This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan History Project for the Don Dunstan Foundation interviewing Mrs Lyn Leader-Elliott. The date today is 18th June 2008 and the location is Flinders University and Lyn’s office.

Lyn, thanks very much for doing this interview for us for the history project. Can you talk a bit about yourself and your education and how you came to work in the Premier’s Department, how all that led into it?

Right, thanks, George. Well, I had done an honours degree in History at Adelaide University and was particularly interested in politics and the politics of the right wing in particular. When I’d finished my honours I started to do a master’s degree looking at conservative ideology in Australian politics from Federation till the 1950s. It was a huge topic; the person who would have been the ideal supervisor for me, who had been in the Politics Department at Adelaide [University], was Peter Loveday and he had moved to Canberra to the ANU.¹ I was floundering a bit, to be honest. I was twenty-four and I was at that stage married to Graham Scott, who was lecturing in Economics at Flinders University. He came home one day and said he’d been in the staffroom at Flinders (where Neal Blewett at that stage was lecturing in Politics), and Neal had come into the staffroom and said, ‘Don Dunstan’s looking for a young woman to work on his staff as a research assistant. Does anybody know anyone who might be interested?’ And Graham said, ‘Well, Lyn might be.’ So he came home and relayed this. I can’t remember now how actually the chain worked back, whether Graham told Neal and Neal told Peter Ward and Peter Ward contacted me— I can’t remember now how that chain worked in particular; but they were certainly the key players.

Anyway, Peter Ward interviewed me for the job, in the bar of the South Australian Hotel, on a Friday afternoon, starting at about four or five o’clock. And we sat in the bar, we just had a really, really long conversation about the Government, about what was important and I suppose about the general political environment at the time. Peter would have been just checking out to see that I was

¹ ANU – Australian National University.
going to be okay in the office and that I would accept and actively support the policies that that Dunstan Government was about. This was in 1970.

1970, yes.

I can remember Peter telling me that the pay was ninety dollars a week or something about that figure and would that be all right. He said it in a slightly apologetic sort of way, but I was delighted because (laughs) I’d been getting by on about twenty-five as a postgraduate student, so this was really fantastic. And I started work very quickly after that, and I went in to work for Don as a research assistant in the Premier’s office.

I soon picked up work as well as Assistant Press Secretary, and so those two jobs were my starting point, and I worked particularly closely with Peter Ward and Tony Baker. The three of us worked together as a trio and we were the principal points of connection for the Premier with the media and for and the media strategy for the Government. That was the starting point, and I know you’ve got more questions that follow on from there.

Yes, right, okay. So what was your specific role, then? You were part of this team.

Well, it changed. It changed over time, but I suppose it started out with some pretty straightforward research jobs in terms of getting out background on planning or housing issues. Particularly those two, I think, with Don, because he held a number of portfolios at the time, as you know. And I can’t remember the times at which things expanded out, but I became Press Secretary for Bert Shard (chief secretary and Minister for Health) at some stage as well as acting occasionally as a back up to Ione Brown as Hugh Hudson’s press secretary, if she was away. I was with Don for three years, from 1970–73. I started out with the research work; I gradually picked up more of the routine press work, writing and issuing media releases. Tony Baker actually taught me how to write press releases; and I began to work on some of the smaller speeches as well, particularly initially for electorate or for factory visits or things like that, starting out with short speeches. I never had responsibility for
major speeches; Peter Ward wrote all of Don’s major policy speeches, and we can talk about that later.

Yes, sure.

But I suppose as I was seen to be okay I was asked to take on the press work for Bert Shard, who actually copped a lot of flak from the media because he had left school at the end of grade seven and he’d gone to work on the bread carts and had come into parliament in the upper house through the Trade Union Movement, he’d been in the Bread Carters’ Union initially. Bert was Minister for Health, and as Chief Secretary he was responsible at that time for police and prisons as well. One of the things that Don cared about greatly was prison reform and the civil liberties/human rights area, so he took a great deal of interest in the areas that were in Bert’s portfolio.

So you were still working out of the Premier’s Office when you were press sec.

Yes, I was working in the Premier’s Office, yes. So the Premier’s Office actually provided that service for Bert Shard, and one of the most valuable learning experiences I have had in terms of writing was translating the work that came in from the public service, with all the professional terms and the sort of Latinate and Greek medical terms and so on, and then turning those into language that still meant the same thing but that Bert could manage easily in public so that he wouldn’t be ridiculed for not being able to pronounce technical words properly, as he was in the book *Bjelke, Don baby and friends*.

Oh, really?

Yes, he was, which was – I can’t remember now who wrote it, but I think it was two journalists, and they had a great deal of fun at Bert’s expense. I saw him just after it had come out and he was mortified, deeply hurt.

Interesting. You mentioned you did this work with Tony Baker and the things he taught you; what were some of the things he did teach you about how to write a statement?

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2 *Sir Henry, Bjelke, Don baby and friends* by Ian Baker, Max Harris and Geoffrey Dutton.
He taught me that getting the first sentence right was the most important thing to do. He would sit at his typewriter using journalists’ copy paper, which was little sheets, I suppose about a third of A4, and green, and he would put those into his computer – it wasn’t computers, it was typewriters – and he would sit there working on that and he would type out what he thought would be the first sentence. If it didn’t work he’d take it out of the machine, screw it up and throw it in the bin. He didn’t start the rest of what he wanted to write until he’d got that first sentence right. And the other critical thing is that any story has to have a peg, and I’ve always visualised those pegs as coat hooks: you know, you can see you’ve got to have something to hang the story on. There’s no point just putting out a long, rambling narrative. And writing concisely, accurately, searching for verbs, the right verb; I mean, all those sorts of lessons of clear, simple writing were things that Tony taught me.

**What about Peter Ward, did he get involved with teaching you how to write?**

He didn’t get involved with teaching me to write on a day-by-day basis, Peter’s work was really more on the policy side. Peter was the person who actually taught me how to be sufficiently confident to say what I really thought on policy issues, like housing, for instance, when it disagreed with what the Premier thought.

**Oh, really?**

Yes. The particular issue was on the Hackney Redevelopment Scheme and when the suburb of Hackney – the inner suburb, which is still intact, little nineteenth century buildings – was proposed for a major public housing urban renewal project along the lines of what was happening about the same time in inner Sydney and inner Melbourne, where the existing medium-density, small housing would be demolished and replaced by towers. I just felt this was really wrong, and I had a lot of concerns about the sorts of lives that people lived in those buildings, and I’d read some things about public housing developments in England and how disastrous they were proving in terms of the dislocation, social dislocations, and in fact all the sorts of issues that we’ve since come to associate with those massive redevelopments. I began to talk about this in the office to Peter and Tony, and Peter finally said to me, ‘You’ve got to do something about this. You’ve actually got find out – – –.’ You
know, basically, ‘You’ve got to do the research to back up what you’re saying, and then you’ve got to say it, and you have to say it’. And I worked quite closely with Wendy Etherington she was then, and now Wendy Sarkissian, who at the time was working for the Housing Trust and was passionate about social planning, as indeed she still is, so Wendy actually led me to some of the current research, the sociological research in particular, and the planning and sociological research, and I was able to draw on that to feed into the policy mill. And I don’t remember actually having that conversation with Don myself but I must have, because I remember the acute discomfort I felt as Peter was forcing me down this path.

Interesting, yes.

It was very interesting, and it’s something that I owe him a great debt for, because unless I’d been able to do that I wouldn’t have been able to do any of the other things I’ve done in my life, this being able to speak out when what I have to say doesn’t fit comfortably with what I think everybody else thinks.

Yes, interesting. So there wasn’t this group think, like just because Don thought something everybody had to fall back in line.

No.

Was he saying to people, ‘Look, I want frank and fearless advice’?

No, he wasn’t saying that. And I think by the time I left in 1973 he had already become very intolerant of dissent.

Oh, really?

Yes. And I know that – I mean, Peter, Bob Bakewell, the senior public servants, John White, Bob Bakewell, Len Amadio and I know there were others, the Treasurer, the head of the Treasury –

Gilbert Seaman?

– Gilbert Seaman – there were a number of senior men, in particular, who would argue with Don and put their positions, but he didn’t like being disagreed with and if he’d really made up his mind about to do something it was very difficult to shift it, and I think that that actually in the end became his undoing because he became so
super-confident of his ability to make changes in the way that he wanted to do and
which he was lauded for doing that he actually just stopped listening.

Really? That’s, what, in the late ’70s you’re talking about?

Yes.

So you picked this up from other people, or just your observation?

Well, it was my observation at the time when I was still there – I mean, the
beginnings of it were there; but it was also things that I picked up afterwards. And
also when one works within politics for any time one becomes quite good at reading
between lines.

Right, sub-text.

(laughter) Where the sub-text is, where the gaps are. Yes.

What were some of those you were picking up?

Oh, I can’t remember now in particular. I don’t know, no.

Just looking at that Hackney issue, you were mainly looking at the research.

Yes.

Were you taking into account the politics of the situation as well? There was a
sort of dual politics going on: one is the protests against Hackney from the
Residents’ Association –

Yes.

– and the other one, my guess is, ‘Well, we’ll get more working-class people in
there, that makes it a safer seat’, potentially – although I haven’t picked that up
overtly.

No, I don’t think so. I was never aware of the second. I think it was probably more
that this was an innovation, it was a new planning step that would show that
Adelaide was up there, you know, with the planning innovators; increasing the
density in the inner-city areas, and which in fact the Housing Trust picked up in
terms of infill in the inner city and some of the inner suburbs a bit later.
Just looking at did Don ever explain, like you said he had very firm views; well, just going back to his vision and overall picture, did he explain what that overall picture was, what he was attempting to achieve? There are policy speeches, but if you take the Hackney issue, how that fitted into this and what were you on about, sort of thing?

I don’t remember him speaking to me about it directly, but of course we all worked from the major policy speeches and statements.

Or did you have to take that into account?

No. In fact, I didn’t have long conversations with Don except when we were in a situation like in a car on a long journey when there was no alternative, and he didn’t have any small talk, really, which sometimes made those long intervals difficult, and he didn’t see me as a senior policy adviser. He had those discussions with Peter, and Peter would talk to us. He probably had them strategically with Tony as well, about media and the writing. But Peter and Tony and I actually worked really closely together and I guess it’s probably fair to say that I relied on them for my understanding of the overall vision because Don didn’t impart that personally to me unless I was seeing him specifically about a speech that he wanted to write, and then he would tell me what he wanted to say, the main points that he wanted to make. But he didn’t ever go into very much detail. He had the most extraordinary capacity to think very, very clearly and very straightforwardly and very briefly, actually. I mean you could spend five minutes with Don and you’d have a week’s work.

Really?

Yes, and I’ve never found anybody else in my entire working career since then who has worked anything like that. In fact when I went to Canberra and I was working with some very, very good people in the public service it used to make me quite uncertain because they’d talk for so long. (laughter) An hour! I knew what had to be done within fifteen minutes, because they rambled. You know, I think that also was fantastic learning for me because you can sketch in the outlines of an issue, of a program or a project and you’d think, ‘Ah, yes. Right, we need to do that, that, that, that, that and that. Right, go and do it’.
Amazing. Did you ever talk about how he got all this together, like Peter and Tony with you, and, ‘Where does Don get these ideas and how does he gel them?’?

I think he read voraciously and he had an amazing memory – I can remember Alex Ramsay saying after one Housing Ministers’ Conference that Don had had an enormous brief of papers – you know, as they are, inches thick – to take with him and he hadn’t had a chance to look at it. He was going to Canberra and he hadn’t had a chance to look at it until he got on the plane, and he just went through, flicking over page by page - he had a photographic memory, basically.

Yes, amazing.

And he got into the meeting and Alex said he was just astounded that Dunstan had not only remembered everything that was there; he’d analysed what was there, knew what the critical points were, knew where they were and could just really run with the agenda, absolutely. Which would reflect as well the fact that he was working closely with the Housing Trust and the Housing Trust was providing him information that he had asked for, that sort of process, so that it wouldn’t come as a bolt from the blue. But that capacity of his meant that he could master an enormous amount of material.

Incredible. You mentioned earlier Peter used to be like the translator between Don and you and possibly Tony.

Yes.

What sort of things was Peter talking about, if you can remember?

Oh, planning. Planning, housing, architecture, the arts. The overall vision for the new South Australia, the industrial development. The vision of the ‘Athens of the South’, I suppose, with enlightened, cultured, pleasant urban environments, visually, aesthetically pleasing, and the civil liberties issues were always there as well. So we got a pretty fair range of the agendas.

Because I was involved with Bert Shard – and I’m sure that’s why I was in with Bert as well – I did quite a lot of stuff about police. I do remember one astounding occasion which must have near the end of my time there when it was decided that I
would be the person who went across to give a lecture to the police (laughter) on civil liberties and the rights of demonstrators and things like that!

This was after the Moratorium?

Yes. And I also remember when I was there – and I’d dressed in my very best clothes, as indeed I did when I went to watch the Moratoriums, so I was standing on the corner of North Terrace and King William Street when the horses were charging against people –

Gosh.

– which was pretty scary. But I was wearing a very proper coat and high-heeled shoes, and I had my hair done in a very proper way that day. But it was really interesting, because when I was over in the Police Building one of the quite senior men at this occasion said to me, ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I recognise you from the photographs of the demonstrations’. He said, ‘You’ve been in the front row’. And I said, ‘No, I haven’t’. And he got the photograph out to show me, and it wasn’t me but it was somebody like me.

Oh, really?

But yes, somebody else who had long hair and, you know, was female. (laughter)

He couldn’t distinguish.

Oh, dear. And that was deliberate provocation, I have to say. But it was also very exciting. A very exciting, stimulating environment to be in.

Yes. And what did you tell the police?

Oh, do you know, the glorious thing is I can’t remember at this stage. (laughs) But I do think that Peter had a pretty fair hand in the writing of what I said; in fact, I think he wrote it. Well, he might have got me to do a first draft, but he would have really dictated all the pegs and he would have signed off on it. And of course the relationships were getting pretty tense already then about homosexual law reform, and Salisbury had arrived, I think.

I can’t remember.
I can’t remember either, but I think he had, and this was a new climate and was becoming quite -- --. So anyway, but I can’t remember enough of the details about that.

The other thing – there were a couple of things I did – was that from time to time I acted as press secretary for Hugh Hudson, when Ione Brown was away. And I also did work for Des Corcoran and Geoff Virgo when their press secretaries were away. Tony Baker used to do the work for Len King.

Right, yes.

So Greg Crafter was Len’s personal secretary, but Tony was Len’s press secretary. So the media output of the Government really, on the whole, came out of the Premier’s Office, and I know that the other press secretaries worked very closely with Peter and Tony in terms of strategies for media release.

Were you involved in any of the meetings?

Not really, no. I mean, I knew them well but I wasn’t, I don’t recall that as being -- --.

Did you get any sense of a sort of media narrative that Don or Peter or Tony wanted from week to week or over a period of time?

Onwards and upwards, I think. (laughter) I think the tone of the policy speeches actually says that pretty clearly. I mean, there was a very strong emphasis on reform and achievement, and I really did feel that the changes that were being made then were reforms. I’ve since come to think that the use of the word ‘reform’ is grossly abused, because reform is very often just change; it’s not reform, which implies that it’s making things better. So that I don’t think that, for instance, the approaches that the Federal Government have taken to refugees over the last ten years have been reforms at all, so I’ve come to be very critical of the use of that word. But I did feel and I do still think that the changes that the Dunstan Government made were significant reforms and that they did make a difference, not just to South Australia but across the whole of Australia.

The other thing I did, the other sort of work I did for Don, was that I was his point of contact with his electorate. So I worked very closely with the two
sub-branches in the electorate of Norwood, Norwood and St Peters. I used to go to the sub-branch meetings and sort of feed information both ways, so that really I suppose I was keeping tabs on the electorate for him and I used to get very involved in the campaigns at ground level. I didn’t actually letterbox myself, but I knew precisely who was. And one of the tasks that Don used me for was to actually do an analysis, polling booth by polling booth, of all the electorates in the State.

**Really?**

Yes, which was incredibly useful. And that was fed into the election planning strategies. And so I also worked quite closely with the Labor Party office on that, and Chris Schacht and David Combe were there then. So I did a lot of different things.

**And just going back to Don and his ideas and Peter Ward, do you get any sense a lot of these ideas were Peter’s as well?**

Yes, they were.

**Okay.**

Yes, I think. Yes, very much so.

**What, the architecture and the design.**

I think that was – yes, and the urban design. It’s really across the board, in many ways, I think they had very similar value systems.

**And there was that synergy for a while; I’ll come back to the tensions later on. Just going back to how the office actually worked, did you have strategy meetings from week to week?**

Yes, we did.

**Right. And what did they talk about?**

We talked about whatever was happening, what was coming up in terms of events, speeches over the next few weeks, what needed to be done, what was happening politically, what sorts of things needed to be managed, who should have lunch with whom as a consequence. (laughs)
What leaders around town and the press – – –. 

Yes. And who would accompany the Premier on various outings and what sorts of things they needed to be looking out for when they were visiting them. And also we used to have quite long discussions about different aspects of legislation or things that were coming up that needed to be thought through in terms of content, and which again was particularly Peter – and this is sort of talking to me as researcher and what we wanted to get and so on, but also of course for speech material.

(break in recording) Just in one of the areas of importance, relationships with the media, what was the view at the time about that? Like there was The News, The Advertiser, then of course you had radio and television. How did that all play out?

Well, The Advertiser and The News political correspondents had offices, I think, on the same floor as the Premier’s Office in the State Administration Building, and –

I think the ABC\(^3\) was, too.

Yes. Yes, Rhys Clark, that’s right. Rhys Clark was the ABC journalist and Eric Franklin was The Advertiser and Geoff Turner – who died several years ago – and Rex Jory were the correspondents for The News at that time. We took great care to make sure that we had good working relationships with all of those journalists, and so part of what we talked about was the timing at which different stories would be released, because if stories were released in the afternoon it meant they would go to The Advertiser; it also meant that you would miss out on television. So for things to go on television they’ve got to be out in the morning, so you could put something out overnight with a seven a.m. embargo, which would mean that it could go into The News, which then came out in the afternoon. But it was a lot of manipulation – yes, ‘manipulation’, use the word – around the timing at which different sorts of stories would be released and where they would be released, and there was also a lot of consideration about synchrony between releases from individual members of parliament and from the ministers in the portfolios responsible for particular things.

\(^3\) ABC – Australian Broadcasting Commission to 1983, then Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
Radio was – there was a media room just opposite our office, actually, where press conferences were held, and we would notify the press that there was going to be a conference. And I can’t remember now the details of the lead time that we used, but we always tried to make it possible to get the crews there when there was an important story. And that was when the radio journalists and the television journalists mostly came in, though there were occasions when there were features, you know, bigger pieces that Don recorded specially. And of course all the factory openings and things like that, building inspections. Actually, the builders’ licensing was one of the things I remember in particular. It’s not glamorous, but it was something that Dunstan was absolutely passionate about.

Yes.

So they’re rights, again, it’s that – and consumer protection, the rights of the small people not to be ripped off. And there was a story on television recently about somebody in Queensland and I thought, ‘Well, I just wonder if that could happen in South Australia with people being left like that’, because [of] that legislation that went through in the ’70s for building inspection and licensing and so on. Sorry, I’ve lost my thread there. Yes, media.

Yes, go on. That was a cycle you were talking about.

Yes, so that’s the cycle.

There was one occasion on which the staff media management completely failed, and that was the day of the pink shorts.

Pink shorts, right.

Yes. Now, do you want to talk about this now –

Yes, go for it.

– or do you want to talk about it later? (laughter)

No, fine.

Don had had these pink ‘hotpants’ made: they were very, very short shorts. They were not just shorts, they were – – –.
These were made overseas, weren’t they, or locally?

I can’t remember where he had them made. I had a feeling that they were made here in Adelaide, actually, by the tailor who made his Nehru suits.

Okay.

Who I think of as being Italian, but that might be quite wrong. And he came into the office wearing them and I think we knew somehow that he had had them made, and he came into the office wearing them and it was a parliamentary day and the media already knew that he was wearing them –

Oh, I see.

and we were besieged with phone calls about wanting to take a photograph of the Premier. And we had a very hasty strategy meeting, which took about three minutes, in which we decided that under no circumstances was anybody with a camera going to get anywhere near Don that day. And so we, the three of us, actually really operated as a team in blocking media access to Don and we succeeded all day until about four o’clock in the afternoon, when he got out of the office in Parliament House by the back door that we weren’t watching and went and stood out on the front steps. And he had quite obviously set it up himself. He wanted to be photographed in those clothes. He sought that deliberately. And it was breathtaking, and that was round about the time I think when the young men from the gym were making their appearance.

I see, right.

He’d been going to the gym. He’d been going to the gym, he had been in a process of transforming his physical appearance for several years, and he really liked the way that he looked, and this was him in full display mode, you know?

Do you know anybody, whether they’d put him up to it, or was it his own idea?

I don’t know. I don’t know. I would find it difficult to think that he could keep a secret like that without sharing it gleefully with somebody. But I’ve got no idea who.
Interesting, yes. And did you surmise – – –?

If you turn that off I could have a pot-shot guess, (laughter) but I’m not going to say it for the record.

Yes, okay. Well, did you surmise what it was all about?

No.

Was it sort of PR or did he ever explain?

Oh, I think it was this was part of the avant garde man, you know? The new man, the innovator, the trendsetter, the breaking with the conservative traditions of the governing classes in South Australia, and the Nehru suits were part of that as well. I was encouraged to wear the sort of clothes that I love to wear, anyway, which are sort of clothes that have got style and colour and not absolutely necessarily what’s at the minute of the fashion but something that looks good and is stylish, and there were photos of him and me going out together that were deliberately set up. There was one when we were going, I think, to a trade union function that was being held in a motel on Greenhill Road, and I was wearing and pink-and-white check pantsuit and I had long hair and matching handbag and shoes and so on, and there was a photo opportunity that probably Tony set up for the journalist, and that photo was in one of the papers, I can’t remember which – The News, The Advertiser – of ‘Don Dunstan and research assistant, Mrs’ – Mrs – ‘Lyn Scott’ . . . . at the motel, and it was about the clothes we wore – you know, ‘fashionable, blah-blah’. And he was wearing his blue Nehru suit.

Yes, and he had that turquoise ring.

Yes, that’s right, but that particular fabric was a sort of a shot – I can’t remember what it was, whether it was silk or a shot cotton of some sort, but it was a fabric that was full of light.

So he was into pushing the boundaries, if you like.

Yes, yes, that’s right, and really enjoying it.

Just talking about pushing boundaries, one of the things we’re interested in following through is his reform processes, like how did he get his ideas followed
through. You mentioned just the sheer force of the ideas themselves and his ability to articulate them.

Well, it was also – I think so, and the force of his intellect and the force of his will, and his skill in working with a very diverse group of people to convince them that this was the way to go. I think he relied very heavily on the support of Hugh Hudson, who also was a formidable intellect, and so was Len King, and they were all committed to reform agendas in their own areas, in particular. I’m not sure who else actually shared the passion for the urban reforms and the aesthetics; I think that was absolutely Don-driven. Transport, of course, was Geoff Virgo and he was a very strong Minister for Transport and he had a strong department. But Geoff Virgo and Des Corcoran were intrinsically more conservative people than Don or Hugh, and so there was always that – I thought it was very significant that Des was Deputy Leader, and from a country electorate, because there had to be seen to be that balance.

So there was a lot of negotiation, and I think that the public service played a key role in that, although I wasn’t aware of the public service dynamics at the time; but knowing the things that I do now about how public service works, I think the role of the Premier’s Department and the Public Service Board would have been absolutely crucial in terms of working with other agencies to achieve the Government’s policy agenda. I mean, do you have – – –?

I was going to ask you did you get any sense of the sort of people who were being brought into – in the public service, for example: one of the observations is a lot of young people were coming in, some were deliberately recruited and others because of the process of getting people in to do a lot of things.

Well, I do remember that that’s where I met you, George. (laughter)

Right, yes.

And Graham Foreman, and in the Premier’s Office at the time, and when I was working on the electorate research I was actually working quite closely – I was working down in the Department, on the floor in the research section of the Department rather than in the Premier’s Office because you had the gear down there that I could use and there was quiet space which in the office upstairs there wasn’t.
Did you get any feel from the public service particularly around Premier’s as definitely on-side and that’s helping, or are they being resistant?

There was quite a bit of tension, I think, particularly with some of the people who had worked under the Liberal governments for a long time.

Right, yes, early on.

Early on. But I think Bob Bakewell was very important. I’m not sure when Bruce Guerin came in.

It was a bit later.

I think that was a bit later. But that would have been a significant shift. He was working in – he was not head of the Department but I had a feeling he was working in industry development, or – – –?

No, he initially came in as head of one of the branches of the Policy Division –

That’s right.

– and then Bill Voysey was the head, and then Bill moved on.

That’s right, yes. But I think Bruce was certainly a significant presence. Len Amadio was a very significant presence on the arts, and he was brought in quite specifically for that. But generally speaking I didn’t have a lot to do with the public service, whereas in Canberra I did, it was a completely different way of working and a very different sort of learning curve. But Peter did, because Peter was working on the policy side of things, and he tended to speak to section heads and departmental heads, whereas I did not.

What about relationships with the unions – well, the party and the unions? Did you pick up anything, like we’re talking about reforms?

Well, again, there was a very close relationship with David Combe; Rod Cameron, the pollster, who was closely involved; Philip Adams – the film on the art side and the [South Australian] Film Corporation – was it Film Corporation back then?

Yes.

Yes. People in and out over the Festival Centre.
In terms of Don’s ideas.

Don’s ideas, I think – – –.

**How did he get the Party onside? Did you get any sense of that?**

I don’t know. I think David and Chris Schacht were really important in that. We as staff had very close relationships with the ALP\(^4\) office. Don was aware initially, I think, quite acutely of his need to work with the Party; but I do think that as time went on he became more convinced that he was going to follow his own path. And that was his undoing, really.

**What about business, did you get any sense of business?**

Oh, yes. Yes, and there was a lot of importance given to business and attending meetings of chambers of commerce and industry associations, speaking to business lunches, yes. And businessmen coming to see him with proposals, and he really had a pretty open door.

**Some sound and others a bit whacko ideas? Not the business people, but the ideas.**

Yes. Yes, depending who they were coming from.

**And industrial democracy ideas came in I think reasonably early in the piece, but was there the sense of he was trying to attract businessmen, at the same time some of his ideas were – – –?**

Sweden.

**Yes, Sweden.**


**Right, okay.**

Sweden the model. Pollution in Tokyo. His overseas trips were very carefully-constructed. Now that we have the Internet we can find out so easily who’s doing what elsewhere in the world, but it wasn’t anywhere near as easy then. But he was

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\(^4\) ALP – Australian Labor Party.
particularly interested in Sweden and as an industrial democracy model. So a lot of the agendas were influenced by Sweden.

**Does the name Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber remind you of anything?**

Oh, no. I mean, yes, I can say that I’ve heard the name, but I can’t honestly – it was probably in a speech.

**Yes. Why I’m raising it is –**

It may even have been in a speech.

– **is I think there was a book that was written before 1970, it was about the new industrial moves** –

Oh, right.

– **and it was all around design and all that sort of thing, and I got a sense that Peter Ward and probably Don had read it.**

I remember now that it was an important book. So too were Jane Jacobs’s works on planning, and I don’t know how much connection there was with people like Pat Troy, for instance, from the ANU. But Pat, of course, was a driving intellect behind the Department of Urban and Regional Development [DURD] in the Whitlam Government and the planning agendas of the two Governments were pretty closely-related, actually. The decentralisation, the Monarto failure, the great visions about the shape of Adelaide, the future shape of Adelaide, decentralisation.

**Land Commission.**

Yes, all of those. I mean they came out very much out of that same body of thinking.

**In synch, yes.**

And so of course when John Mant came from Canberra into South Australia – that was after I’d left – but, you know, his presence here was very significant. And Andrew Strickland, with whom I also worked in Canberra, in the Department of Urban and Regional Development; because Andrew came back into the Premier’s Office and then became head of the Public Service Board in South Australia. So
there were a lot of DURD links. But I think I was probably the only person from the South Australian Government who went to work in DURD, and that was by a circuitous path which we’ll talk about later.

Okay, we’ll pick that up. I’m interested in views from the DURD end, if you like. Just one last area perhaps in your time in the Premier’s Office there: you mentioned earlier on there were some tensions, what were your observations about that? I’ve spoken to Peter Ward – not on the record just yet – and he was talking about crises and tensions. How were they dealt with, what was the cause of some of them and how were they dealt with?

Well, the ones I remember most vividly were the ones surrounding Don’s emergence into an actively bisexual being and then, apparently, a homosexual – I wasn’t in a position to [know] – and the demise of his marriage. So it was in that personal area.

I see, yes.

And I wasn’t there when the crisis with Salisbury blew up.

That was later on, ’77, ’78.

But the personal ones, again, were – in fact, I’m not even sure that the Ceruto scandal actually hit when I was there. I think I had probably left before then; but Ceruto was around. I’m just not sure that I really want to talk about this very much.

Yes, fine. We’ll leave that one. I was probably talking more about any policy tensions and things like that.

No. No. Well, there were policy tensions in a number of areas, but I think the really explosive ones happened after I had left and I suppose it’s out of those things where I have based my view that Don became increasingly unwilling to listen to other people and more determined to pursue his own wants, and that his judgment suffered because he wasn’t willing to listen to advice that ran counter to his personal views and his personal positions, and so he took strong stands on things where he didn’t actually have support, and that he – I don’t know. Look, it’s really hard for me to be specific at this distance, and I didn’t keep notes at the time, I didn’t keep a diary and I haven’t gone back and reread any of the documents. I haven’t read biographies. So it’s difficult for me to recall the details.
But things, I suspect —. (pauses) I mean, people accepted the arts agenda. You know, it costs money, it cost money, it was money that was being taken away — these arguments still continue — being taken away from roads and drains and footpaths, but it had some glorious outcomes. People embraced the changes to the licensing law, the consumer protection legislation. Really more, I think, probably in the areas of homosexual rights, of prison reform, of some of the law and order issues, actually, which the Rann Government is unfortunately tackling in a completely different direction. There is always tension in that area between the people who want to punish everyone who doesn’t fit a certain sort of moral code. I think it’s actually in those areas, and I think that’s where his personal flamboyance actually really offended a lot of people very profoundly and he wasn’t willing to compromise on that at all. He wasn’t willing to be discreet, actually.

I have this theory he was interested in setting up SA society in sort of his own —

Yes.

— not image so much, but what he thought.

Yes.

Civil liberties, push the boundaries, even libertine to some extent.

Yes. Well, I think that’s it. I mean I do think that’s it, and I think that’s where he lost support. And because that sort of pushing actually takes a great personal toll. You know, if you’re pushing out there all the time and you haven’t got strong personal support — because Adele would have encouraged him in that area, his other close friends would have encouraged him as well. Sorry, I just need to be really specific about that: I don’t mean any of the people who were working for him at the time that I was working there, but some of the other people outside with whom he was associating. He was always quite cheerful about challenging the Adelaide Establishment. But I think — and I don’t have any evidence for this at all, but this is sort of my own thoughts, I suppose — is that a lot of the flamboyant boundary-pushing behaviour which was trying to — and I agree with the way that you’ve put it, I think, in terms of trying to revolutionise the whole of South
Australian society and beyond that, through the example of South Australia, to extend it nationally – I think that he also lost the support of a lot of the more traditional parts of the Labour Movement – not just the Party, but the Movement as well.

Just now extending nationally, you went to work in – I’m not sure whether it was DURD or the Minister’s office.

No, I went to work initially for Les Johnson as Minister for Housing, because initially I applied and I was interviewed for the job as Gough’s Women’s Adviser, which Liz Reid got, fortunately. But Peter Wilenski rang me up after that interview to say that I’d come second, which astonished me, and that they had a couple of vacancies on ministerial staffs and would I be interested in coming over to see the ministers to see which one I’d like to work for. (laughs) Which is pretty incredible, really. So I did, and that would have been, I suspect, at Mick Young’s recommendation because Mick was really very keen for me to go to Canberra. It was Mick who suggested I apply for the Whitlam job in the first place – along the lines of, you know, ‘Gough wants a woman to work on his staff’, that sort of stuff.

Anyway, I went over to Canberra and I was interested in both Health and Housing, which were two portfolios where there were vacancies, and I decided on balance that I would prefer to work in Housing because I was intensely interested in that area and in planning. And once I got there I found that I was in a very, very different environment indeed and that the Commonwealth Minister’s housing agenda was very different from the State housing agenda; in fact, he was principally concerned with finding ways of dealing with the housing shortage by adopting American models of condominiums and transportable homes, and I just could not get my head around this and it was a very unhappy six months I spent in his office, actually. But during that time I met the people from Urban and Regional Development and I discovered DURD, where they were advertising positions at the Clerk Class 8 level, which was a policy officer level, and I was incredibly lucky to get one of those. So I worked then in the Department of Urban and Regional Development and was absolutely happy to leave Parliament House behind.
What area were you working on there?

I started out working for Bill Butler, his name was, who was head of the Coordination Division, and because my background was very eclectic – already it was eclectic – and I wasn’t a specialist, he used me as his PA. So I worked across all the programs in that division, including the Area Improvement Program, the Regionalisation Program, and on the national estate. One of my first jobs there actually was to go through the International Convention for the Protection of the [World] Cultural and Natural Heritage and to sort of tease out what would be the implications of Australia signing that convention. Subsequently, of course, I got to work for the Australian Heritage Commission in its early years and I’ve been very, very interested and involved in heritage policy and administration ever since – and it links very closely with planning, of course. So I worked in that division for some time; and then I got a promotion to work in inner urban policy, and Glebe in particular, Glebe in Sydney, and inner Adelaide, so again that thinking, the work that I’d done in South Australia in terms of urban renewal and inner-urban developments, was directly relevant to that.

There was a pretty close working relationship between the Department of Urban and Regional Development and South Australia, and I know that Alex Ramsay, for instance, head of the Housing Trust, was held in very high regard, he was very good, and that the Dunstan Government thinking was also seen to be consistent – which wasn’t to say that South Australia was a breeze to deal with, because DURD’s agenda, its role nationally, was to coordinate all matters dealing with urban and regional development, which led it into conflict with every other agency in the Commonwealth Government and with state governments because it was very, very actively using section 96 grants, specific-purpose grants, to channel and control state activities and to fund projects directly in the states that hadn’t necessarily been on the States’ own agendas. People said at the time that there had been nothing like this federally since the Department of Post-War Reconstruction in the late 1940s. It was an amazing place to work because people had come from all over the world to work in it because it was doing such exciting things.
Incredible. And did they ever make any observations about Don at all – who was this guy?

Oh, yes. And in Parliament House in Canberra I was quizzed endlessly about Dunstan, about the Government agendas and about his sexuality. I didn’t ever talk about his sexuality for years and years and years, and the journalists in particular really wanted me to say that he was having homosexual relationships and, ‘What about his relationship with Blah and Blah?’ And I’d just say, ‘Oh, no, no, no, no’. You know, it was total and absolute blank denial to the point where I probably looked very stupid, but there was no way I was going to concede that there was any substance to rumours and gossip about him. In fact, one of my roles in South Australia when the rumours were getting around about Don not following the straight and narrow path was to be seen with him publicly in situations that would encourage people to take photographs of him with me as a young woman, and so that I was, for instance, sent across with him to be his official companion for the first Kernewek Lowender, and we were there for the whole weekend. Peter Ward has a photograph that was probably in the local paper (that he says he thinks he might give to the archives but he’s not sure) of Don and me dancing the Murry Dance down the main street of Kadina, Wallaroo or Moonta, whichever town it was. I was his official companion for the whole weekend because his marriage had broken up by then, and so I sat next to him on the official table as his companion. You know, this was deliberate image creation.

Did they ever talk about Don going federal at all when you were in [Canberra]? Were they interested in that?

Well, yes, they were, you know, ‘It would be fabulous to get him here’. But I don’t think he ever had any interest in going federal; I think he would have – it’s a shark pool, absolute shark pool, Federal Parliament. He would have had to fight for a role, whereas here he was really able – he was a significant player on the national stage as well as a very significant player on the State stage because of the agendas he was setting.

Yes, and the Labor Party’s federally at that time being basket cases in the state ones.
Yes. Yes, that’s right.

Well, Lyn, it’s been a very – covering a lot of areas. Is there anything that you don’t think I’ve asked about or you’ve talked about that you wanted to cover?

Well, there was one thing that I haven’t mentioned was that one of my regular jobs each week was to go through all the rural and regional press, and that was done in the Premier’s Office at that stage because it was thought really important that that sort of central intelligence unit, if you like, knew what was being written about the Government outside of Adelaide, and in the local press as well. So that was one of my jobs.

And you talked to Chris Schacht about that? Because he was Tom Casey’s press sec for a while.

That’s right, yes. Yes, I did. I mean we all worked together very closely, actually. It was not a big team and we all had clearly-defined responsibilities, but we all did work together very well.

All right. Well, thanks very much. It’s been a most interesting interview.

Good.

END OF INTERVIEW.