted to sell Anlaby, the family seat, just out of Kapunda. He approached Don because I think he wanted to give the State Government first right of refusal, and it was pretty clear from the outset – but I don’t remember Don giving any instructions on this, and from what Hedley said he hadn’t received any instructions from Don – but it was at the time that there’d been Raywood, Graham’s Castle, all these big places had been bought up with public money often from infrastructure departments to be (staff-management) development centres and the like, and it was clear by the late 1970s that this wasn’t sustainable practice in terms of state budget and economic management. And there’s no way that we were going to be able to buy Anlaby, you could work that out very quickly, but it was my task to go with Hedley up to visit Geoff Dutton and his wife –
Ninette.

– Ninette, and Geoff had all these good ideas that he hoped might be able to be taken up, but then it fell Hedley’s lot to submit – I think it was actually a cabinet submission; but I guess that I would have written a fair bit of the background documentation. And Hedley was quite anxious, actually, about the fact that he was going to recommend that the government not procure it, and I think that reflects the fact that Don hadn’t given him riding instructions.

Interesting. It wasn’t couched in the form of an arts venue or anything like that, a rural arts venue?

That was one of the options.

Oh, really?

But I think more than that, though, Geoff had it in mind – because it was the manor, you know, the Dutton staff and workers used to live on the property and there was this brick sort of courtyard with surrounding stables and some residences, I think, and Geoffrey was seeing we could get Clydesdale horses in and take people for tours of the farm. So I think there was a tourism thought behind it, perhaps, more than an arts venue thought.

Interesting. And you joined the Intergovernment Coordination – was it Branch, or Unit?

I think it was a unit.

And what did that do, what was your job there?

I think it had been recommended that such a unit should be established in the Corbett Committee of Inquiry in 1975. Its purpose was to coordinate across government, across the public service, intergovernment relations.

Public sector, or service only?

I don’t know what the formal charter was, but it finished up pretty much limited to the public service proper. We’d get involved with some statutory authorities, but mainly public service, I’d suggest from memory. But it was quite a step towards centralist
control, and that meant that intergovernment correspondence was supposed to go through the Intergovernment Relations Unit.

So that’s any state and the Commonwealth.

Yes. In theory, other states and local government as well; but in practice it had to do with the Commonwealth. Now, in practice of course that wasn’t feasible. There are day-to-day operations, for example, for a road authority or the Highways Department in terms of the way they’re dealing with the Commonwealth on road funding, so it was ludicrous to suggest that every piece of that correspondence from the Minister for Transport would be vetted by the [unit] and in any case I can tell you that a lot of government departments weren’t going to take a blind bit of notice of that requirement, anyway. However, it would be true to say that there was a very close control kept on submissions to Commonwealth committees of inquiry and Commonwealth parliamentary inquiries and that sort of thing, and it was common practice for someone from Intergovernment Relations Unit to actually attend those hearings and be a witness there. And even still as a graduate officer I found myself quite often presenting the state submission and talking to it, sometimes in the company of someone from the relevant department. For example, I can remember appearing before a Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, and they were conducting an inquiry into the effect of television on children’s learning and education, so I went along with an Education Department person and spoke to the submission that I basically wrote, having received documentation from the Education Department as to what they thought the issues were.

And what was the general approach going on, like what were you having to watch out for in this role of coordination and intergovernment relations?

Well, I’ll try and illustrate by one example, and it was the most unsuccessful example. It became apparent in the late 1970s that the Commonwealth was adept at making grants to the states by way of special purpose grants, section 96 grants, and what it was, was it was a seed funding by stealth. The State Government would accept the funds, get into the given activity and then later in the piece Commonwealth funding would dry up and there you had a working situation that the State Government would then be saddled with.
Now, this became quite important in an industrial sense, because – and I’m fairly certain Bruce Guerin wrote a memorandum or a minute that was signed by Don to the Chairman of the Public Service Board stating that in future any public service positions that were created on the basis of Commonwealth funding were to be contractual and subject to the continuation of that funding. It became very clear that no-one was taking the slightest bit of notice of it, that the Public Service Board disregarded it summarily, and it was very much a reflection that there was a real sense in which the Public Service Board was an industrial arm of the public service. It was more about not only employing public servants but looking after the interests of public servants and trying to expand that employment base. That’s a subjective view, but that was the strong flavour I got. And, as you know, George, it wasn’t till the mid-1980s that the Public Service Act was rewritten such that it had to do with the management and business of government as well as the employment of public servants.

So what value-added, if I can use that term, were you adding to this process that departments couldn’t do or combinations of them couldn’t do?

Well, there was an issue of consistency and it was possible and it did occur that a department might take a position that didn’t have regard to what was happening elsewhere in government or in fact mightn’t have even had regard to overall government policy. If you ask me for some examples I’m going to struggle at the moment to call those to mind. However, I do think that there was a fine line between policy consistency versus people within the Policy Division or the Intergovernment Relations Unit actually expressing their own policy views on matters. In retrospect I do believe we erred in that regard.

Do you want to elaborate on that at all?

Yes, I could. Now, this comes back to – I’ll combine my comments on that with the practice of cabinet comments –

Yes, sure.

– which was something that caused a lot of resentment elsewhere in the public service and I’ll admit to having perhaps engaged in the writing of those in a manner that was not sensitive to the perspectives of those who were the experts in the area – as much as I
might still stand by what I was saying at that time if I were to revisit it. That’s the sort of thing I’m talking about.

Intergovernment relations: the other thing that came into it was there was an extent to which – and I think this was true for the Policy Division at large, too – there was the issue of marketing the government, and in saying that, I will illustrate that by pointing to two of the annual events. One was the annual Commonwealth budget, and that came damn near to being an exercise in political propaganda at the state level, because what we used to do was to look at all the funding on a grant-by-grant basis, and look at the percentage variations. And so a great noise would be made about where there’d been reductions in the specific grant, but the truth of the matter was that generally, if you added it all up, the bottom line was pretty much the same.

As a somewhat amusing sidelight to that, in those days State Treasury did not really exercise much policy influence.

Yes. I was going to ask you about them, so good.

Well, if I could just mention this story, George. When the Commonwealth budget came down we’d all be locked up down there at Parliament House and I’d be monitoring the grants and doing those sums. But that was actually of no interest to the State Treasury, and principally their main operative in that little exercise was Tom Sheridan, the Deputy Under-Treasurer. Tom Sheridan’s responsibility was to draw up the annual State budget. All he ever wanted to do was to check out to what extent the assumptions he was making about Commonwealth funding, how that was being played out in terms of getting a balanced State budget, and one year I was busy trying to calculate the gap between the funding from one year to the next in grants; Tom was busy calculating the gap between what the Commonwealth had actually given us and what he’d assumed they were going to give us. The two stories got completely mixed up. The Advertiser ran a headline with the statements from the Premier saying that we were going to cut this much on this program and that much on that program, and the figures were actually the gaps between what Tom thought we were going to get and what we actually got. And no-one twigged. Front page of The Advertiser. Just sailed through to the keeper.
And you mentioned section 96 grants before. You’d think Treasury would have picked up that issue of ‘Don’t let’s commit to things unless we’re clear about future flows of money’.

Yes.

Did they ever come into any of this?

Yes – thanks for that, George, and I think you might be prompting me on conversations we’ve previously had on that matter. Yes, you remind me – and this was a very interesting policy issue – Tom was very, very wedded, as most state treasuries would be, to the notion that it would be much better to get untied funds in a total lump from the Commonwealth which could be then used by the State at the State’s discretion in terms of which activities and programs they are applied to. Now, bearing in mind that the specific-purpose grants mechanism was very much an instrument that had been used by the Whitlam Government, it was seen as a reasonable thing to do at that time, including by the South Australian State Labor Government.

Yes, and now we’ve got Malcolm Fraser’s Government.

Now we’ve got Malcolm Fraser and it's an issue of do you stick with your centralist principle, which was a centralist principle that was of great influence in the Labor Party philosophy and policy. And I prepared a memorandum for the Premier’s consideration saying that it was important that specific-purpose grants remain so that national priorities could influence the way social policy development occurred across Australia, and not on a fragmented state-by-state basis. Now, that was an example of – and by that time I was not a mere graduate officer; I’d moved up the line a bit – but, having drafted that, it was a bit of a try-on on my part, actually, because I was very interested to see what Bruce’s reaction would be, as head of the Policy Division. Bruce put it through to the Premier, unchanged, and Dunstan signed it. And I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall if Bruce in fact did discuss that with Don or just put it in as a piece of paper and whether Don consciously was engaged with the principle involved, which was really a rejection – a bit of a kick in the arse – for the Treasury advice.

Yes, interesting.
That was, to me, a very interesting experience. But who knows how much Don was engaged with the content of the minute at the time or not?

**Did you have much to do with Treasury when you were in that role, State Treasury?**

Yes. I’d been going over there on particularly – oh, because I mentioned one event being the annual Commonwealth budget event; the other event, of course, was the annual Premiers’ Conference. And it fell to my lot to do a lot of the work, and after Andrew Strickland moved to the Department of the Environment I finished up actually being acting head of the Intergovernment Relations Unit and was responsible in 1977 for pulling together all the papers for the Premiers’ Conference, so that was extremely hard work. One can identify with thirty-seven-hours-in-a-row-type scenarios. It’s not a new phenomenon. But, to answer your question, that obviously involved a lot of liaison with Ron Barnes, as the Under-Treasurer, because he was putting together the briefing notes on the financial side. It also involved a lot of liaison with the Solicitor-General, who was Brian Cox at that time – whose assistant, interestingly, was Cathy Branson, or associate or whatever you call it – and the briefing notes from Brian Cox were very important because there were some critical sovereignty issues emerging, particularly in relation to the seas and submerged lands legislation. Now, that was very stimulating work and it was an extraordinary experience for someone like me to be having to work the likes of Brian Cox who, as you know, became a Supreme Court judge, and Ron Barnes. But again, the Treasury stuff was very much the sums and the budgets and the mechanics rather than substantive policy issues.

**So you never got a sense of a policy view out of them.**

I rather think that Ron’s preference was to avoid that.

The other thing that’s probably worth mentioning as far as Don was concerned, because one would get to read the transcripts of the Premiers’ Conference – Andrew Strickland and Bruce Guerin would actually attend them and sit in – but reading the transcripts I was struck, in those years, by what seemed to be the rapport between the two elder statesmen of Premiers’ Conferences, and those two were Don Dunstan and Joh Bjelke-Petersen.
Really?

Now, that to me was quite astonishing. They actually did provide leadership to the rest of the group at certain points, which I found interesting. And even more interesting was the fact that sometimes – I can’t use the term ‘caucus’ because it doesn’t apply to the National Party of Queensland – but Queensland Premier’s Department officials would be sent down to South Australia and we would work together to develop postures on particular issues, seas and submerged lands being a case in point. Very interesting.

Yes.

And that would not be well-appreciated, the way that Don would work in that way.

So that was in the state interest, obviously.

Yes, that’s right. He was a great federalist. And I think the story I told earlier reflects that, too.

Interesting. One other question just in follow-up on that one: the work you did getting all these submissions and briefs together, did you get a sense that made any difference? Like before there wasn’t one of these intergovernment units and now there was; what again difference did you think it was making?

I think for the purposes of clearly-articulated policy positions it was very valuable.

State position.

I really do. I mean, naturally I would, I suppose; but it actually seemed to result in a better representation of South Australia’s view. I think it’s fair to say that in those days South Australia was looked on as a serious player in those environments in a way that hasn’t been the case for quite some time.

Did you get feedback from Commonwealth officials along those lines?

We did. I could cite an example of the Commonwealth inquiry into health and welfare, that was the Bailey Inquiry, Peter Bailey, and I remember at the first session we had with Peter and his group, when they came to [South] Australia, and we’d prepared a whole lot

---

of documentation coordinated through the Intergovernment Relations Unit and Peter Bailey – I well remember this – saying what a pleasure the Commonwealth always found (it was) to deal with South Australia and find that the material had been presented in a comprehensive and comprehensible manner.

**Interesting, good.**

It was really nice feedback to get. And there were quite a few inquiries of that sort. Another one that would spring to mind would be the Williams Inquiry into tertiary education,⁷ I think, and that was a Commonwealth inquiry conducted by Bruce Williams, who was the Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, I believe. Then there was a Commonwealth inquiry into nurse education,⁸ it was a smaller exercise.

**So there was a lot of stuff going on.**

You’d be dealing with quite a lot of those and you’d write a state submission to them.

**What about tariff changes and things like that, was that a big issue then? Like car industry.**

I think that the tariff changes was pretty much the province of the Economic Intelligence Unit, which, as you know, was part of the early Premier’s Department. You know, all those things that developed separate lives of their own – be it Len Amadio as the arts officer and the food stuff and tourism – they were all bits and pieces of the Premier’s Department.

It’s also interesting to recall, I think, that I think Don remained wedded to advice from a cluster of people who he felt gave good advice rather than looking at the source of that advice as being in bureaucratic form. For example, when the Policy Division became the Policy Division, which was to give it more clout and more structure and better careers for those in it, higher classification for the person who headed it, Don never, ever referred to it as the ‘Policy Division’. I don’t know whether you will recall this: he always referred to it as the ‘policy secretariat’.

---


⁸ Inquiry into Nursing, chaired by S. Sax and reporting in 1978.
Secretariat, interesting.

Right through to the end. He never moved to the changed bureaucratic terminology.

Like it was his little outfit.

Yes, and he remembered the way it was and that’s how he’d created it and that was what it meant to him.

And I just want to ask you, there was some coordination work where somebody would round up all of the projects going on all over the government.

Ah, yes.

Were you involved in any of that?

That was supposed to be part of the brief. But I think that took on much greater significance after I’d gone, because remember I left during – of course, Des Corcoran had become Premier and Labor lost power that year; but that was much more an administrative coordination issue than a policy coordination issue, in my view. So that happened more afterwards, thank God as far as I was concerned, that rounding-up stuff wasn’t my bag. (Post script: I think Mike Sullivan and Kelvin Bertram dealt with this stuff.)

And I’ve got a note in my records you worked on some of the Maralinga clearance.

Yes, that’s right. And I’d forgotten that till you mentioned it. But that came because of my involvement in the Pitjantjatjara land rights exercise. But, yes, the Commonwealth were visiting the various sites at Maralinga. Because there were two issues: one had to do with cleanup; but the other that was emerging, of course, was some pretty significant litigation starting to emerge, including in Britain, in terms of British servicemen’s health. And The Advertiser at that time started running stories that would have it that the atom bomb testing in the early ’50s was a conscious form of genocide and all this sort of thing. I was never persuaded by that, to be honest. I’m not saying it wasn’t inconsiderate and devastating for Aboriginals, but I don’t know that it was consciously designed to achieve that.

I’ve got a group of questions I think you’ve covered that’s about methodologies and things like that.
Yes.

Was there anything you wanted to add there – we talked a bit about that earlier, but probably the big area was research was done, consultations, discussions with people, checking things out and then framing of recommendations.

Yes.

In what sense was that tuning into what was happening, both I’ll call it ‘administratively’, but also politically? Or was it basically how things ought to be seen to be working, like taking into account a range of things but leaving the politics to somebody else, some other group – that’s the cabinet or the Premier’s staff or somebody like that?

Yes. Look, I think – this is an impression from a long time afterward – but my sense of the thing was that the inquiry was able to find its own direction and the politics could be taken care of later. I’m having trouble thinking of specific examples, but I’d say that there must have been things that were put forward that basically just got shelved.

Some might have been in the frame of ‘Somebody wants this to be done: now work out how to do it’, versus ‘Well, here’s an open question: go and inquire into it and tell us what you think ought to happen’.

Yes. Yes, I think the inquiries were pretty open. I’ve also mentioned, George, that I have a sense that the season of inquiries did peter out towards the late ’70s and it did become more attuned to implementation projects.

Just again reflecting over your time there and the work you did, I just wanted to run through a few things on the change processes.

Yes.

Some of that might be informed by later work you did and reflections on your time – you had a long career in the public service – reflections on the time in the Policy Division, Premier’s Department. What did you see as the major change factors occurring in that time: was it the Premier and the leadership, or was it that with the people that were brought in like young people like yourselves and movers and shakers like Bob Bakewell, or what?

Yes – the Bob Bakewell influence, the young people, that was great. I think it did change, though. The change that I saw was, just as I’ve talked about how the Policy Secretariat became Policy Division, and just as we’ve talked about how policy consistency coordination headed a lot more towards rounding up, of keeping tabs on where bodies
were at, I think that was very much reflecting how the public service was heading, too, into a much more mechanistic sort of model.

**Process and process management**

That’s right, that’s the word, yes, that process management. Now, one thing that I wanted to say – and I think this reflects this to some degree, too – cabinet comments: when the Tonkin Government came to power in 1979, there was an impression – and you may disagree with this view – but there was an impression that all the Policy Division ever did was sit round writing cabinet comments, and I remember doing a few sums on that to see what proportion of the Policy Division’s time was taken in doing cabinet comments. And it wasn’t that big a slice of the action. However, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy, in my view, because I think in the 1980s the Policy Division, which had then become the Cabinet Office, a lot of its effort was put into writing cabinet comments, so that wasn’t the creation of policy; that was the critiquing of policy. Fair enough – now, it should also be added that a lot of people would say, justifiably, it’s not the business of public servants to make policy, that’s the role of elected governments: yes; but Don saw it as the role of the public service to develop policy for cabinet’s consideration. I think that largely evaporated. Does that get towards the sort of thing that you – – –were thinking about?

**Yes, sure. With an open mind.**

Yes.

One of the questions that comes up is the encouragement of creative thinking, risk-taking perhaps, as distinct from careful processes and risk management approaches and things like that. Did you get any sense of that, like you started as a young person in the Committee Secretariat; was the world open, so to speak –

Yes, well, it was.

– lots of ideas –

All I can say to that is ‘yes’. And the naivety of all that was quite an important consideration, too, because it just didn’t seem to be like that in later years.

**Yes, that’s interesting.**
George, there’s another inquiry that I haven’t mentioned that I should in terms of Commonwealth [inquiries] – I was just looking through my notes. One of the inquiries I was involved in was a very interesting one, and that was the inquiry by Justice Hope from Sydney into the relations between ASIO⁹ and state Special Branches.¹⁰ Now, that inquiry was running at the time the whole Salisbury Affair blew open, and you’ll remember that had to do with the pink files in Special Branch and so on. It was my lot to be the desk officer within the Policy Division on that inquiry, and I had some extraordinary experiences in that. By that time I should add that I think at the tail end of that Des Corcoran was Premier, but it was interesting in relating to Justice Hope, with whom I had very good and constructive and cordial relations, but it would be fair to say that the intelligence services of the Commonwealth took a very dim view of people such as myself being involved. I think I was probably seen as some sort of fellow-traveller of a government that they took a dim view of.

Right. I think recent revelations about them shows that they weren’t being very competent right through the system there.

Yes.

So just getting back to change processes –

Sorry, yes.

– the role of the Policy Division, that was effective or not so effective in your view?

I think it was effective, but I’m not sure that such a thing could exist today.

Right, in that sort of way. And the Premier’s Department and other departments? You mentioned the co-ordination work that worked reasonably constructively.

Yes. Within the bounds of reality. There was a lot of coordinating that simply just didn’t occur.

And you’ve mentioned a lot of these characters. Did you get any sense about where – we mentioned earlier the Establishment, but probably by then a lot of them had gone or

⁹ ASIO – Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation.

¹⁰ Royal Commission on Intelligence and Security, chaired by Mr Justice Robert Hope and reporting in 1977.
were less influential – but industry, and how they related to the Government at all? I mean, we had industrial democracy and some of these more radical ideas.

Yes. I don’t think that was very well-received in industry. Remember in the late ’70s there were still some very entrenched, old-fashioned ideas and it wasn’t till 1979 when we went through the first of the bank crises – then that was the Bank of Adelaide, which was just incompetently administered by the old guard, really. Industrial democracy was anathema to the old guard. I recall hearing Don say that he’d (laughs) sent two people overseas to look at industrial democracy, I think in parliament. One of them was – was it Ted Gnatenko?

Gnatenko, yes.

– was sent over from the Union Movement, and there was a fellow from industry who was sent over and I cannot think of his name for the second. That will come to me, I can’t remember at the moment. (Post script: Michael Lloyd) But Don said, ‘Gnatenko wrote a very good report, and the report by’ – it may be a good thing that I can’t remember his name – ‘was absolutely useless’. (laughter) Don was just disgusted. I can picture this guy’s face.

Were you with any meeting with Don when he had meetings with industry people or union people?

No. The closest to that, as far as industrial democracy was concerned –

Or anything, really.

– okay. I was one of the group that would have been described by Peter Ward as the ‘young Turks in the Premier’s Department’ who were wanting to pick up their role in industrial democracy. And I’ll tell you another one was Richard Yeeles, you remember?

Yes.

He was in the tourist area and that was very interesting, he was very frisky under the banner of industrial democracy. This is quite an amusing story. I guess, as I believe it to be true, and I don’t think it’s defamatory, I’ll tell it. At the time that it became apparent to the troops that Don had given an undertaking to Graham Inns that he would be the next head of the Premier’s Department there was a bit of a backlash against that within the
Department, and I think leading the charge was Philip Bentley, and there was a push from – what was the industrial democracy committee called?

**Joint Consultative Committee.**

The Joint Consultative Committee. And the Joint Consultative Committee took it on itself to say that the workers wanted to have a say in how the next head of the Premier’s Department would be appointed. Don was masterful in handling that sort of scene. As we later realised, he’d made the deal and it wasn’t going to change, but yes, he was prepared to have this – – –(say) process run through. And what he would do was he would like the Joint Consultative Committee to develop a list of criteria that they would be looking for as qualities in a head of department. Well, a working party set about that task and I was involved in it; needless to say the criteria that were identified were those that it was considered Graham Inns didn’t have. (laughter) It was terrible. And it fell upon the Women’s Adviser, Deborah McCulloch, and myself to present these to Don. And so in you march and, you know, Don would sit on the high chair and you’d be on these very low chairs in front of his desk, and he looked through the list with that slight smile around the corners of his mouth, he thought it was all wonderful stuff. (laughter)

**And he thanked you profusely for your work.**

That’s right, thanked for efforts and that would inform the process. And then the inevitable happened. (laughter)

**And you’d been consulted with. That’s good.**

On that, by the way, I formed the impression that in terms of policy development in the Policy Division I don’t ever recall there being much effort put in to see how that sat with policies that had come down from Labor Party Conference.

**Yes, right – I was going to ask you that.**

Yes. Well, I got the distinct feeling that that just didn’t happen and it didn’t worry Don that it didn’t. Because once Don had gone, in those sad circumstances, when Des went to the next election, Policy Division basically was set a task, probably inappropriately, of writing Des’s policy material for the election. That was probably going over the
boundaries as to what a policy division should have done. But I do recall that somehow I
got involved in the writing up of the ethnic affairs policy, and that fell into the Minister’s
hands, namely Chris Sumner, and Chris Sumner rang me up at home and gave me an
absolute spray – as he was entitled to do: he said, ‘This has not the slightest regard for the
policy brought down by the last Conference’, which he’d obviously had a big hand in
crafting and saw the process as being one that flowed through. And he was right.

I recall receiving – I forget whether it was under Don Dunstan or not, but a lot of the
Labor Party policy statements and being asked to comment on them or something like
that.

Yes, you’re right. That was very much a Bruce initiative, I reckon. Yes. Yes. And that
was probably a check, almost like a little feasibility check, I reckon.

Interesting. Well, we’ve covered a lot of areas, Andrew, this morning.

Yes.

Were there any other areas you think you’d like to talk about before we just round up
on your general observations on the Dunstan Decade?

No. Let’s move on to that, George.

All right, yes – well, let’s get into that now.

Look, it was a freeing-up, enlightening decade. I think all of the clichés about it are pretty
right, you know: the emergence of the arts, the emergence of multiculturalism, the
emergence of lifestyle issues, of the food and wine – which didn’t really grab hold until
we had the Grand Prix here, funnily enough. But without Don having got the ball rolling
and that great work by people like Graham Latham none of that would have occurred –
the sense of tourism, too. Now, I think it also was a period in which modern
administration started to take hold, even though in a sense Don’s own style was more
personal, but I think the Corbett Inquiry, that report came down I think in 1975 and there
were a succession of other inquiries subsequently, but it started a process of evolving
modern management in the South Australian public service. So I thought that was
important.
The other thing about the Dunstan Decade is that it has to be recognised – and it usually is – that there were some extremely competent ministers: the Hudsons and the Hopgoods of the world, and of course Des as loyal deputy.

The other thing is that I reckon a lot of people, and the critics of Labor governments and critics of Don, would point to that period of being a period of unrestrained excess and including in terms of economic and budget management. I dispute that strongly. I actually reckon that Don – who, as you know, was also Treasurer – actually was a fairly prudent economic manager and that’s why I think people like Ron Barnes were happy to perform the role they did, because they felt that if they were putting forward prudent budget proposals for the shape of the budget they were being listened to. So they weren’t going to get into policy debates within the context of what were quite restrained budgets. Now, not everyone will agree with that view, but I think there is a certain amount of truth in that.

The other thing is that, although it took a fair while industrially for the concepts of outsourcing and some of those economic rationalist mechanisms to occur, I always thought that Don – and I’ve seen some of his writings on this, too – didn’t think there was any magic or mystique about whether something was done by the private sector or the public sector. He saw that there was clear traffic between the two. So he was a social democrat and not a democratic socialist, and I think that’s an important distinction.

What about your general impressions about his style? Was that helpful or not helpful over a period of time?

For me he was always pretty remote, and I found much greater intimacy with him in later years when he was running a restaurant in The Parade and that he welcomed – because he wasn’t socially gregarious, anyway. I think he sometimes found it difficult, even dealing with staff who he didn’t know well. So you’d be called ‘mate’ rather than ‘Andrew’. I always presumed that was because he wasn’t probably entirely sure who I was.

I think Kevin Crease once told me if he called you ‘chum’ you were in big trouble.

Oh, yes, I saw that! Yes. That’s right. That was said with a certain delivery, too. (with emphasis) ‘Chum.’
You saw it with who?

However, the other thing that I would say is that I’d mention that Don was sometimes a sucker for a bad idea, whether it was the Coalyard Restaurant or Wardang Island, and for me the most poignant memory I have was that last meeting he had with the Policy Division in the cabinet room, and Bruce had tried to fire him up to give the Policy Division a bit of a pep talk and some ideas, so there was going to be some leadership with ideas, and that was the fateful day that we wondered whether Don really thought that the economy of South Australia could be saved by a kelp-led recovery.

Kelp-led recovery, right.

Do you remember the kelp-led recovery?

I don’t, actually.

The only new idea we heard on that day was that he said there was this enormous potential for the farming of kelp in the waters of South Australia, and you just felt that he was struggling with his health and other things were happening in his life and there was an energy level that was sapping.

I guess one of the issues there is whether all of this relied too much on Don or whether there are others who should have been helping him in at least the ideas way, anyway, or whether they were just sitting back.

Yes.

All right. Well, Andrew, thanks very much for that, it’s been great, your contribution to our history project.

Thanks very much.

END OF INTERVIEW.