

**George APAP**

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**This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation Don Dunstan History Project interviewing Mr George Apap, who was involved in the Union Movement and a member of the Labor Party in the 1970s – possibly earlier, but we'll find that out. The date today is 4<sup>th</sup> September 2009 and the location is Mr Apap's home.**

**George, thanks very much for doing this interview for the Don Dunstan Foundation's Oral History Project. So people have an idea of who you are, can you just talk a bit about yourself, your arrival in Australia, your education and the sort of work you did?**

Thank you and it's my pleasure to be able to contribute towards the Don Dunstan Era, and he was one of my – and still is – favourite Premier.

I was born on an island called Gozo – Gozo is only nine miles by four miles, and Gozo is two and a half miles north of Malta. We still are called 'Maltese' ..... but there are three islands: Malta the largest, Gozo the second-largest and Comino is the next one.

I was born just three months before the Second World War started and, as everyone knows, Malta had a hiding in the Second World War and my father died during the War, in 1942, when I was two and a half years of age. I started school at the age of five, soon after or at the same time that the War was finished, because there was no education, no schooling during the War, and the only school that there was – unless you are rich and go to universities – it's a seven-year school, and I went to the full seven years. English was the second language so we knew a little bit of English, and I left school when I was twelve years of age. I went to work straight away at the age of twelve in a café bar working six days a week, ten hours a day, and I was earning ten shillings a week for sixty hours' work. At the age of thirteen I left the bar and I went to work in a cement tile factory and I doubled my income: I was earning one pound a week for five-and-a-half-day week.

My second-eldest brother, Joe, he came to Australia in 1947 and in 1953 he came back to Malta to find himself a woman, marry her and come back to Australia. He was working on the waterfront and he had about three months' leave of absence from the waterfront to come to Malta. And he found a woman by the name of Mary, he married her and he came back to Australia with myself and my other brother, Charlie – Charlie is eighteen months older than me – and that was in August 1953.

**George APAP**

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When I came to Australia, I went to work straight away. I had no money at all, of course, during the trip. We came by ship and it took thirty-four days from Malta to Melbourne.

**Was that part of some scheme or just you came on your own steam, I'll call it?**

No; that was a migration scheme that was supported by the Australian Government and it only cost me five pounds to come from Malta to here. Being only a minor it was five pounds; if you are a senior it used to cost ten pounds each.

**And were you bonded to go wherever somebody said you needed to work, or you were fairly free?**

No, no, you go wherever you like, wherever you find job you can go, and we went to Melbourne because that's where my brother Joe was, and I had an uncle there, too – he's been in Australia for about twenty years at that time – and we went and rented a house in Melbourne with my brother Joe, brother Charlie, Joe's wife and myself. I was fourteen years of age then, when I came to Australia.

I worked in about five different places when I came. The first time that I worked was with the PMG – Postmaster General's office. We were digging trenches to put the cables and all sorts of things for the telephone, because the telephone system then was with the PMG, same as the post office now, and you had to be twenty-one years of age. I was only fourteen going on fifteen and I worked there for two weeks, they found out that I wasn't old enough so they told me to leave. But jobs them days were plenty, you just walk out of one and just go into another, and I worked as I said in five different places in about three and a half years, and then I joined the Melbourne waterfront, and I was just under – I wasn't quite eighteen years of age when I joined it; I was seventeen years and ten months old. You had to be twenty-one years too to be on the waterfront, but again I said that I was twenty-one and I got away with it, and I was earning full wages and I really enjoyed it.

And I did not know much about unions at that point in time, but as soon as I joined the waterfront I became very active in the Waterside Workers' Federation. I remember from 1956/57 to 1960 there was a big dispute on the whole of Australian waterfront. What happened, in 1955 or '56 the union levied all members ten shillings and the ten shillings

**George APAP**

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was to go to the Australian Labor Party. Two people, a father and son by the name of Hurseys in Tasmania, refused to pay it and they were members of the then Democratic Labor Party, DLP, and whenever they hopped on a ship to work the other wharfies walked out and the whole of the Australian waterfront walked out, and we used to go on strike at least once a week. The matter went right up to the High Court of Australia whether in fact a union can levy its members or not, and that was the question at the time, and right up to the High Court of Australia all courts said, 'No, unions cannot levy its members'. But then it went to the Privy Council in England in 1969, it went right up to the Privy Council, and the Privy Council was unanimous saying, 'Yes. It's in their constitution. The constitution is a registered constitution, so whoever registered the constitution must know that this part was there, that they are able to levy its members', and the wharfies, the union, won it, and that was a big blow for Robert Menzies at that time, because Robert Menzies was the one that took it on against the wharfies.

I was involved in all that dispute, right through, and then in 1960 I was twenty-one years of age and the then Vice-President of the Waterside Workers' Federation, Ted McCormack, said to me, 'George, you'd better join the Australian Labor Party because you'll be a good, active young man and we need someone like you'. And I went and joined the Australian Labor Party when I was twenty-one years of age and 1961 – twenty-two then, twenty-two years of age, but I was a member for twelve months of the ALP – Menzies called an election and Menzies won by one seat only, in 1961. And I remember them days the polling booth stayed open till eight o'clock at night and I was on a polling booth from twelve o'clock to eight o'clock at night with about four or five others, you know, handing out how-to-vote-ALP tickets. And that was the start of me to become politically-aware and politically-active and trade union-active.

**Was the Communist Party active then as well?**

Yes, the Communist Party was very active, as a matter of fact, and that's how Menzies – someone claimed that's how Menzies won the government at that time. There was a guy in Queensland, member of the Communist Party, stood as a candidate in that election and he gave his preferences to the Liberal Party to embarrass Menzies – not that it was a safe

**George APAP**

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Liberal seat – and he gave his preferences to the Liberal Party to embarrass Robert Menzies and – lo and behold! – I think he got about two hundred and something votes and half of them followed the ticket and did give the preference to the Liberal Party, and that's how that member of the Liberal Party won that seat at that time, and if he would have lost the seat Labor would have had the majority.

**Gee.**

So he was very embarrassed himself at the finish, because he didn't mean it to go that way. But I remember that quite clearly.

So then I worked on the waterfront for about fourteen years and Bill Landeryou, very active political person, he was a politician in Victoria, he was the Secretary of the Storemen and Packers' Union and he lived close to where I was in Broadmeadows, and we were in the same branch of the Australian Labor Party of Broadmeadows and he asked me to go and work as an organiser with him at the Storemen and Packers' Union in 1969. And I left the waterfront, which everyone thought I was mad because it was the best job anyone can have as a labourer, and I went as an organiser with the Storemen and Packers' Union. I worked in Melbourne for four years as an organiser and in 1973, January 1973, the union here of the Storemen and Packer's Union went broke and they owed money, and the federal office asked me to come to South Australia to find out what is going wrong.

I came to South Australia and within two weeks I found out what was going wrong and I went back to Victoria and gave them a full report. They asked me to come back again to South Australia to find someone to stand as a secretary; I came back and all the committee people and members in South Australia said to me, 'Stay, stay, stay here'. So I stayed here and I was the union secretary in South Australia for twenty years, exactly twenty years. And I was opposed the first time that I stood and I got eighty-four per cent of the vote and there were three that stood against me, they got the rest, and from there on I have never been – I had an election every four years, but I was never, ever opposed.

**How many members, roughly, were there?**

**George APAP**

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When I came to South Australia there was only about twelve hundred members. But within eighteen months I'd built the union to three and a half thousand people, and when we built it up to three and a half thousand people it was a viable union to stand on its own two feet.

During the '50s and '60s, you've asked how I was treated, and I was called 'dago', 'wog' and all sorts of things with many people – not many; with *some* people. However, I'm known to make friends pretty quickly and I had a lot more good Australian friends than what I had bad Australian people, and I really enjoyed life in Australia – hence I've been here fifty-six years.

I stayed as the union secretary till I was fifty-four years of age – or fifty-three, actually – and I had three heart attacks and the doctor told me to give the job away because the stress of being a union secretary was a bit too much for me, and I gave the job away at that time. The union looked after me financially and everything and I have not worked since then, but I'm living comfortably, I can say. But that's why I retired, because I had three heart attacks.

In South Australia my union was affiliated with the ALP when I came in 1973 but they did not pay any money because they didn't have any money, they were broke, and Mick Young was the State Secretary at that time and he was the Federal Secretary at the same time. I had met Mick Young when I was in Melbourne –

**That's State Secretary of the Labor Party?**

– of the Labor Party, sorry, yes, the Australian Labor Party – and I said to Mick Young that I want to reaffiliate and to pay the fees, and we came to an agreement that whatever the union owes the money to the ALP to forget it and to start as fresh within the Labor Party, and I did just that.

My influence to join the Labor Party was Ted McCormack. He was the Vice-President of the Waterside Workers' Federation and he finished up a good friend of mine.

Don Dunstan, I became fairly active within the Labor Party and the left group at that time were called the Peter Duncan group, he was the leader of the left ALP. Don Dunstan asked me to join the executive of the Australian Labor Party in round about 1978, I think it

**George APAP**

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was – no, it was earlier than that, about '76 – so I became the executive member of the Labor Party and I was there until 1988, when I was the Senior Vice-President of the Labor Party in South Australia. However, John Bannon and I did not see eye-to-eye so much and they expelled me from the Labor Party.

**Really?**

Yes.

**Was there any specific reason for that?**

Well, there was. I warned John Bannon about the chief executive officer that he employed for the South Australian bank – what was his name?

**Marcus Clark.**

Marcus Clark. *Because my brother in Melbourne, which – he was active too and within the Labor Party – knew that Marcus Clark went broke at least twice in his life in Melbourne, and when he heard that we employed him as the head of the South Australian bank he said to me, 'Did you know that he went bankrupt twice?' And I brought it up on the executive of the Labor Party and John Bannon said that I can only shit-stir and that type of thing, and – yes.*

**So that was '88.**

In '88 – yes, '88/89.

**How big was the state executive, how many members?**

There was twenty on the executive at that time. Yes, twenty on the executive; and the Premier or the Leader of the Party, obviously, was part of it. And the Secretary of the Party was part of it. At that time Chris Schacht was the Secretary of the Labor Party.

**What about in the '70s, was that the same size?**

Yes, it was. All the time that I was on it, it was always – – –. No, it wasn't, sorry; it was twelve first and then they built it up to twenty for some reason.

**And what was its role?**

**George APAP**

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Its role was to make policies of the party and to conduct elections, the executive wants to conduct elections; to get money, of course, and suggest how we can get money to pay for the elections; and hold monthly meeting of all affiliates; and one big conference, four-day conference, once a year.

**Once a year. So the role was – the conference would settle on the state platform, if you like.**

That's right.

**But in between the executive would respond, what, to motions from sub-branches and deal with any business that needed to be dealt with in between times?**

Correct, yes.

The one particular policy that when I found out about it I wasn't happy about –

**What year was this, roughly?**

This was in 1979, I would say, or '78 – before Dunstan retired. They had one clause in the policy that says that you didn't have to be a member of the Labor Party to go onto the executive and to attend conference – – –. True. If you are a member of a union that will be enough for you, a union affiliated with the ALP, that will be enough for you to be a member on the executive. And there was one guy by the name of Roy Griffiths, he was the Secretary of the Australian Society of Engineers, that was *not* a member of the Party – he lived in Semaphore, where I lived, and I've never seen him in the Semaphore Branch of the ALP – so I questioned why; they said, 'He's not a member of the Labor Party'. I said, 'Well, how can you be on an executive of a company or of a party if you're not a member'. He said, 'Oh, the union, you're a member of the union that's enough, a union affiliated with the Party'. Anyway, I said, 'Well, that's not on'. I put a motion in to the executive to change that rule to say that, to become a member of the executive and to be a delegate to the annual conference and the monthly meeting you must be a member of the Labor Party first. And Don Dunstan got a hold of it. He said, 'George, George, George!' He said, 'Don't push it, don't push it'. He said, 'Leave it to me'. He said, 'I'll guarantee you that it will be changed within two or three months'. He said, 'Do you trust me?' I said, 'Of course I trust you'. He said, 'Leave it to me'.

**George APAP**

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**This was at the executive or outside?**

Outside of the executive – no, he just sort of whispered in my ear – – –. Actually, he came into my office, because the ALP was down below of the Trades Hall and mine was upstairs, and as soon as the executive meeting finished I went to my office and Don Dunstan was up there within two minutes. And anyway, he just said that to me and I said, ‘Yes, okay, I’ll leave it in your hands’. He said, ‘Frankly, I’ll agree with you, hundred per cent’. He said, ‘If you’re not a member of the Labor Party you should not be able to be on the executive or attend conferences or meetings of the Labor Party. And – lo and behold! – within two months it was changed.

**How was it changed?**

It was changed to say, simply, that for you to attend annual conference, monthly meetings and to become an executive member of the Labor Party, you will have to be a member of the Australian Labor Party.

**Where was that put, an exec meeting?**

Yes, it was put on the executive meeting and then it went to the conference, it went to the conference because it was only just before the conference, and the conference passed it. There were only, out of about – I would say there would be about eighty people in the conference, eighty to a hundred, there would have only been half a dozen that voted against it. But it was Don Dunstan that done it, without any problem at all, and he didn’t create any problem. He spoke to all of them, to all those that mattered, and including I would say that he would have spoken to Roy Griffiths, too, about it and said, ‘You have to become a member of the Labor Party’. But there was no problem with it, it was changed. If it would have been *me* that moved it, there would have been the right wing that would have got up and done and said all sorts of things; but, being Don Dunstan, it went smoothly and it was changed with no problem. Frankly, Mick Young wasn’t very happy with it at that time, and Mick Young is a good person and I used to get on extremely well with Mick. So, yes, he wasn’t happy about it, he wanted it to remain as it was. But Don said, ‘No, it’s going to change and that’s all there is to it’.

**George APAP**

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**So were you a member of that left faction, or at this stage there were two left factions, weren't there?**

No, I was a member of that left faction, and the Deputy Prime Minister now was one that she was a member of that left faction too.

**Julia Gillard.**

Julia Gillard. You knew she was here in South Australia?

**Yes, right.**

And, yes, she was a member of that left faction.

**What year was that, roughly?**

It would have been perhaps early '80s.

**Early '80s, right.**

Early '80s when she came on, yes.

**When did you join on the left, what year roughly?**

It would have been about '77, I think that's when the left actually started here in South Australia. When I was in Melbourne I was with the left, too, in Melbourne; and when I came to South Australia early in the piece there was no left faction at all, and I spoke to a few others and Peter Duncan was the one that sort of progressed it and –

**Brought it together.**

– yes, it came on.

**So how did that work? You had separate meetings?**

We used to have caucus, yes, before the monthly meeting and before the conference we used to meet. There was about twelve of us or so – John Scott from the Amalgamated Metalworkers' Union, myself from the union; from the plumbers' union, what's his name?

**Tumbers?**

**George APAP**

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No, not Tumbers; Tumbers was Amalgamated Metalworkers' Union. He became a commissioner of the Industrial Commission. Forgotten. I can see him in front of me but I've forgotten his name at the moment. There was about half a dozen union secretaries, about half a dozen, and we used to meet in my office in the Trades Hall.

**Can you remember some of the big issues of the time?**

Not really.

**Uranium, for example.**

Uranium – yes, yes, uranium: we were against that, of course. And what else?

**I'm going to drop one on you.**

Yes?

**Uranium: were you at the meeting that Peter Duncan called to make sure – while Don Dunstan was overseas, Peter Duncan got a meeting together to discuss the uranium policy because he was concerned that Don was going to change his mind and endorse the uranium mining. Were you at that meeting?**

Yes, I remember that meeting. That's about, what, thirty years ago now.

**That's right, yes.**

Yes, I remember it.

**And Don came back or heard about it and was very upset, apparently –**

That's right.

**– that people were meeting on this issue without talking to him about it.**

That's right, that's right. I remember that, yes, I remember that quite well, actually. Yes.

**Can you recall what Peter was saying?**

Well, Peter was saying that we obviously got to be against uranium mining and explained what – at that time myself I think I would have heard 'uranium' twice in my life. So I didn't know what uranium was. But when I found out and heard and read a bit about it, I

**George APAP**

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realised that it can make these nuclear bombs and the rest that comes with it, it certainly would be detrimental to people and that's why I was against it.

**Interesting. And what sort of influence did that left faction have? What sort of numbers, for example, in the conference?**

We would have had at that time about forty per cent.

**Forty?**

Forty per cent. Now they haven't got nowhere near that; but at that time we would have had round about forty per cent, because the big unions – you know, the Amalgamated Metalworkers' Union, my union, the plumbers' union, the wharfies' union, the seamen's union – you know, the unions were mainly with [the left faction] and that's how the left came to have that forty per cent.

**And where were the Australian Workers' Union? Because at one stage they were left, in SA.**

At one stage they were left, when Jim Dunford was the Secretary, but they have never been extreme right or extreme left, actually, they're always in between, here in South Australia. In Melbourne and Sydney it was a different thing, and in South Australia they got on well with us. I remember when Jimmy Dunford died. He's buried at McLaren Vale, I went to his funeral.

**Interesting. All right, well, you continue what you were covering there.**

Okay. (consults notes, break in recording) I became the Vice-President of the United Trades and Labour Council in 1979 and the President in 1980. At that time it was agreed amongst many of them that you only be the President for twelve months so it sort of rolls on for everyone to have a chance to become the President of the Trades and Labour Council. I was on the executive of the Trades and Labour Council for nine years. Don Dunstan got on well with the unions.

I remember in 1975 I had my members in the oil refinery out on strike for three weeks. The issue was then the thirty-five-hour week. And the oil companies shut the tap of fuel, and South Australia run out of fuel within ten days of when we had the strike. Obviously,

**George APAP**

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that affected all people in South Australia and affected companies, affected workers – you know, they could hardly go to work – *et cetera*, and everyone turned against me. I had several threats and including a couple of times I had a letter sent in with a live bullet in it with a letter saying, ‘And the next bullet is pointing at your stupid head’, and that type of thing. Anyway, the police have confiscated my mail to home and to my office and they used to check it and I used to pick it up at five o’clock from the police station in Adelaide.

I had a twenty-four-hour police guard on me for about a week, and Dunstan done that, to protect me; and wherever I went on my job, when I went home to sleep, the police were in my house. So it was very stressful. My children were being driven to school by police and picked up by police, because even my children were threatened at that time. But Don Dunstan himself helped me a great deal on that.

**Did he talk to you?**

Oh, yes, yes – every day. I would say during that time he would have spoke to me every day about the issue, inquiring how it’s going, where are we with it? Are we in the Industrial Commission? What did the Commission say and what’s been happening? When do you think it’s going to be resolved? You know, just to keep himself informed on it. And he never, ever told me that he was against what I was doing. Never. He just simply wanted to be informed of how the dispute is going and where we’re going and how long it’s going to be. They rationed the fuel too, the Government, with even numbers and odd numbers and even to get them one day and the other one. But yes, he was a great help to me, which made it a lot easier for me than if we would have had, for instance, a Liberal government or if we had a Labor government that doesn’t care much about workers, like we had a few times.

**Did he talk about the workers and conditions at all?**

Not really. He didn’t interfere with the dispute itself and the issue of the dispute, but the issue of the dispute and the dispute I was in charge of it and that was it, and he never tried to influence me one way or the other. He just wanted to know what’s happening and when it will be perhaps resolved.

**George APAP**

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**How did that get resolved, that issue?**

That got resolved. It went before the Full Bench of the Federal Commission and the workers got thirty-five-hour week. We won our dispute at the finish. It was three weeks, three weeks it was, and I'll show you a cartoon that a member of our union had put – because he made cartoons, this guy working in the refinery – and he's got one of me saying, 'No, no, no, members'. I've got all members around me working in the refinery and they all are in the nude, and he said, 'No, no, no members. I'm not saying a "streak", I'm saying a "strike"'. (laughs)

**That's right, really – because Maslin's [nudist beach] was down the road there.**

Yes.

**Was it the first thirty-five-hour week for workers in Australia or South Australia?**

Well, the wharfies were on thirty-five hours a week, although it wasn't sort of legally in the award, it was just an agreement between the shipowners and the wharfies, and the wharfies had the thirty-five-hour week some five years before.

**Right – this was the first official one, though.**

The first official one, yes.

**That's interesting.**

The first official one, yes, was the oil companies.

**And can you remember the grounds for thirty-five hours?**

Yes, the grounds for thirty-five hours were mainly that the technology that the oil companies are putting within the oil industry have decreased the workforce by about twenty-five per cent and increased the output by about eighty per cent. So that's what we had.

**Productivity sort of related, yes.**

Productivity increase, and the technology reduced the workforce. That was our argument.

**One of the first enterprise bargaining deals, if you like.**

**George APAP**

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Yes.

**Well before Hawke and Keating.**

That's right.

**Interesting.**

That's right. The Dunstan government gave the workers in South Australia ten days' sick leave a year instead of five, that was in the middle-'70s, and he gave thirteen weeks' long service leave as in legislature after ten years instead of fifteen years, and pro rata after seven years instead of ten years. And that was in the middle-'70s, and that has not been matched by any state in Australia up till now, so that on its own showed that Dunstan cared about the workers and I remember when it came through, you know, like all the other states: 'God! How did you do it?' You know. I said, 'Well, *I* didn't do it; the Government done it. We got a good government in Don Dunstan's Government and he was the one that done it and legislated for it'.

**Was that Jack Wright pushing it?**

Jack Wright was the Minister for Industrial Affairs, yes. And I got on quite well with Jack Wright, he was another guy that you could talk to quite easily. Yes.

The left at that time was called, as I said before, the Peter Duncan Left, and I certainly would not call that now the Peter Duncan Left, what Peter Duncan is doing now.  
(laughter)

**He's in Lombok.**

He is in Lombok, yes. He came here in front of a court about six–eight months ago, and I wanted to go there just to punch him one in his mouth. He took ten thousand dollars off me for the Dine-Out Victoria Square [company] and he was the biggest shonk ever on that.

**Really?**

Oh, my word. Yes.

The Adelaide Establishment were against Don Dunstan, of course, because he liked – –  
–. (telephone rings, break in recording) They didn't like Don Dunstan because Don

**George APAP**

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Dunstan was for the ordinary people, like me and like many others, and Don Dunstan was, you know, for the majority of South Australia and not for the top hundred or so. And I admired him for it, I admired him for it.

**What were they saying about him in particular that you recall, any particular things?**

Well, yes: as you know, they labelled him sexually-wise that he was wrong and that type of thing, and that was the worst thing that they could say. But mainly they labelled him as he is only a 'union man', that he just do what the union tells him to do. But that was not true. If he believed in something he would do it, but if he didn't believe in what you're saying he will tell you so. He was straightforward.

**Can you remember any times like the unions wanted something but he argued them out of it?**

I know that there was a fair few, but I can't recall a specific one at this point in time; but yes, I know there was a few. Especially when I was the President of the United Trades – no, that came after, it was before I was the President. But there would have been few. But I was on the executive of the Trades and Labour Council and we met with him and with Jack Wright and that, and he was a straight shooter. If he agrees to what you are saying he'll tell you. If he disagree he'll tell you again. So he wasn't what the Establishment was trying to say; he was simply a straight shooter and if you're right you're right, if you're wrong you're wrong.

**Was he on top of the particular issue that you might have been discussing?**

Oh, yes. Always.

**Yes, always, right.**

Always, always. Because he knew before he came and met what the issue was, and obviously he would have studied it, I would say, and he would have talked to some people that know about the issue and he was never not right up-to-date with everything, he was always up-to-date with everything that you want to discuss with him.

**He didn't get angry and heavy or anything?**

**George APAP**

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Never. Never. Never. Never. Never seen him angry. I been to his house, I been with him, I met him hundreds of times and I cannot recall that I seen him angry once. He could have been boiling inside of him, but it doesn't show outside.

**Were you ever at any social functions with him?**

Oh, yes, yes, yes.

**With what sort of people – union people, or – – –?**

Union people and for instance, when he opened his café – I'll never forget that – the one in Norwood: people went there by invitation and I was invited to go there for the opening, and yes, he was quite good.

**Why I'm asking that is some people said they found it very hard to talk to him, like if it was about business it was fine but if there was sort of social chitchat he often just used to close off. (laughter) How did, again, your colleagues and that find that situation with him? Like Des Corcoran could go to a bar and have a good joke with people –**

Yes.

**– but Don, they said, used to be a bit awkward.**

Not Don, that's right. That's right. He never socialised a lot. Perhaps I only seen him in the bar in the Trades Hall no more than half a dozen times; but, as you said, Corcoran used to be there all the time. And yes, he wasn't a great guy to socialise with, perhaps, but to talk to I found him very good. I never, ever had him rejecting something that I wanted to say.

**Good.**

When I came to South Australia and the first thing that I want to do is to meet Don Dunstan and to be friends with him and the rest that comes with it –

**Yes, sure.**

– and he certainly did – never, ever sort of said no or anything. As I said before, he was – I found him to be a gentleman and that he understand your thinking and that.

**George APAP**

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Don Dunstan was a reformist and he did reform South Australia. South Australia would have been years behind the time before he become the Premier, and I would say in his first time of him being elected as the Premier South Australia came equal to any other state in reform, and certainly when he left due to his illness South Australia was one of the best reform states, with policies, with everything. I even know people that came to South Australia simply and purely because of Don Dunstan. I got a guy, friend of mine here at Port Willunga, he was a South African and he was under house arrest in South Africa because he supported the Blacks and he supported Mandela, and he knew Mandela quite well. He's a professor, his name is Basil Moore. And when he escaped from South Africa in the early '70s he went to Ireland, because his parents were Irish, and then he came to Australia and then he came to South Australia simply and purely because of Don Dunstan.

**So he'd heard about him. Gee.**

Yes, heard about him, read about him.

**Did you ever think how was Don getting all these changes? Because sometimes he'd stick his neck out and people would wonder what he was on about and things like that. What did you observe about the way he did things? You've talked a bit about this change he made and he agreed with you on the constitutional change in membership –**

Yes.

**– and you mentioned he'd get up there and argue. What about in the wider public, what sort of things did you think about at the time?**

Well, I think most people trusted him in any changes that he wanted to bring in. People like me, for instance, I knew any change that he wanted to bring in, that it is for the better of South Australia and for the betterness, too, of the ordinary people like me. Even some that firstly I did not agree with or have not heard about it and I didn't know what it meant, sometimes, I still said, 'Well, if it's Don Dunstan that's doing it, that's okay by me because I trust him'. That's how I felt myself, and I know there were a few others said the same thing, you know, and they mention few of the reforms that he brought in and they said, 'First up I thought, "Oh, gosh! Not this!"' And then after it came in then they said, 'By

**George APAP**

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god, he was right and I was wrong', although they never said anything against it, but they thought about it. So yes.

**All right. I'll follow up another one that didn't quite get there: it's the industrial democracy one. I'm not sure whether you're going to talk about that one, but the worker participation in management. There was a bit of debate, particularly from the union – well, the employers wondered what was going on –**

Yes.

**– but from the union side there was a bit of concern about, 'Well, where does this put us?' That's the unions.**

Yes.

**If workers are going to get directly involved, are the unions sidelined? How did that play out in the Union Movement?**

Well, yes, that's another one that the union said at the time, 'Well, if the workers are going to be part of management and management be part of workers, there will be no need for the unions perhaps and the union will disappear'. But I had faith in him and I knew that if it will come in it would be for the betterness of the workers. And that's what my job was – not for me to be the union secretary; my job was to try and help the workers to have better wages, better conditions, better occupational health and safety and better of everything.

**Yes.**

Our union, the Storemen and Packers' Union, were the one, for instance, to start the union superannuation. In 1978 we started what we called the Labour Union Cooperative Retirement Fund, and it's still going on now. We started it with \$48,000, because we had the offices of the union superannuation, and now I believe it's got about \$3 billion or something.

**Really?**

Yes.

**Incredible.**

**George APAP**

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So I've still got money invested in that union, and I was on the executive of the union. And that's the type of thing that Dunstan would have been looking for, too, to try and better the conditions and everything of the ordinary workers. But yes, it was controversial at that time. Certainly management didn't want anything to do with it, and unions were hesitant to a certain extent because they thought that if that comes about we may lose the union. Yes, so it was controversial at that time.

**Interesting, yes.**

But I trusted him, that was me, and I got up with the unions and said that I'd trust him.

In regards to me standing for Semaphore, Don came to me and asked me if I ever wanted to be a politician, and I said yes, perhaps one day I would. That was in 1978. And he said, well, there would be a seat vacant within the Legislative Council, 'And I suggest that you should stand for the Legislative Council'. And I said, 'No, I don't think that I would like to stand for the Legislative Council, I'd rather stand for the House of Reps', I said, 'because it gives you more sort of flexibility to what you can do and not do', I said. And he said, 'All right, I'll see what comes about'. And within a month he said to me, 'Well, look, Semaphore will be up for grabs because Jack' – forgotten his name, he was the Member in Semaphore at that time – 'will have to retire', because the rule book of the Australian Labor Party said that you cannot renominate to be the candidate if you are sixty-five years of age, and Jack was sixty-five years. So I said yes. I wasn't living in Semaphore at that time, and I was living in Black Forest; however, when the preselection came about Dunstan supported me. The right wing stood three candidates for preselection against me, and there was one from the Metalworkers' Union that he claimed that he was left; but anyway, I won it and I won it simply and purely with the support of Don Dunstan. If it wasn't for Don Dunstan I wouldn't have won preselection for Semaphore.

When I won preselection I immediately put my house in Black Forest for sale and I went to live in Semaphore within three months of being preselected. Obviously, I joined the Party there, the branch there, and I had a fair bit of support, but the Australian Society of Engineers, Roy Griffiths – the one that I outed from the executive because he wasn't a member of the Labor Party – he and Don someone – and I've forgotten his name; he was

**George APAP**

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an organiser with the Australian Society of Engineers, lived in Semaphore, the one that stood against me for preselection – he put the rumour out that I am all sorts of things and they got with Norm Peterson. He was a clerk, Norm Peterson, in the container depots, and one time he was the acting manager of the container depot at Freight Basis and he sacked our union delegate.

**Really?**

Yes, and we immediately went out on strike and within twenty-four hours it was fixed, the delegate got back on the job, and Norm Peterson resigned his job as the assistant manager of Freight Basis at that point in time and went on clerking again. **So he had that much against me, Norm Peterson, that he tried to do something to my union membership, and he failed and failed miserably because he left the job himself.** I don't know whether he was pushed or whether he left himself. But anyway, the Australian Society of Engineers got behind him, they kept saying that he is a 'Labor supporter', that he was a Labor supporter, and some people took it to be that he was a member of the Australian Labor Party, but he wasn't and he was never, ever, ever a member of the Australian Labor Party. And I beat him on the first preference vote but with the preferences of the Liberal Party – and the Democrats, too, gave him the preferences – Norm Peterson got up and beat me in that election.

There were three others that stood against him and the three others did not beat him and he beat them with the first preference vote, and one of them was Kevin Foley.

**Really?**

Yes, he stood against him, Kevin Foley, and he got done; and then Norm Peterson retired and Kevin stood again and won the seat. The other one was the Federal Member for Port Adelaide –

**The ex-teacher.**

– the ex-teacher, yes. He stood against him. And there was another one, Bignall[?].

**Bignall, yes.**

**George APAP**

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He stood against him, too. Anyway, no-one beat him. I didn't beat him, he beat me; he beat the other three; and I would have got more votes, first preference votes, than the other three. But anyway, that happened.

**Did Don in that context say he would like people from non-English-speaking background in the Parliament?**

He did. That's why he was supporting me and he said that he wanted someone with non-English-speaking background and, yes, a migrant.

**Were you the first one or was there somebody else?**

I would have been the first one, I would say, yes. I don't think that there was anyone – well, I'm sure that there wasn't anyone – at that point in time as a Member of Parliament from the Labor Party.

**What about the unions, were you the only – – –?**

Even the unions to a certain extent at that time, yes. At that time I would have been sort of a foreigner, to a certain extent, because – yes. Bill Landeryou was the one that supported me in Victoria; and, yes, I don't think that there was – well, I am *sure* that there wasn't a European, apart from the English, Irish or Scottish, but from the European side of it I would have been the very first, I think, yes. Certainly when I came here in South Australia I don't know of anyone that was a European or other countries, yes.

**And did you have any links with the Italian and the Greek communities at all?**

Oh, yes. Especially with the Greek, I always had good liaison with them, yes. And even now, frankly, they look for me, especially now I am a councillor and I am Chairman of Aldinga Beach Community Bendigo Bank, I'm the Chairman of the Board for that, yes. I started the Bendigo Bank here.

One thing I want to tell you just during the election of what happened: Roy Martin was the Mayor of Port Adelaide and he was dead set against me, and the week before the election he took out one full-page advertisement saying that we don't want these type of people here, 'We should send these people back where they came from. We fought against

**George APAP**

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these people and we don't want these people to take over our Parliament'. And he finished it up by saying – how does it go? – 'In the rays of the sun we will remember them'.

**Gosh, yes.**

And not many people liked it, but many people believed him in the meantime. And three months after the election I rang Roy Martin and I said, 'Roy, I was very disappointed with the advertisement that you put in the paper and I would like to come and talk to you about it'. 'Why?' I said, 'Well, Roy, just talk to you about it and that's it'. Anyway, he said, 'All right, how about if you come Saturday, ten o'clock in the morning?' And he didn't live far from where I lived, and I said, 'Yes, I'll be there'. I walked in and his wife opened the door and I went to shake her hand, she just (indicates pose) –

**Really?**

– yes, wouldn't shake [my] hand, and he was sitting in his lounge and there was a chair there: he said, 'Sit there'. And I went to shake his hand, too, and he wouldn't. And I said, 'Okay'. I said, 'Roy, firstly', I said, 'I just wanted to ask you do you know the country where I was born?' He said, 'Italy'. I said, 'No, Roy. It wasn't Italy'. He said, 'Greece, then'. I said, 'No, not Greece'. 'Spanish?' I said, 'No'. And I said, 'Malta'. 'Well, that's Greece', he said. (laughs) That's how much he knew. He said, 'Well, that's Greece'. I said, 'No, it's not Greece. As a matter of fact, it's about two thousand miles away from Greece, Malta'. I said, 'It's right in the middle of the Mediterranean'. I said, 'And Malta got the George Cross, and every Maltese that was in Malta during that War, they got the George Cross'. I said, 'And I lost my father at the age of two and a half years old because of that war', I said, 'so when you said you fought against the type of me', I said, 'you was wrong', I said, 'And I should ask for an apology but I know you wouldn't give it, and I don't want to create any problem about it'.

Anyway, we spoke a little bit about it and I walked out. A policeman that I knew in Port Adelaide said to me that Roy Martin asked the police to be in his house whilst I go there because I'm going there to kill him. (laughter) And the police said, 'Well, did he say that he's going to kill you?' And he said, 'No'. He said, 'Well, why do you think he's

**George APAP**

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going to kill you?’ Now, that’s the type of thing that happened during that election campaign.

**Ignorant.**

And, as a matter of fact, only about two years ago I was driving into town, and I’ve always got my car wireless on the ABC, and there was one guy from I think Sydney he was, and they were talking about elections and the rest that comes with it. And he said that there are racial campaigns and he said, ‘But the biggest one that I recall, that was in Semaphore, South Australia, in 1979’.

**Really?**

Yes. So he was talking about my candidature at that time. Yes.

**So he learned nothing, that mayor.**

No, no, he certainly did not.

I already said what Don Dunstan said to me, about to nominate for the thing. I think of Don Dunstan of being the greatest Premier in Australia, and I don’t think that there is anyone in Australia since I’ve known, from the ’60s, ’70s and ’80s, that will outclass Don Dunstan in any way, shape or form.

The last one, when you asked about any mistakes that Don Dunstan did, I think the biggest mistake that Don Dunstan did is he didn’t look after himself and he looked after other people rather than himself, and that’s how he became ill in 1979 and that’s why he had to leave the premiership and went to Italy. If he would have looked after himself I would say that Don Dunstan would have been the Premier of South Australia for at least another ten years over 1979.

I remember when Don Dunstan went overseas and he was coming back when Des Corcoran called an early election, and election twelve months before it was due. And we had an executive meeting, of course, and Chris Schacht was the State Secretary, and Chris Schacht said that Don Dunstan is coming back to South Australia, ‘But I think that Don Dunstan should not be here during the election’. And he said, ‘The Liberals will pick up on him’. There was that issue that came about about Ceruto, was it, and –

**George APAP**

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**Ceruto, yes – the book, yes.**

– yes, the book, and Chris Schacht suggested to the executive to ask him to ring Don and tell him not to come to South Australia during the election. And that's what did happen. I was the only one on the executive to say, 'No, I want to see him here. I'll be pleased for him to be here'. But unfortunately I was won out on that thing on the executive and Don didn't make it to be here during that election.

**Right, and the rest is history.**

And the rest is history, that's right. The rest is history.

**Great, that's been terrific. Thanks very much, George, it's very good.**

Okay, my pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW.