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**This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation Don Dunstan History Project interviewing Dr John Bannon. John was a member of parliament in the 1970s, a minister in the late '70s and then became Premier of South Australia. The date today is 24<sup>th</sup> June 2008 and the location of the interview is in the Ligertwood Building at the University of Adelaide.**

**John, thanks very much for doing this interview for the Don Dunstan History Project.**

I share an education with Dunstan, because he did all his secondary schooling at St Peters; and, like him, I went on to St Mark's College at the University of Adelaide. Don was an active member of that St Mark's community while he did his undergraduate degrees. So in one sense we sort of tracked after each other.

There were two prominent Old Collegians at the time actively involved in State politics – there were a number of others who never really identified themselves as such – and one was Don Dunstan; the other was Robin Millhouse. They provided an interesting contrast as members of parliament. I can remember in my senior years each of them would come and address the Current Affairs classes and engage in dialogue, and that's where I first came across Don, at school rather than doorknocking, even though we lived in his electorate. My father, who did a lot of stage design for Colin Ballantyne and others at the Hut and Norwood Town Hall knew Don quite well through the theatre, but I hadn't met him until he came to school to spread the Labor word. He gave mighty impressive, electrifying talks for those who had ears to hear, and was a considerable inspiration.

**What was it about, the talk?**

It ranged over all the issues; but certainly one of the things he focused on was the electoral system and electoral reform. At that stage the voting age was still twenty-one, but his line was, 'Whatever preconceptions you have about politics' – and I think he was specifically addressing the conservative majority of boys – 'you've got to keep an open mind. You're going to be exercising your vote and it's

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got to be an informed vote so you've got to understand the system', and that gave him a platform on which to talk about electoral reform and the values of democracy. So I can remember being very impressed with that; he would refer to whatever current issues there were at the time, but it was mainly more about the philosophy of politics.

What he did engender among a few of us though, was a real interest and desire to get into politics and as soon as I got to university that's what I and many others did. Dunstan was a terrific inspiration in that.

**That was at the school and at university, too.**

And at university, yes.

**What did he do there that inspired a group of you?**

Well, at university he was obviously one of the key inspirations of the student activists. I mean he was just so refreshingly different from the Frank Walshes and others who were the old-guard Labor men. Mick O'Halloran died in 1960, he'd been the Leader of the Opposition for years showing no great interest in displacing Playford as Premier, and Frank took over. For students, Frank was certainly not an inspirational figure by any means, nor were the old guard, who clustered around him. Dunstan was very much the charismatic face of Labor and obviously interacted considerably with people on the campus.

**Had you joined the party?**

I joined the party – yes, at that stage; 1962, in my first year of University I became a member.

**'Sixty-two, right.**

And I was actively involved – because my mother had a flat out at Evandale, I was in the Maylands Sub-Branch, of which the formidable Mrs Margaret Scott was

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Secretary. It was in Don's electorate, so he used to occasionally come and speak at that and I was involved as a committee member and State Council delegate.

**How was he looked on as a local member – – –?**

Oh, they thought he was terrific, with good reason. I mean, he was hugely active and his presence was everywhere. I think it was always felt that no matter what he was doing at the broader state level he was available for his constituency. And we should remember this about Don, he served a long apprenticeship. It's more common these days for people to go into parliament and within a few years they're ministers or whatever – they don't tend to stay on the back bench or in opposition for long. In his case, partly through the circumstances of the gerrymander but also because of the way the Labor Party worked then, Don served an apprenticeship from 1953 right through into the early '60s. He was certainly a prominent spokesman throughout that time, but he didn't hold office or authority until quite a considerable time into his parliamentary career – it was 1965 before he became a Minister. And that's always worth remembering: he served a very long apprenticeship, was very eager to actually get his hands on the levers of government, and therefore really wanted to make the most of it when he did.

**Did he use the student group at all in terms of formulating his own ideas, getting feedback from you and others at the time?**

I can't say how specifically, but he would certainly have done so – from time to time we'd be engaged in discussion with him. He actively gave addresses, question-and-answer stuff, working on some of his campaigns. Yes, he was certainly involved with the campus group. In the 1965 campaign the ALP<sup>1</sup> Club at the time was extremely eager to help; the Vietnam War was at its height – but I think we were regarded as perhaps somewhat of an embarrassment as an electoral force, (laughs) so we were given a role to work in a couple of marginals, particularly supporting Hugh

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<sup>1</sup> ALP – Australian Labor Party.

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Hudson's bid for Glenelg, Hugh being a University man and well-known to all of us. We prepared a special pamphlet under our own auspices and authorisation, and I know there was quite a bit of interaction with Don about the themes and the way in which our shock troops would address the electorate at Glenelg. Don saw our efforts from two points of view: one, he knew that we had huge energy and enthusiasm; but he also knew that it could be counter-productive if (laughs) we didn't get some fatherly advice and guidance before confronting the electors, and he was happy to provide that.

**And what were some of the political, or the local political ideas that you were picking up yourself at the time?**

Well, as I say, the dominant State issue was electoral reform in the state system. Labor had been robbed or cheated of office, and we had a social program which we couldn't implement for that reason. But I guess most of us focused more on the bigger, the national, scene, which of course Don himself did, too; it had state manifestations. The White Australia Policy was one, civil liberties another –the first demonstration I ever went in was against the banning of entry of an academic appointed to the University who was regarded as suspect. The immigration system was keeping this bloke out. It wasn't a racist thing, as it happened, in that case; it was more about radicals.

**What was his name?**

I think it was Brenner. The Brenner case. He'd been appointed Lecturer in Politics and was finding it hard to get a visa or something. Anyway, there were immigration issues off the back of old battles like the anti-communist referendum of a previous generation, which I was aware of as a child but not as an activist. So White Australia and immigration reform; the Vietnam War, of course, was an absolutely dominant agenda issue on-campus among campus activists from about 1963 onwards – in other words, before conscription, before Australia got heavily-involved, we were sponsoring talks and discussions and things like that. So it was a national agenda.

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That raises an interesting aspect of Dunstan's influence: most of us carried a foreign minister's baton in our knapsacks. But he was one who constantly stressed the value of state politics and the ability to do things at the state level. Speaking personally, after my experience with the Whitlam Government working for Clyde Cameron, 1973–5, I was convinced of the Dunstan thesis, that there was a lot of drama and sparks and things at the national level but if you really wanted to get in and do something practical in what at that stage we felt to be a very conservative environment, or one where the conservatives could always keep reasserting themselves, state politics was the way to go. And I think he convinced a few of us that we wouldn't be wasting our time there; that in fact the state had a lot more issues going for it than most of the federal issues.

**And apart from electoral reform, did you pick up any sense of other ideas being formed about the economy and the early runs – well, the *Planning and Development Act* was another area; but Aboriginal rights – – –.**

Yes, Aboriginal rights, which was connected up with the immigration reform issues and so on. The issues of state development, the reinforcement of the manufacturing base and things like that; a sense of the vulnerability of the South Australian economy and the need therefore for an activist government to try and stabilise it. Industrial relations, that was an issue that I was particularly interested in, the working of the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act* and issues like workers' compensation and so on – and, in fact, professionally, that's where I later worked as an industrial lawyer, both working with the unions, in particular the AWU,<sup>2</sup> and subsequently on Clyde Cameron's staff as his adviser on industrial legislation and then finally within the Department of Labour and Industry. The industrial democracy issue was a very high priority in South Australia; in fact, I was originally asked to join and lead the Industrial Democracy Unit here, but preferred the broader role, although I was a

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<sup>2</sup> AWU – Australian Workers' Union.

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member on the steering committee that ran it. Phil Bentley became the first head of that unit and collected some interesting people around him (including Geoff Anderson and Mike Rann).

**Did some of those ideas have any ideological overlay, like democratic socialism, I recall some of the debates, particularly sometimes the student movement not thinking Don was radical enough; but does that have any resonance or do you have recollections on that?**

Certainly there was a lot of tension between the so-called social democrats or democratic socialists and the more revolutionary socialists. Adelaide didn't have a vibrant communist student club or anything of that kind; we were actually – as is often the way in South Australia – a very broad-based group ranging from people close to the DLP<sup>3</sup> to people who were probably close to card-carrying coms. But in other campuses, particularly Sydney and Melbourne, they would fracture into separate groups. I was for a while the President of the Australian Student Labour Federation, which was one of the most extraordinary groups, (laughter) because in addition to mainstream ALP types and clubs it had genuine DLP-type people together with the Aarons and the other radicals from the Moscow-aligned Communist Party – and, of course, the new radical left, the Maoists, Hall Greenland, Albert Langer and people like that all around. So there was a full spectrum of leftism, and Don would have fitted into the conservative end of that, if you like, because he was a Fabian socialist. That was really the vision that a number of us supported, which held that the ideology and programme are all very well, but you've got to have the tools and the ability to practically implement it. That was a Dunstan message. And I think, in consequence, there was a reasonable hostility to the extreme left approach on most issues.

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<sup>3</sup> DLP – Democratic Labor Party.

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**And just picking up some of the detail on industrial democracy, I've interviewed other people about that but I was just wondering what you thought about – your observations about Don's initiatives there and where it might have succeeded and where it failed in the end?**

Well, interestingly, both Don and Clyde Cameron were influenced heavily by the Scandinavian models, although the Yugoslavian workers' council system was also an inspiration. So they cherry-picked some of the examples of cases where workers on the floor could have a greater influence and input to not just the working environment, but even to the direction of companies and so on. Business was pretty nervous about the whole thing. But it was your classic social democratic or Fabian approach. Those on the left used terms like 'workers' control' and were looking at workers' co-operatives; that was never the agenda. It was more introducing the legitimate expertise, if you like, of all levels of the workforce into how things operated at the workplace.

It was one of those causes that was new, it was innovative, it was radical; trade union training was connected with it because the understanding was unless the workers came educated in the way in which the system operated and so on their input would be token rather than real, so that was all part of it. It involved the Trade Union Movement in a level of responsibility which was also seen as important.

**And the unions grabbed hold of it at the later stage, from recollection.**

Yes. Yes, they did; but equally there were some suspicions there that their role would be diluted or watered down, and they shared this with business. But Don's approach was to collect a group of people drawn from the various sections to manage the process, and the Industrial Democracy Unit itself was staffed with people who were eager and informed and educated and raring to go. And they did some useful things.

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**As a relatively senior public servant of the time, did you get any sense of where the departments were at with Don's initiatives and processes – not only industrial; I know there was industrial democracy in the departments, but – – –.**

Sure. You had the Corbett report on the public service and so on.

**Yes.**

I think there was still – I won't say 'resistance'; not so much resistance as sort of working around. There was thirty-two years of doing things the Playford way and some of those bureaucrats were pretty skilled but they had their structures and so on and they were not easy to change.

**And did you have any observations about the role of the Premier's Department and the policy area at that time?**

Well, only that it was obviously increasingly becoming an important force and impinging on departmental operations in a way that they weren't used to. The practice, for instance, of the Cabinet Office commenting confidentially to the Premier on all the submissions from the ministers caused some alarm among the departments and some resentment among the ministers. One of the changes I made, incidentally, when I became Premier was to have that information circulated to the Minister prior to the cabinet meeting – although I felt it was useful for the Premier to have that sort of input, it should be shared with the minister concerned, whereas the Dunstan formula produced critical comment out of a hat. All it did was create tremendous resentment and suspicion and a defensive reaction, in my view, whereas if there was a legitimate query based on the Cabinet Office analysis, then the minister should know before the debate took place in cabinet and it shouldn't be used simply as a debating point against the proposal, and ought to be treated on its merits. In this period through the '70s and in my first term as minister in the Dunstan and Corcoran Cabinets there was very much the feeling that this process was aimed at concentrating power in the hands of the Premier and allowing ambushes to take place at the last minute, and it was heavily resented.

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**And Don never explained why he went this way and not the other way?**

No. I think the system had grown up – it was probably part of the transition; I don't know how Playford operated, but from the outside one could see he had a great personal influence and probably a direct relationship with most of the heads of the departments. In Dunstan's case, the concept of getting some advice, separate advice, would have evolved into these, very specific briefs, that the Premier could then use in the discussion on a particular proposal. (break in recording)

**Well, John, you joined the South Australian Parliament, you were elected to the parliament in 1977. How did you – – –?**

Can I just say something before we move from the public service page?

**Sorry, yes.**

It was an interesting perspective from which to see Don, because I'd only ever known him as a politician in the electorate and campaigning and all that sort of stuff. From the public servant's perspective he had enormous authority – well, he was seen as the repository of power. If you could get through to the Premier, then despite guys like Des Corcoran, Hugh Hudson and Geoff Virgo (they acted as a bit of a triumvirate) and others, who you would regard as strong ministers you would prevail. Don was seen as the final arbiter and I can remember a couple of occasions when preparing budgets you would make a bid for the staffing needs or what sort of program the department might have and there was great excitement about getting to the Premier to discuss these things with him. He did this with most ministers, and a lot of work was done on the preparation of the briefs. The two occasions on which I was part of this process, they were both extremely disappointing as Don did have this habit of firstly keeping people waiting an inordinate amount of time and, secondly, falling asleep when – (laughs) well, the debate was raging on. Don used to say it was a judicial concentration, and it's true that from time to time you'd think he was asleep and he'd come up and ask a relevant question; but the best technique was just

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to wait (laughs); just stop what you were saying. And it was very disconcerting, because, as I say, there was this huge anticipation: 'We've got our audience!' And you finally get in and if it was in the afternoon or later in the evening and he was there, the eyes would drop. It wasn't good PR among the public servants, who felt they hadn't really been listened to. They expected an interaction of a kind.

I took some good lessons into government myself, and that was one: I resolved that if I was ever in that position I would not – not necessarily as Premier, but certainly again as a minister make keeping to your timetable critical. You know, if it's going to work and you're seeing someone at one o'clock you try and admit them at one. You don't let it drift because it just gets out of hand, like a doctor's waiting room – which is the way Don ran it. And I hear suggestions Kevin Rudd operates in a somewhat similar way.

**Yes, it doesn't sound good**

And I think that's not good. But, interestingly, I got this cracking when I became Premier, and Ron Barnes, the long-term Under-Treasurer came to me at one stage and said, (laughs) 'Ah, Premier, do you know, you're causing real difficulties for me in the way I'm trying to keep on top of my stuff in Treasury'. And I said, 'Oh, god, what's happening?' He said, 'Well,' he said, 'with Don, we always knew we'd have to be there when the appointment was set, that was the courtesy, but we knew that it might be half an hour or an hour or so there, so, I used to get all my reading done and I'd bring a couple of officers over for department discussion. It was one of the most useful times of the day. Now I get over and I've got my reading briefs and next moment I'm in there, trying to remember what we've come to see you about'. (laughter) He was quite disconcerted by that. They all got used to it, but that's just an aside on style. The Dunstan style was different.

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**Can you remember any of the specifics of what his agendas still were at that time, 1979, roughly?**

Well, my perspective came, I guess, from the brief that he was giving me, which was this whole community development area. He was, if you like, moving down a notch in the social services and other areas, the lifestyle areas as well, from the State Government and its departments to raising community involvement. I think it fitted a pattern: in the workplace, he wanted the workers involved, the industrial democracy initiatives and so on; in the community, with reforms of local government, with establishment of community development councils, with the promotion of community arts and all that sort of stuff coupled with recreation and sport; the libraries, comprehensive delivery of library services round the State, the Crawford report. All that stuff, much of which I was involved with, was what he saw as creating a civilised, active, accessible community. And then there were economic activities, industrial and urban development and finance services (including ramping up the State Bank), which I was not directly involved in. That's very much what he was promoting.

**Yes. Later on, Richard Florida talked about the 'creative something-or-other society', and I guess on looking back that's what Don, through this sort of work and ideas with you and others, was trying to do.**

Yes.

**Although I don't recall that term actually being used anywhere.**

I don't recall the term and it was never really, apart from the 'community development' concept for that group of activities, it was never really articulated. But he saw the building blocks. You have one of the best education systems in the world, so you're turning out people with capability. In their communities they've got to have the opportunity to express themselves and have an influence and impact; in their workplace similarly, and so on. And it was very much that kind of vision. It was an exciting, an interesting vision. It was a refreshing vision. As I say, it came

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off the back of '75 and the thought of, 'Hang on, we're vulnerable here and we've been in for a while. I've achieved electoral reform and a couple of other things; where do I go?'

**Because 1977 was a good result.**

Exactly. It was a good result, a solid return for the Government. That gave us the complacency of '79, of course. And belief in a contrived election – see, it was another early election, the second one, of which '79 was the third in a row which was too much – but 1977 was an early election to stabilise and reposition after the deadlocked Parliament of 1975, to go on into that next period. And the economic circumstances seemed to be okay, although the economy fractured soon after that. Dunstan felt education, the health system and so on had all been put into pretty serviceable form. Prisons needed to be tackled, the criminal law and that area – though law reform, of course, had been dealt with to a large extent – so that was on the agenda as well. But, yes, in February '79 he disappeared.

**Yes. Just looking on him as a parliamentary performer, you came in in '77 and later you were in parliament for a long time yourself: what are your reflections about Don as a parliamentary performer?**

I saw him in action regularly from 1975. Oh, he was terrific in the House. He was a great debater. By the time I saw him up close he'd done it all. He'd been there and done that, so he wasn't as assiduous in his participation or as fired up as he would have been in the past. From time to time the opposition even bypassed him, they thought that it was a waste of time targeting him because he could handle them too well. Of course, when the Salisbury issue and a few of those things came up, then the heat went on; but he was a terrific parliamentary performer. He knew the standing orders backwards.

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**Was there anybody who could take him on?**

Not really, not when he was on song. Robin Millhouse was pretty good, he delighted in denouncing – particularly in my time – the ‘Lib–Lab’ combination, when he was on one limb (laughter) and the other parties were on the other, Yes, Millhouse could be effective and could get under his skin a bit They had been sparring in the House together for over twenty years. Most of the others, no. And Steele Hall had gone; I mean, Hall had obviously nettled him as well from time to time. But David Tonkin, Bruce Eastick, - Don benignly patronised them.

**And looking on Don as a political leader, what are some of your observations there, like the leadership of the Labor Party itself and then of course you get into the campaigning and then his leading the government, I’ll call it – different roles, I guess?**

Well, he was certainly a charismatic leader and that was his style, a presidential style. The Government focused and derived its energy from him and he demanded that kind of attention. Don was nothing if not a performer and he loved to be out there performing, in adversity or success, and inevitably that meant that a lot of the nuts and bolts stuff had to be done by others. With the Party, I think he felt confident that the levers could be pressed, that nothing outrageous would emerge from the Party. His worst experience there, that I observed, I think, was over the uranium issue, when Peter Duncan started his little carries-on and cabals, over that, particularly when Don was overseas. It’s the only time I’ve seen him *really* lose his cool in caucus. He was already ill and it was not insignificant that his retirement from politics occurred very soon after that. He was a very disturbed man at that stage. There would have been other factors as well, of course – I mean, the death of Adele really knocked him round, knocked him round badly – but in this case he felt there were those in the Party, there were people – Duncan in particular who were organising the Party against him, and that really made him uptight, angry, felt betrayed. It was an enormously emotional situation, which gave you a hint that despite the difficulties he’d had with the Party in early days he’d been very

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comfortable with it through most of the period of his leadership, once he became the leader; and that was probably true. And now it was fracturing, a bit.

**And you were there some time as a minister in the cabinet – I don't know how long – but what were your observations about – – –?**

I was there for about a year. Well, under Dunstan, about seven months or so.

**Seven months, yes. How did you see him as a leader of the cabinet, if you like?**

He tended not to engage greatly.

**Oh, really?**

Corcoran, Virgo and Hudson ran the cabinet and most of the debate and divided the issues up, and Don would intervene if he thought necessary. He would preside; he didn't actually often intervene – by the time I got into cabinet, he was not engaging in the day to day policy. I mean he was on top of issues, but he was not proactive.

**Unless he was interested in something specific.**

Unless he was specifically interested, and then he would enter the debate. But he tended to set that up beforehand; he didn't often hazard anything in a cabinet debate over the issue. He would let the threesome argue amongst themselves, and sometimes they agreed, at other times they had ferocious arguments and he was distressed by this; he wasn't really handling it well in those last months.

**Because I heard Virgo and Hudson weren't getting on too well for a while.**

No. No. There was a lot of tension over policy and tactical issues and they were both appealing to Don to resolve in their favour and he was finding it difficult to provide a leadership role. (sound of vehicles with sirens)

**And how did it actually work? A submission would be circulated and people had read it and the minister –**

The minister would present it, yes.

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**– sponsoring minister would talk to it and then there'd be some debate?**

Yes. The system hadn't changed much from forever, really. Don would be in possession of the Cabinet Office comments (laughter), which he would use if he chose to at appropriate times; but not many submissions probably got in without at least some discussion and vetting. So the cabinet meetings were not protracted; they were expected to start and finish pretty promptly. By the time something had got into cabinet it was there for endorsement, not for major debate.

**It should have all been done, yes.**

Yes, exactly.

**Interesting. And, just looking at Don as a change – I'll call him a 'master' – what sort of ideas did you pick up from how he went about things for your own leadership?**

I don't know specifically what ideas I picked up. Obviously, lessons – pro and con lessons – in terms of overall style. I think everybody's style not only relates to their personality but the times in which they're operating. The 1980s was not a time to be in government and behave grossly flamboyantly or anything like that, in my view, particularly because – I mean, we'd been out of office for three years; nobody expected us to get back and they were waiting for us to cock up monumentally. We were in an economic depression, things were pretty bloody grim, so it wasn't a time to strut around and try and inflate expectations. The Dunstan style was just not appropriate for that period. But certainly in the late '60s and into the '70s it was.

**And how did you see him working that – people talk about his 'courage', if you like, taking on issues that –**

Oh, yes.

**– weren't necessarily generally popular anyway and going for it?**

Yes. The whole issue of electoral reform, as I say, it was a fundamental building block, but you could not get anyone to tell you that this was an issue that any of us

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should have been wasting our time on, except Don, who would not be deterred and just kept at it and articulated it and put it on the agenda and *made* it an issue or a cause. He was *very* good at doing that if he got fired up about something. The whole arts thing is an example, I mean there was no arts policy of the Party; in fact, Chris Schacht and I were the first ones who actually got it organised in 1978 – it was just before I became a minister, actually, and Don put me in charge of the arts – but in '78 Chris and I had done the rounds of arts communities in the State and elsewhere and we'd actually written a policy. Until then there had been no platform, policy of any kind; it was all out of Don's head, it was driven by him. The guys in cabinet would say, 'Oh, that's Don's indulgence, we let him go on that because he might support us in something else.' You know, Corky would be sure he would get a road construction approved if he was prepared to (laughter) put up with some arts thing at the Festival. So that's an example of Don: 'this is an issue and I will make it one and I will raise and elevate it, despite everyone telling me it's a waste of time or it's not important.'

**And later on in the piece there was a royal commission into the non-medical use of drugs.**

Yes.

**That's an area that was sort of pushing the envelope a bit, so what was the thinking at the time?**

Yes, he certainly was prepared to embark on those things. The problem was by the end of the '70s both the general economic situation, perhaps his own health, and the climate, were such that he was forced to become pretty cautious and it was very hard to drive things through at that time. Remember, he'd always be dealing with an upper house where it was very difficult to get stuff through anyway; the question is whether you make a show of it or you don't. It's hard to say where Don would have gone in different circumstances. He certainly would not have seen his reform agenda

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as having been finished; there are others who'd say, 'Well, he's just become ultra-cautious' – and necessarily so.

**Just looking at the area you were the minister for, were there any achievements that you recollect in the short time you were there that sort of kicked things along in the community arts? I think you had an interesting chief exec or permanent head I think there at the time – Anne Dunn, wasn't it?**

No.

**Or Ian McPhail?**

Ian McPhail was the head of Department of Community Development, and we certainly did some good things energising local government in a lot of areas where they wouldn't have had a bar of this and didn't really know what it was about. The community development councils worked in some areas, didn't in others. I mean you have to look through the records – I haven't really ever sat down and thought through what were policy gains and so on. We only had twelve months or so. The commissioning of the Edwards Report was one of the most significant things I did and –

**Right, that was on the Museum, wasn't it?**

– Museums plural - Bob'd talk to me about his early findings and so on, and we thought it was all going to die when the government changed. But Murray Hill at least maintained some interesting involvement there. The History Trust emerged from it; wasn't exactly the concept that we were working on, but it did provide that substantial injection of funds and revival to the Library, Museum, Art Gallery and so on.

**Yes, because it said Don sort of neglected some of those areas for a long time, the Art Gallery, the Library – – –.**

Well, yes. I don't know about neglect them; certainly, they didn't have that iconic status that the performing arts, film and community arts and so on had had, so it's more like redressing the balance rather than undermining it. It's a cyclical thing, and

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we got involved in quite a few areas, much of which was not accomplished for reasons I can't put my finger on in those last Dunstan years. A lot of that agenda was revived and implemented in the '80s because I was Minister of the Arts through most of the first term or so of Premier and a lot of what we'd been talking about and planning in the '70s was done in that time,

**When Don resigned, you were observing before that he was looking tired and distressed. What was the reaction from your cabinet colleagues – and yourself, for that matter?**

Well, most of us were pretty dismayed because he was the reason some of us were there and we hadn't contemplated him moving on in the short term, quite frankly. We knew there was a lot of unfinished business; but we knew also that he was travelling rough and it wasn't easy.

**Then Des took over. Just looking at Don's overall achievements, the social side and the arts, on the economic side lots of people have criticised Don on the lack of performance there. I've been following through that area with some of the other interviews; but have you got any observations about what a state can actually do in this sort of area?**

I think the record wasn't too bad at all. Those things that could be done were done, and the fact that we had no significant mining centre, that manufacturing industry was being wound down, tariffs were being abolished: all the things on which our post-war expansion had depended were being dismantled. Now, in that environment it's damn hard to maintain momentum and, as I say, I think Dunstan took advice, tried to push the right sort of levers and do what could be done.

**And did you see him making any huge mistakes, or 'clangers' sometimes I call it, that you wish he hadn't?**

I don't think many. I think the Salisbury business and all that sort of thing was very badly handled.

**In what way?**

Well, things were allowed to come to a head that should never have –

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**I see.**

– that should have been headed off at the pass, and people then became fixated with their own agendas, the whole Special Branch conspiracy stuff: it was that murky side, and Don was compromised in that area. I mean people like Ceruto were real lowlife and they were his confidants. Whatever people say, it's not an area that any of us were comfortable with. But I think that was part of the tension within Don always, that (pauses) he was compromised, and compromised more severely than he'd like to admit. And most of us were out there defending him ferociously without really knowing the truth and being able to deal with it in an open sort of way.

**John, I've covered a lot of areas. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about before we finish?**

(consults notes) I don't think so. Just in terms of – yes, certainly – I've mentioned in passing the difference in style: not so much Dunstan as Whitlam was my cautionary model, I just did not believe in crash through or crash; I believed that you had to tackle government from a long-term view, you weren't just getting in there for three years of frenetic activity that ultimately would be futile. So that explained why both in opposition and government I was very measured and would not get involved in some of the stunts and things like that that people urged on me, even if they would have short-term effect. So in a sense that was a contrast; but that doesn't imply in any way that I rejected or undervalued Dunstan and his influence. Indeed – just one final thing I put on the record whenever I can, because I know it's peddled by some people, including Alan Patience, that Don was hounded out of the State and my Government refused to find a job or place for him in SA – the truth of that is entirely opposite: to the extent any hounding was done, it was done by the Libs. If you recall, the Tonkin Government (and Attorney-General Trevor Griffin in particular) even ran a motion in both Houses of parliament around the Ryan and McEwen book, and derogatory of Don, where I made I thought one of my best speeches defending him, in which I said in effect, 'Why are they wasting their time? The man's retired

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and time's moved on and they're in government; what is this about? 'The reason the Libs are doing this is because they just cannot stand the fact that what South Australia is, and what South Australians feel pride in, is associated with Dunstan and they've got nothing to offer and must somehow besmirch him and his record before they can feel comfortable or effective' So that's where I stood.

In the lead-up to the election, this is in 1982, we were travelling fairly hard in Opposition with the Roxby Downs thing and I was trying to change the policy to give us a chance of being elected, becoming electable; it was thought we didn't have a hope – Don got this offer to go to Victoria and he came to see me about it and I said, 'Look, Don, everyone's writing us off; but I think we're going to get into office. We're going to have a big job to do and I'd like you to have a part in that'. He said to me 'Mate, I appreciate that, I have enjoyed our association; but I don't believe you will be elected, if you don't mind me saying so' –

**Really?**

– (laughter) 'and this is an offer on the table that I need to take'. So off he went to Victoria and, as you know, he took holus bolus most of the tourism and other ideas that had been promoted here around things such as the wine industry and started promoting it all there. There was considerable, *huge* resentment in the community. People don't understand how much a lot of that was resented. I never resented it. But that was the situation. The way Alan and others describe it is that this happened after the election and our return to office -, that he *had* to go to Victoria because there was nothing on offer here. On the contrary. I also said, 'This will actually look very bad for us, Don, particularly among the faithful. They'll see you as having given up on us'. 'Oh, well, I'll make sure that's not said', he assured me. But that's how it was seen. I felt really let down.

Ironically some years later I was rung by John Cain when Don was in trouble over his tourism administration to ask: 'Can't you blokes take him back?' It got very difficult – my response was 'Well, if that's what Don wants, he will certainly be

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welcome'. When the time came Greg Crafter set up an inquiry into outer local government areas, which we asked Don to do, and the media and Libs you remember went berserk: 'Outrage!' 'Dunstan in paid job' etc. The hostility all came out of the woodwork, dripping again, and I thought, 'Does Don really need this?' He did a very good job of the enquiry and later took on the Chair of the Jam Factory and a couple of other things. There was never any rejection of Don and his role in South Australia, and it really hurts me when these people try and land that one on us, quite frankly.

**All right. That's good, it's on the record.**

So I'd like to set the record straight.

**Great. Thanks very much, John.**

END OF INTERVIEW.