This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan History Project for the Don Dunstan Foundation interviewing Mr Graham Inns on his work with Don Dunstan in very senior positions in the South Australian Public Service in the 1970s. The date today is the 10th February 2009 and the location of the interview is Mr Inns’ home.

Graham, thanks very much for doing this interview for the Dunstan History Project. Can you just talk a bit about your background and then how you got into a senior position? The first one I think was the Public Service Commissioner, the Public Service Board.

Thanks, George. Bearing in mind that I joined the public service in 1955, I think it was, in the Education Department. I went through various positions in the pay section and in that period developed a bit of an interest in industrial relations, went to University of Adelaide under a public service scholarship, did a Diploma in Public Administration followed by a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Economics, both of those at the University of Adelaide, then later a Master of Commerce at Flinders University; but more relevant to this discussion, I guess, is the two earlier periods of study at University of Adelaide, where I first met Don Dunstan. He was in Opposition at the time, the first time I met him. He wasn’t even Leader of the Opposition; he was in Parliament, but very much concerned with social and public sector reform, and so at the University I met him.

Later, I was appointed as Assistant General Secretary of the Public Service Association because of my interest in industrial relations, and in 1967, after Don had become Premier, he contacted me to discuss some public sector reform issues because the Public Service Act really hadn’t been substantially amended since about 1927. He had spoken very much of public sector reform and, while I was at university and with the PSA, I became very interested in reforming the public service in a number of ways. As I say, the more substantial amendments to the public service had only occurred on a gradual basis since 1927, and indeed the Public Service Act at that stage still reflected much of the 1854 Northcote–Trevelyan issues, (laughter) which of course are quite primitive by 1960s standards. So it was because
of my fairly outspoken views on reforming the public service that Don got in touch with me and asked if I would come down to Parliament House, which I did, as he was looking to introduce some legislation and have a completely new *Public Service Act*, which in fact came into being I think it was in 1967 was the completely fresh *Public Service Act*, which, amongst other things, introduced a Public Service Board on a full-time basis and a whole lot of other changes which were, I guess, modern for the time but still needed further expansion later on.

He also asked me for my views about people who should be appointed to the Public Service Board at that time. The then Public Service Commissioner – it was a single Public Service Commissioner, Max Dennis – while a very capable and intelligent man was still very much in the 1950s era, who was pushing to have people like Colin Tillett or Colin Tucker, traditional public servants, appointed into those full-time positions. Don was resisting that, and rightly so, and asked for my views on perhaps who might be a reformist but was still in the public sector. I put forward Bob Bakewell’s name. Bob will recall my conversations with him, that is, with Bob, to see whether he’d be prepared for me to put his name forward. I did, and Don accepted that, and with a little bit of controversy Bob was appointed.

**What year was that?**

That would have been 1967.

On and off I worked with Don still in the position of Assistant General Secretary of the PSA. Don would contact me every now and again as an external sounding-board, still getting the traditional public service advice. He was asking, from time to time, my views about certain things. But in 1969 I left the position in the PSA and was appointed to a position of Chief Industrial Officer of the Public Service Board of Papua New Guinea. Now and again, I guess two or three times a year, we would have an exchange of letters. He came up to Port Moresby during his time as Premier and during that period in which I was away, of course, he was defeated in government and Steele Hall became Premier. But nevertheless I still corresponded with Don.
I came down on leave, and it would have been in about October/November 1981, and gave a paper to the Royal Institute of Public Administration, as it was then, on my views about the public service and particularly the industrial relations program in Papua New Guinea, in which I was fairly critical of the way in which the Australian Government was trying to transplant arbitration into a society which really didn’t have any concept of arbitration. Their processes of settling disputes were not part of the arbitration system; it was a rather projected and prolonged form of negotiations and conciliation that Papua New Guineans were practising as part of their traditional culture. That paper got a fair amount of publicity, earned a bit of a finger-wag by my superiors in Papua New Guinea for being so outspoken. It was published in New Guinea in the *Journal of Industrial Relations* up there, and it caused a bit of angst at the time. But it was drawn to Don’s attention and within a couple of weeks he had contacted me and asked if I would have lunch with him, which I did, and it was at that point that he said that he was doing some more restructuring of the public service, that he was intending to appoint Bob Bakewell as Head of the Premier’s Department and would I be interested in a position as a commissioner of the Public Service Board? Because, once again, names were being forwarded to him (laughter) of the traditional kind. I said that I was very interested in that but I needed to check what my obligations would be in my position in Papua New Guinea, I returned to Port Moresby, discussed it with my commissioner up there, and we reached an agreement whereby I would separate from the public service of Papua New Guinea and come down and I took up my appointment as a commissioner in February [1972].

That’s interesting history. In his talking to you about the public service – you mentioned the *Public Service Act* – but what were some of the things driving his need for reforming the public service? You talked about the old style, but were there any particular frustrations he had or strategies he had in mind?

Well, yes, there were several of them, and I guess they all are embroiled in the concept of conservative. The public service was a very conservative body. It
comprised then of fifty-two departments and, while I am an advocate for flattened structures rather than mega-departments, fifty-two departments was ridiculous.

The public service had come through the Playford Era, of course, and it had very much in the twenty-odd years that Playford was Premier with the ministry that Playford had, the public service had developed a very, very strong following for Playford ideas; and, while Playford in many respects was a reformist, he was certainly very, very conservative when it came to the role of the public service there were also a number of conservative and traditional public servants. Don had found, both in terms of his position in Opposition and in Government, that he just wasn’t able to get the public service to do the things that he wanted them to do. He just found that there was always a reason for not doing something, so he felt that the changes needed to be made both in terms of structure and in personnel at the top in order to bring the public service into a method of thinking that was in accord with the directions that he wanted to follow. He was having trouble getting some of his reform measures through. He would make requests which there was always a reason for not doing it or delaying it. He found that people were still being promoted into positions by virtue of seniority rather than by capability, and that frustrated him immensely.

He was able to make changes by appointing certain people into key positions where the Government – the Governor in Executive Council, which is of course essentially the Cabinet plus the Governor, but essentially the Cabinet – he was able to make appointments of head of department and in some instances deputy head of department, and so he made a number of very key and important appointments, like Ian Cox, John Steinle in Education, Brian Shea in Health. And so those sort of changes were made in personnel and gradually he was able to introduce some reforms in those very important areas. But still we had this clogging, if you like, this bottleneck, of public sector administration governed by the Public Service Act and certain constraints where the powers of the Public Service Board were paramount, and the then Chairman of the Public Service Board was quick to remind the
Government what *its* powers were and what the *Board’s* powers were. So that was his frustration with the public service at that time, as I recall it; being of course thirty-seven years ago memories are not necessarily precise.

**Can you remember any of the debates – like you became a public service commissioner and you had Max Dennis there and Bob Bakewell in the Premier’s Department, but some of the debates about what this new public servant ought to look like or be able to do?**

Yes. The debates were essentially about making the public sector more responsive to the policy directions of the Government. He’d already introduced changes like liquor reform, he’d introduced measures like a greater focus and attention and putting money into the arts. But where he was being frustrated in some of the areas in which he wanted reform, which was in equal rights and equal pay for women, he was having trouble with his views about industrial democracy and workers participation in management, they are some that come to mind. There are probably a range of others and they might occur to me overnight. (laughs)

**Okay. And you went in there as the Commissioner.**

Yes.

**So what was your role there, to be the person who pushed some of this reform and got the Board to change its thinking?**

Well, yes, that was my role; and the first task that he gave to me, asked me to undertake, was to chair a committee which would report on industrial democracy in the public sector, I chaired that, and Don Laidlaw was asked to chair a committee which looked at the private sector. And that report was completed towards the end 1972. I looked desperately for a copy of that report but I’m afraid that I don’t have it, but I do recall some of the key recommendations that we put forward. And even as those recommendations were put forward they were still being resisted by what was the majority on the Board, bearing in mind that I was one of three – and I’m not critical of my colleagues; after four or five months they started to accept me (laughs) as a commissioner. There was a bit of resistance to begin with, I might tell you.
And so the recommendations – I’ve jotted down a few notes here – that we came up with on that 1972 report were the establishment of joint consultative committees in departments; a central public service consultative council be established; job enrichment schemes were part of that process; classification committees be established to decentralise that decision-making power away from the Public Service Board or in combination with the Public Service Board; promotion selection committees, whereas promotion was by interview with essentially management participation as distinct from employee participation; category review teams was part of that and disciplinary inquiry committees. A central public service consultative council was also part of that. And so that report went to him. Still there was the remnants of resistance to many of these recommendations, to the extent where Bob Bakewell and I discussed ‘What are we going to do about this whole issue of trying to get the reform through?’ when there were individuals who were pushing but still the body of power resided with many of the traditional public service heads and with the Public Service Board.

And so with my encouragement and with Bob Bakewell’s encouragement he decided to establish a committee of inquiry into the public service, what’s known as the ‘Corbett Inquiry’. And so David Corbett chaired the committee of inquiry, and that was established – I think it would have been (consults notes) in 1974, I think it was established. It reported in ’75 and it comprised David Corbett as Chairman, Professor David Corbett being Professor of Politics at Flinders University; Bob Bakewell himself; and David Martin, he was with – oh, where was he from?

Was it Fowler’s?

Fowler’s it was, yes, yes was with Fowler’s. And so I guess the basic terms of reference of that committee of inquiry was to review the efficiency and the structure of the public service, changes in conditions of employment, classification structures, and it came up with a whole series of recommendations and to the best of my recollection there’s a whole list of them. I don’t know whether you want to list these as my recollections of those?
If you like, yes.

One of the first things that it did, and important things, was to recommend that the Executive Council be given the power to give directions to the Board itself. So this was a fundamental break in policy: that the Government was then in a position to direct the Board to do certain things, whereas the standoff had been in the past that the Board could, by virtue of its statutory powers, thumb its nose at the Government if and when it wanted to, and that was one of the frustrations that Don met and that was probably one of the key reasons why the Corbett Inquiry was set up.

Interesting.

The committee also endorsed the bulk of the recommendations that my worker participation and management committee had put forward. There was a series of recommendations of delegations to departments which previously had resided essentially with the Public Service Board, in human resource management, or personnel policy I think it was called then, and organisation structuring. And in fact departments were given under these recommendations, or were to be given under these recommendations, much greater power in the appointment of individuals to all but the very senior positions. The executive officer structure was still in the hands of the Public Service Board, as indeed they recommended that the industrial relations policy responsibility reside with the Public Service Board.

The committee of inquiry was very critical of the time that was taken to fill vacancies in the public service, because the logjam always occurred with the Public Service Board and hence the recommendation that all but the very senior appointments be delegated out to departments. Also recommended, as I recall, wider powers to the public service arbitrator; it took away the right of appeal against outside appointments to the public service, which was a frustrating effect to the government who wanted to bring in fresh appointments – well, the appeal process usually, more frequently than not, knocked those over; introduced contract appointments in certain areas; the strong recommendation of reducing the number of
government departments – as I said earlier, I think fifty-two government departments at that stage.

The recruitment of females and equal pay and equal opportunity loomed very much as a recommendation in this report, as I recollect. Until the early 1970s – and I seem to recall it still existed when I came into the position of Commissioner of the Public Service Board – women had to resign when they became married. I think the old Public Service Board gave way on that one (laughs) in the early 1970s, but there was still discrimination in terms of pay and opportunity to seek promotion, and the Corbett Inquiry was quite vigorous in what it had to say and, as a member of the Public Service Board, one member amongst three, it was very, very difficult to get those sort of things going by myself and hence I was, with Bob Bakewell, very much an advocate to get this committee going and make that as a recommendation.

In that period while the Corbett Inquiry was going on I went to the United States and to, in particular, Canada, where a great deal of public sector reform had taken place, and we had had conversations and correspondence with the Public Service Commission in Canada in Ottawa, and with John Burdett, the late John Burdett, who was one of the directors – a person of my own age group, and indeed we were recruited to the public service on the same day, both into the Education Department, so I knew him and knew him well – and so he and I went to Canada and to the United States and also to the United Kingdom to see what the latest public sector reforms were that had been introduced, and we made our recommendations to the committee of inquiry, many of which were included in that report. So my recollections of that particular committee, which took a great deal of my time in 1974 and into ‘75 – – –. Things like career development programs, there was really no manpower planning, as it was called then – I suppose ‘person power planning’ is the – – –.

‘Workforce planning’ now.

Workforce planning, is it, now? There was virtually none of that that was done at all because it was difficult to move the public service out of this seniority syndrome.
Dominated by males as well.

Dominated by males, very much. Also the issue of part-time employment by females: I mean, you were either full-time or not at all. That was part of the Corbett Inquiry findings, as I recall. Outrageous things like establishment of child care centres in departments, if you don’t mind, (laughter) were proposed; and it also, I think, was the springboard for the appointment of the first Women’s Adviser in the public service, and I’m pretty sure that the Corbett Inquiry recommended that.

So the Corbett Inquiry was something of a breath of fresh air and it shook the foundations a bit of the hierarchy. Indeed, it brought about the decision by Max Dennis to take retirement. He was sixty-three when that came out, and he decided to retire and went to the Premier and said that he needed and wanted to go. As he went, my understanding and belief is that – again, in his sort of last gasp, if you like – [he] was recommending his replacement, which was not me, and other replacements which would reinforce still (laughs) the old guard. And Don was having none of that, so I was summoned and asked to take on the position of Chairman, which was fairly revolutionary because that would have been in 1975, at which stage I was still fairly young, I was in my thirties, and that was unheard-of. (bell rings, break in recording)

Don asked me to take on the position of Chairman of the Public Service Board, but also said that he wanted me to consider (a) my replacement and [(b)] any other replacement that might occur. And so he was looking for two replacements on the Board, and the two replacements we eventually came up with was firstly Gar Tattersall, who was I think Director of Admin and Finance in the Education Department, and Iris Stevens Crown Law.

And so our task was essentially then to put into effect the changes that were recommended in the Corbett Report and, with other appointments that were and had been taking place around the public service, we’d amalgamated a lot of departments, and that caused some heartache, because there were some departments – like the Department of the Minister of Agriculture, which comprised about six people –
taking away the Head of Department status, the permanent head status, from some of these people was quite traumatic and just the sheer handling of individuals during that amalgamation process was difficult enough. The Women’s Adviser had been appointed, Deborah McCulloch was appointed, and most of the changes that had been brought about, there had been resistance to the introduction of worker participation in management by some departments and certainly by the Public Service Board as it was. We started some experimentation and in particular used SAMCOR\(^1\) as one of the early experiments in worker participation and I was appointed to the board of SAMCOR, SAMCOR being the South Australian Meat Corporation at Gepps Cross.

Joint consultative committees were established and the process of employee involvement in promotions was put into being as an essential requirement. There was still some resistance to some of those recommendations. The joint consultative committee idea had a rather stuttering start – even in the Premier’s Department itself, as I recall, when I ultimately became head of that department.

We’ll come to that later.

Yes. So it was a period in which we were able to get, because we had myself and Gar and Iris there with the Premier’s imprimatur, able to drive some of those essential forms. And that era lasted until 1976, I guess, when Don decided that he wanted Bob to move out of Premier’s Department and head up State Development.

We’ll come back to that later on. I just wanted to follow through some of the public service reform issues. The rollout of the recommendations, the implementation, there was a committee set up, PAPAC – Planning and Priorities Advisory Committee.

Yes.

What was its role and who was the chair of that, if you can recall that.

\(^1\) SAMCOR – South Australian Meat Corporation.
No, that’s some detail that I’m having a bit of trouble with. George, my memory’s not good enough to tell you who the chair of that was.

**Was it Don himself, or Hudson?**

No. I was certainly involved in it, but it wasn’t a committee that had enormous impact because most of it was being driven by the Board itself. And in fact I don’t think it lasted for very long because I think there was starting to become an acceptance of the reform. Public service departments were starting to realise that there was a seriousness in this public sector reform.

**And in the process of the committee did Don ask you to report to him and did he sort of give reactions to what was going on, or did he basically leave it to the committee to get on with things?**

We had a weekly meeting arrangement. On a regular basis I reported to him what was taking place. But Don was a reformer of a kind where once he had made the decision to proceed with a set of reform ideas and had appointed people to implement those reforms, whether it was in the public sector, whether it was in social welfare or whether it was in health or education, he seemed to have sufficient confidence and trust in the right people that he considered that he had appointed to put those into effect and to report to him on a need-to-know basis or if there was some issue himself he would contact those people direct. So we were left pretty much to our own devices and reported to him on a need-to-know basis.

**Did he have anyone of his advisers involved at all, like – forget who was there at the time; Peter Ward for some time, but he may have left by then.**

No. The Advisory Group was not very large, and we certainly had Peter Ward, John Templeton was it? And of course his secretary, Wright. No, there was not a great deal of liaison, other than with Bob Bakewell himself. Bob was assigned as being the, I guess, principal reporting-to person, because he’d been a member of the Corbett Inquiry. Bob and I liaised on a constant basis and so, whereas I would only report to the Premier on perhaps a weekly, maybe even a fortnightly basis, Bob was essentially the person who I liaised with on the reform.
So he would have been Don’s key there.

Yes.

And there was a committee secretariat with a chap called Brian Hill –

Yes, that’s right.

– servicing the committee.

Yes.

There were researchers I recall that had been brought in to do some of the more detailed research for some of the areas, like I think there was a chapter in there on women’s – or equal opportunity issues, I’ll call it.

They essentially worked as a strata below the Board itself. They had an implementing role. They reported to the Board on progress but, once again, once the policies were determined and the Board endorsed certain directions, they were given the imprimatur to proceed and implement.

And can you recall any of the debate about, ‘Well, how far are we going to go on these reform recommendations and the practicalities of them?’, just digging into some of the detail?

Some of the reform processes lost their inertia and impetus in the process. Some of the recommendations were honoured in the breach, and in particular areas like joint consultative councils seemed to not take on, to any marked extent. And part of the reason for that was that the initial recommendations back in 1972 gave or suggested that joint consultative councils be given quite considerable power, and the Public Service Association at the time was looking to bring the employee involvement into its own hands instead of it being very much, as the committee that I chaired recommended, that it be employees rather than the unions. In fact there was a bit of a build-up, not only by the PSA but by the trade unions generally, that it should be employees elected or nominated or appointed by the unions as distinct from the employees themselves. And this is where the worker participation in management thrust lost a lot of its impetus because of the clash between what the Government
wanted to do or what the Public Service Board wanted to do in terms of employee participation, whereas the unions were seeing it as very much as a loss of their own power.

And there was some work done, there was some statement or policy statement that I recall being delivered, about all of that, and I think you were the key person there.

Yes, I probably signed the document, and that was none too well-received because some of the heads of the departments were, in order to try and derail some of these recommendations, were – we sensed at the time were probably aiding and abetting the unions (laughter) –

Right, I see.

– in the hope that the whole knitting might come undone. But yes, the Board issued an edict at the time which laid out what certain – and I don’t have a copy of that, and again we’re testing my memory of thirty-plus years ago – but it got away to a shaky start, to the extent where Don then decided to establish a Worker Participation In Management Unit within the – it was initially in the Premier’s Department and then went into Department of Labour, I think.

Yes, that’s correct, yes.

Yes. And Lyndon Prowse headed that up. A rather controversial if not eccentric figure, which into a still having the remnants of being a conservative public service, his style maybe wasn’t what the public service was looking for. But nevertheless he did drive particularly the joint consultative committee notions in the public service.

What was the department heads’ and senior management’s problems with all of this?

Loss of their own power, mainly. They felt that if employees were going to make – and there was a clash between the extent to which it was consultation or decision-making, the resistance by some of the heads of departments was that that would lessen their power and indeed saw it as cutting across the very principles of
the *Public Service Act* and the principles of the Westminster model of public administration. They were the essential reasons for the resistance. And I think probably in hindsight we tended to attack industrial democracy head-on. It would have been far better if it had been introduced as a gradualist movement than the frontal attack that perhaps we were looking to put into effect at the time we did.

**Just sealing off the discussion about the Public Service Board, it was still a very powerful department.**

Yes.

**Their investigations area.**

Oh, yes.

**Were you involved, did you have responsibility for that area and did that role change, the investigations?**

Well, yes. The role of the Public Service Board still was the central controlling agency of the public service in many, many areas, particularly in organisation structures and in the classification of individual officers, and that gradually was changing and in fact to some degree was being driven by some of the public service heads like Ian Cox, John Steinle, who were wanting to pick up the role of self-government, if you like, autonomy, in their own departments. The Board wasn’t resisting that so much as wanting to do it on a time frame of being sure that the departments had the skills, the knowledge, to do it and to allow the Board to change its role from being a doer into a policy establishment.

**Fair enough. And you’ve got the Public Service Board, you’ve got the Premier’s Department and the Treasury and to some extent the Auditor General’s Department, they call the central agencies. How did you see those relationships from your Public Service Board perspective?**

Well, in the time from [when] I became chairman of the board and then having a board comprising people who were committed to effect the sort of reforms that we wanted, one of the first and essential things to do was set up good working relationships and understanding with the other two central agencies, three if you
include the Auditor General, although the Auditor General stands back a bit from all of that, Treasury and Premier’s Department. We of course had that with Bob Bakewell, who was appointed specifically to ensure that what the Government wanted they got. Still a little bit of resistance from Treasury, because at that stage Ron Barnes hadn’t been appointed as Under-Treasurer. Gilbert Seaman was on the verge of going at that stage and Ted Carey –

Carey, that’s right, yes.

– was Under-Treasurer, although the Board had made a different suggestion at that stage. But the person that we suggested said ‘No, not yet’. But, having said all of that, there was considerable discussion and liaison between those three essential agencies and [they] worked cooperatively together. There was never an occasion that I can recall where any of those senior people were at loggerheads.

Right, interesting. And what role did you see the Premier’s Department having still when you’re in the Public Service Board, because I’ll pick up that area later on when you actually became head of the Premier’s Department?

I still saw the Public Service Board as having the principal responsibility for ensuring that the public service did those things which the Government wanted in terms of delivery of its policies. The Premier’s Department became less the sort of secretariat role than it was and more the development of policy role. Under Bob Bakewell the Policy Secretariat, as it was called, was established, Bill Voyzey headed that up, and Bob was very much placed in the position of developing those structures which would be policy development, I suppose.

And did you have any discussions about the sort of people that ought to be recruited into the area?

Oh, very much so, yes. The Board was there to ensure that people who had the skills were appointed. But let me say that our role was essentially to – if Bob Bakewell wanted certain people in certain positions the Board was not going to stand in his way, and correctly so.
Fair enough. Now, you became Head of the Premier’s Department in what year was that, ’76 or ’7?

Yes, ’76 that was. That came about with Don wanting to move Bob into State Development. I think at that stage one of the views that Don had was twofold: firstly, he liked to move people on, believing that he’d get the best out of people by them not becoming entrenched in one position, and I think that was an excellent policy; and secondly he wanted to see the areas of development developed, that is industrial development and trade development, and so he made a number of key appointments there including Bill Davies. Bill Davies, I think, is still alive but he’d be in his nineties now.

I don’t think he is.

Isn’t he?

No.

Oh, I see. So people like Bill Davies were brought in from outside and worked in this enlarged State Development Department, which caused a vacancy in the Premier’s Department. I’m not sure whose view it was, perhaps it was Bob’s view, that the position should be advertised, which it was nationally. I was invited and perhaps even of my own volition applied for the position and a shortlist was prepared which I can almost recall vividly as comprising about three people. One was David Mercer, the other was me, and there was somebody from Canberra whose name I can’t recall. But nevertheless Don decided that he would himself interview this shortlist and what he did in the end was to invite David Mercer and I to have lunch with him, which we did at the Festival Theatre –

At the same time.

– at the same time – well, he’d already seen us separately –

I see, yes?
– but then asked the two of us to come and have lunch with him at what’s now Lyrics Restaurant, I don’t think it was at the time. But nevertheless we had lunch there, in which he discussed the various things that he wanted to do and asked the both of us what we thought about either Mercer becoming Head of Premier’s Department or Mercer becoming Chairman of the Public Service Board and me becoming Head of the Premier’s Department. For whatever good and reason it developed into the latter and I was appointed Head of the Premier’s Department and David was invited to become Chairman of the Public Service Board.

And I emphasise that process because that’s how David Mercer became Chairman of the Board, by way of being an applicant for the position of Director General of the Premier’s Department. And so eventually other changes were made in the Public Service Board, Gar Tattersall ultimately becoming Auditor General, Mary Beasley of course coming in, Iris Stevens becoming a judge of the Local and District criminal court, and David Corbett coming in as a commissioner, so there was those sort of changes all taking place in and about 1975, ‘76. Yes, so that’s how that process came about.

And we touched on, earlier on, there were some issues about your appointment that the Joint Consultative Council picked up.

Yes.

Do you want to talk about that at all?

Well, I wasn’t involved in that. I don’t know what the real issue was. We had people like Phil Bentley I think involved in that. One of the issues was that in the period between me being asked or invited to become Head of the Premier’s Department and leaving the position of Chairman of the Board because David Mercer had to separate from the Queensland public service – he was a commissioner of the Queensland Public Service Board – was my desire to do some restructuring in the Premier’s Department before I arrived, there were some things that I wanted to look after but others that I thought were best looked after by a deputy. There was no deputy of the department. These are things that were my thinking at the time;
whether or not they’re supportable in current organisation development terms is a different matter. But I asked for a position – and, as Chairman of the Public Service Board, I was in a pretty good position to be able to see it happen – (laughs) to creating a position of Deputy Head of the Premier’s Department, and Hedley Bachmann was appointed Deputy at the time and, as Bob Bakewell left, acted as Head of the Premier’s Department for a period. And that, as I recall, became one of the issues that the Joint Consultative Committee of the Department, they were accusing me of put in my own man, as it were, and it was essentially, as I recall, about Hedley Bachmann.

I don’t know that there was criticism *per se* about me being appointed because it had been due process. I mean the position had been advertised nationally and it went through all of that. There might have been some other issues but I can’t recall what they were.

**Did the Council or Committee say, ‘Well, here’s a key appointment, aren’t we supposed to be involved in some of this sort of stuff, or at least asked about it?’**

Well, I don’t know whether they were asked or not asked, because I wasn’t there –

**All right, so it’s nothing to do with you.**

– I was simply an applicant. It never came to me that there was a challenge about me in particular. (break in recording)

**Well, notwithstanding all of those issues, what did the Premier Don Dunstan ask you to focus on when you took up the position of Head of the Premier’s Department?**

Bearing in mind that Don remained Premier only for a relatively brief time after I was appointed the essential things that he was still looking for – and I think that he regarded my role both in the Public Service Board and coming into the Premier’s Department – was to see that the reform agendas that he was looking to introduce were carried out. There were a number of things that he wanted done. There was the change to the *Health Act*. And that, the Minister of Health at the time was Don – – –.
Simmons, was it?

No. Having difficulty recalling his name. Anyway, he was appointed to head up –

Banfield.

– Don Banfield, that’s right, Don Banfield – a very nice man- followed the Premier’s instructions to bring about some pretty key and fundamental changes follows the Bright Committee report. And so Don Banfield, Brian Shea and myself were appointed to carry that out. Then there was the Committee of Inquiry into the Non-medical Use of Drugs and I was asked to keep that ticking over, and that’s when Bruce Guerin got involved in that side of things as well.

But I suppose generally speaking in that period my role was to be more coordinating and to keep an eye on departments to ensure that what changes were being asked to be brought about were in fact brought about.

It wasn’t an easy period because there were a number of prima donnas, I guess you might say, in and about and who’d surrounded themselves with Don. It became almost competitive in a way, which was a bit disappointing, and that was not my style. I wanted to do the sort of things that needed to be done, others looking more to perhaps ingratiating themselves, and so we got to the Department was managing well. We had a bit of a uranium crisis with Peter Duncan while the Premier was away, and it was a period of where the road was a bit rocky in some respects.

But into that period came a time when Don started to become distracted. The ‘grossly improper’ statement that he made at a press conference started to come and bite him and the Des Ryan – and I’ve forgotten the name of the other author – were starting to write their book, *Grossly Improper*, and some of the essential ingredients in that book in its draft form were starting to leak. And it was clear by November ‘76, was it? When did Don resign?

‘78, yes.

February ‘78. So it was ‘77.

Might have been ‘78.
Yes. When was the election?

‘79.

So he would have resigned in February ‘79 and the election was nine months later in September ‘79.

‘79, yes.

So it was in ‘77, round about October ‘77, that it was clear that Don was becoming distracted and very much concerned with the pending publication of this book, (clock chimes) and there were leaks into the press about what it might contain, and so Don was starting to focus on things other than reform issues. (break in recording)

Just looking at Don’s reform agenda, how did you get that moving in the Premier’s Department itself and more broadly? You said earlier on that you’d wanted to do some restructuring, you got in a deputy, but what areas did you pick up specifically?

I guess that what Don wanted me to do was to become involved in some of the other areas that he was looking to reform. Health was one.

Yes, you mentioned that, yes.

The Bright Committee had recommended certain changes and under Don Banfield we had looked to bring about through legislative reform, and so I had the carriage of that. Bearing in mind that I served perhaps only a little more than a year with Don as head of his department, the other area in which I did have some involvement was the non-medical use of drugs. Then there was the Salisbury Affair, of course.

Do you want to talk about that at all?

Yes, perhaps a little. Don had become increasingly concerned with what was reported to him from various sources about the so-called ‘secret files’ in the Police Department and had called Salisbury over to see him about the contents of those files, which Salisbury refused to do saying that they were confidential to the police and that government had no right to either access those files or in any way to tamper with them. It was because of that refusal that relationships between the Premier and
the Police Commissioner became somewhat strained, to the extent where Don decided that he would have an inquiry into the secret files and appointed Justice White to do that.

The report by Justice White was quite damning and I was present with the Premier when Justice White presented his report which indicated that (a) those files did exist and (b) they contained the names of a great number of people who ought not to be on those files and that it was completely out of order for the police to have any records of a permanent kind of a whole range of people. And he cited some of the types of reasons why people were on those files, such as somebody was seen looking into a bookshop in Hindley Street that contained books on communism.

*Oh, really?*

(laughs) As petty as that. Anyway, Don summoned Salisbury to his office and indeed they had several meetings, at one of which I was present, in which he asked and required those files either to be destroyed or severely culled. And Salisbury refused. On an occasion that he had Salisbury in his office he gave him the ultimatum of destroying the files or resigning – he saw Salisbury alone; he indicated to me subsequently the nature of the conversation but wanted to see him by himself – again Salisbury refused and then there was a period of a few days in which it was considered what ought to take place.

The Premier’s personal policy area recommended that Salisbury should be immediately dismissed. The public service advice was that he should consider that very carefully and that a better course of action would be to suspend and to set up a committee of inquiry. I think we suggested that it be chaired by the Chairman of the Public Service Board with such other people on it. Not a royal commission at that stage, we thought that an administrative-type review was the better way to go. That advice did not prevail and I guess the rest is history – that the dismissal took place, the protests occurred, *The Advertiser* with Stuart Cockburn at the helm of the report writing, as an investigative journalist, took up the cudgels of Salisbury – I understand that when the letter of dismissal was delivered Salisbury was having dinner with
Stuart Cockburn, hence the link – and so eventually the Government felt that the best way to relieve the pressure was to set up a royal commission under Dame Roma Mitchell and that royal commission of course, as we all know, upheld the dismissal.

And did you notice any observable strain of all of this on Don?

Oh, unquestionably. In fact, it was round about that time that when I saw him there were a number of occasions I asked if he was okay; he didn’t want to confide too openly with me on his state of health. He had been through a number of particular tragedies and strains. He had lost his wife, Adele Koh, of course, in that period. He was driving his reform agenda very, very vigorously. I would call on his home on my way from my home into the office at eight o’clock every Monday with Cabinet papers in which we would discuss what was to take place in the Cabinet, what the various recommendations from the departments were, what our own Policy Division recommendations were and what things ought to be taken notice of by him, and on a number of occasions I noticed that he seemed to be distracted, that he was I think unwell in appearance; and I knew that he was getting some medical attention, of what kind I don’t know.

And this Cabinet briefing and going through the Cabinet papers, what was that about, basically – to make sure he was well-briefed, and did he have questions on things?

Yes, he did. The Policy Division would prepare briefing notes on all or most (clock chimes) of the recommendations and papers from various departments. These were usually done after discussions with the department, and departments normally would know what our comments were going to be on their papers. I would then be briefed on a Friday afternoon as to what the Policy Division felt about each of these recommendations, I would take the Cabinet papers home over the weekend, look at those with the Policy Division comments, see the Premier on Monday morning, brief him on what the departmental view was, perhaps adding my own views – normally I would agree with what the Policy Division observations would be – so that he had one sheet of paper which would summarise what the Cabinet submission from the
Department was, some of the things that he might question, and perhaps a recommendation as to the stance that he should take.

And did you have any observations on the operation of the Cabinet and whether this helped at all or – – –?

Well, I think it undoubtedly helped the Premier; whether it helped Cabinet or not – bearing in mind that it was Don’s view that usually prevailed (laughs) in Cabinet. While he was very consultative in his operations and to a very major extent the Cabinet was dominated by the personalities of Dunstan, Virgo, Hudson, Corcoran; in the earlier stages of course King, although Len King was not a member of the Cabinet when I came into Premier’s Department; but those four were, I guess, a group whose opinions dominated the directions of Cabinet and Don unquestionably was a leader amongst them.

Do you recall any stoushes that you had to hose down between what the Premier’s Department was saying and other departments, any particular issues?

I can’t recall any particular issues but they were there. There were periods when the Policy Division’s relationships with departments were not good. There were the occasional accusations that we had the Policy Division named as the Gestapo was one term that was used to me. Some departments felt that we operated rather secretly – I say ‘we’ because I embrace myself with that policy area – that we should be much more consultative, we operated far too secretively, and that we briefed the Premier; even though the instructions were that whatever we were proposing in our submission and briefing to the Premier should be discussed with the department beforehand, I’m not always sure that that took place.

And the uranium policy, were you involved in the workings up of that?

No, not to a great extent. In fact I’m having trouble recalling the way in which that was dealt with, but that was largely dealt with within the Premier’s own area. I certainly recall the stoush between Peter Duncan and the Premier.

Just in reflecting on the policy work at the time, you said you were briefing the Premier, what did you see as good policy work and not so good, as head of the
department? And you mentioned the Policy Division, the sort of quality control and value-added that you might have put into what was going on?

You mean me personally?

Yes.

I suppose that I took the view that there’s not much point in having dogs and doing all the barking yourself, and by and large I had a pretty good respect for the brain power and intelligence of the people who were in the Policy Division, yourself included.

Thank you.

I inherited much of the Policy Division from the appointments that Bob Bakewell had made and I thought that he made some very good appointments; and a number of the people in that division were given the opportunity to better their education, you included.

Yes – thank you, yes.

And to gain further and better qualifications which would equip them and it did so. There were clearly some difference of opinion from time to time but not such that I believe interrupted the good development of policy for the Premier’s best advice. I had the opportunity every Monday morning of indicating what my views were on things, but I can’t recall any major stoush other than there was the odd occasion when I believed that there were some areas in which I had not been informed which I thought I should have be informed about –

Fair enough, yes.

– but that’s internal administration and not part of the Dunstan thing.

You mentioned earlier you did some oversight probably of the work on the non-medical use of drugs. What was your role there? Because this potentially was a radical reform.

Well, it was. The role that I played essentially was to liaise on a periodic basis with the chairman, whose name I can’t recall.
Sackville.

Sackville.

Yes, Ronald Sackville, yes.

Professor Sackville. Was to liaise with him on progress, certainly was to make sure that he was adequately resourced, but certainly not to put any input. But then to brief the Premier how he was going in terms of timing, et cetera, et cetera, but I wasn’t given periodic reports on what he was going to put up.

Did Don have any particular agenda that he wanted out of all of this?

There was perhaps the rare occasion in which he would say, ‘Look, when you next see Professor Sackville you might indicate to him my thinking here’. I think Don himself saw Sackville from time to time, not on a frequent basis. Don wasn’t inclined to do that. Once he’d given somebody a job to do he let them do it. He might want to drop the occasional hint in as to what he thought, and certainly he wanted to know on a periodic basis how their reporting was going, but when the report came out, of course, and it was pretty far-reaching in its recommendations and it really never got off the ground – (a) Don was becoming sick and (b) the legalisation of certain substances was never going to get off the ground in the climate of South Australia and so it tended to, like marijuana itself, wither on the vine –

Wither on the vine, yes. Go up in smoke, yes.

(laughter) Go up in smoke.

When you were working with Don, did you say to yourself, ‘Where is this person getting all these ideas from?’ and did you have any feel for that?

No, I don’t think it was ever a question in my mind. I think much of Don’s ideas generation came about from his own initiative. Don was very, very sensitive to things that were taking place elsewhere and testing in his own mind whether that was a part of a reform agenda that he wanted to adopt, and the classic example of that is industrial democracy, where he’d done quite a bit of reading on the models in
Sweden and started to pick those up. But much of the reforms and ideas that he had I do believe were self-generated, I think he was an original innovator to a very, very marked extent. There were a great number of things that he just knew were wrong, like he just instinctively knew that the public sector in the early ’70s and ’60s was just not a responsive public service. He didn’t have all the answers for change, but he did believe that he knew people who could bring those changes about, and the same could be said about education and health and, just as particularly – very much particularly – about social welfare. He just wasn’t getting anywhere with the social welfare changes. And of course as the Member for Norwood he came across what he believed to be a number of individual injustices and just couldn’t get responses from the Community Welfare Department, as it was known then. And so when Ian Cox came in he had somebody who was very much to the fore in welfare reform. Yes, I think that he was an original reformist, not always knowing exactly what reforms should take place but knowing that there should be a reform, but there were other areas in which he knew precisely what needed to be done. The arts was one, and I didn’t become involved very much in that, he didn’t select or appreciate that I was (laughs) of that era and ilk. He had a lot of ideas in which he said, ‘I want this done in particular’, which was out of his own thinking.

Did he talk about any particular people, like industry leaders or — — —?

He drew a lot of industry leaders to him. Ironically, many of the people that he sought advice and developed close relationships with were either strong members of the Liberal Party – one in particular being a member of the Legislative Council was Don Laidlaw. Don Laidlaw was quite a significant confidee of Don’s. Others, like Bob Ling from Hills, Bob Footner from Bridgestone, while they often frankly told Don that they didn’t agree with what he was doing, nevertheless they had high respect for him and gave him frank and open advice and he listened to that advice.

And did he talk about getting his reforms through certain groups, like initially the Party and the community at large – you’ve got the Cabinet, you’ve got specific interest groups – his reform process ideas, like ‘Here’s an idea I’ve got’, did he talk about his way that he pushed these reforms?
I’m not sure I exactly understand what you’re getting at. If you mean did he draw people to him to further his ideas and consult with them on how these ideas might be implemented, yes, I think he was a consultative Premier. If you mean did he bring somebody in and say, ‘Give me and idea to run with’, no, he didn’t do an enormous amount of that. But he would pick up an idea that perhaps might have been mentioned to him at a gathering and he’d say to me or somebody, ‘What do you think of this, somebody said such-and-such?’, it might not be a fundamental thing; but he would listen to people and he never ignored what he considered to be well-meaning and sincere and good advice.

Well, something like industrial democracy had this very broad idea that there ought to be democracy in the work – well, initially, of course, he expanded the ability of people to vote for the Upper House, so there was the democracy at large, if you like, and then ‘Well, what about the workplace?’ became the industrial democracy side; but did he have an idea of how he was actually going to get that through, or was it, ‘Here’s an idea and let’s see how it runs and then deal with things as they come up’?

I’m not sure how his idea of industrial democracy, worker participation in management first arose because I was in Papua New Guinea when these ideas were emerging. It was when I took up my appointment in February ‘72 that he called me in to say, ‘I want this done’, and then I sort of set about doing the research where industrial democracy, et cetera, et cetera. He’d picked up, clearly, some notions in Sweden. Whether it was his own research or whether others had put this to him I don’t know because, as I say, I was in Papua New Guinea when these ideas generation came to the fore.

And just off the record you mentioned the trip to Malaysia. What was that all about? I know it was about trade, but did he have a broader vision, like more links with Asia generally?

It grew, I guess, out of the notion of Colonel William Light and his links back to Georgetown, and sister cities throughout the world were starting to develop as a notion, and Don had examined what the advantages were of sister city relationships and believed two things, I think: firstly, that if you have a sister city relationship it
will develop goodwill between the peoples of those communities and therefore peace, love and harmony results – not that we were in any fear of hostilities with Malaysia at the time; but, secondly, it developed an aura of trust in which you could do business together. And so it emerged and developed that way and I went on at least two occasions with him in which we saw both the Prime Minister of Malaysia and the Chief Minister of Penang and other officials in order to further that relationship. Which, regrettably, seems to have declined somewhat.

And relationships with the Commonwealth Government, were you involved in any activities there?

Well, only to the extent that we had an Intergovernmental Relations Division under I think Jeff Walsh headed that up at the time. I was involved to the extent of knowing what Jeff Walsh was doing, obviously, although Don did ask for a direct reporting relationship, which I was happy about. I went to one or two premiers’ conferences. Premiers’ conferences were essentially in those days more about Loan Council activities and so Treasury were predominantly – I think there were only probably two premiers’ conferences that I went to, and accompanying Don at the time were people who perhaps had done some specialist work on the particular items that were at the premier’s conference; but largely it was about money.

And just before we get into some very broad reflections there was Don’s retirement: did you want to say anything about that, above and beyond what you’ve alluded to earlier – he was not looking well and – – –?

Well, I guess it was no surprise to me that he did retire and succumb. There were enormous pressures coming on him: he’d lost his wife; he knew that there was a book being published, *Grossly improper*, and that the indications were that that was not going to be seen as favourable. He felt very much betrayed by John Ceruto because it was starting to be leaked some of the things he might have said to Des Ryan and the other author about it. I could see the growing pressures on him. He seemed to be distracted frequently when I saw him. But he never confided in me to the extent about his health. I knew that he was seeing medicos. But it didn’t come
as a surprise to me that he would retire. So he was able, fortunately, to retire and take advantages of the provisions of the *Parliamentary Superannuation Act*, which had been amended in the year previous.

**Fair enough. Just reflecting on working with Don and some of the important things he did, did you want to provide some sort of a summary about that?**

I think any summary that I would make I would put emphasis on Don and my relationship in public sector reform. I think this is where he saw that I would make my strongest contribution, and he tended to use me more in the earlier stages in reforming the public service and then, more latterly, in overseeing other, selected areas of reform. But I saw Don Dunstan as an original reformer. He was dedicated to bringing about a better public service, a more responsive public service, one that was efficient, one that was effective, one that delivered what the government was voted in to achieve whereas that had not been seen the case prior to the 1970s.

My relationships with Don were good, professional and occasionally social. I had enormous respect for the intelligence of the man. His intelligence, his ability to be able to grasp instantly what you were saying was quite phenomenal, you never, ever had to repeat or explain in a different way – as so frequently you had to do with other ministers (laughter) –

**Right, yes.**

– Don grasped a point immediately; in fact, his intelligence at times was almost frightening and caused one to feel an element of inadequacy yourself because he was so much on top of things and could handle a number of different reform issues at the one time.

He wasn’t a person who was easy to talk to on a one-to-one basis. He was not comfortable in social situations. He was brilliant in a group situation, his ability to address and talk to a group of people – and the Hindmarsh Building Society issue of course was the classic example, and ‘turning back the tide’ (laughs) at Glenelg – where he could address a group of people and persuade them to a point of view was absolutely brilliant. But he never seemed to me to be particularly comfortable or
happy in social chitchat. It had to be a meaningful conversation and a conversation on a subject in which he was interested. He would never be interested in talking about the cricket. (laughs) I can remember one very interesting situation when I came in to see him with a bundle of files under my arm and said, ‘Oh, the English are one for seventy’. He said, ‘What?’ (laughter) I said, ‘The English are one for seventy’. He said, ‘What does that mean?’ I said, ‘At Adelaide Oval’. He said, ‘What’s happening at Adelaide Oval?’ I said, ‘Well, there’s a Test Match on down there, or cricket’. He wasn’t interested in that sort of [thing]. I can also recall being on an aircraft with him and he just wasn’t interested in any social chitchat and we virtually flew from Adelaide to Singapore without much of a word being spoken between us. I didn’t like, and he didn’t like, talking business on an aircraft because it could easily be overheard. So he wasn’t interested very much in talking about the latest social happenings unless it was a new restaurant that I’d been to that he wanted to try. So he did have that tendency to give the appearance of being a bit socially aloof, but I don’t think he was. I think that it was simply a matter of he only bothered about discussion if it was meaningful; he didn’t want to waste thought nor words on nothingness.

And were there any areas that – he was seen as a progressive reformist, but were there some areas that you thought he was a bit conservative on that you came across?

Well, no, not in my view. My only comment on that would be that I guess I was more of a gradualist than Don was. Don always wanted things done yesterday and mostly we could do them today; but there were occasions on which I and perhaps even others would say to him, ‘Do you think it’s about time that the community were given the opportunity to digest your latest group of reforms before you inject them with another group?’ And he would say, ‘Oh, Graham, you’re far too conservative. I’ve got to get this reform agenda. There’s many things that I need and want to do’. And I think if there’s any criticism that people could level at Dunstan it would be that his agenda, while I wouldn’t say ‘faultless’ but a much-needed reform agenda, he was impatient, perhaps a bit too impatient at times, to see it introduced and
implemented and adopted. That was one of the problems we had with the reform agenda of the public service: that, while his reforms were excellent and driven by perhaps people such as myself and the Corbett Inquiry and Bakewell, *et cetera*, he was impatient to see them being introduced without taking into account that we had to drag the rest of the public service around. It was a bit like trying to turn the Queen Mary around and that wasn’t easy, and he was often impatient with the speed with which – I think he felt that, ‘Well, the doctrine’s laid down, I put you in charge to achieve it, everybody else should now accept it’, (laughter) and, you know, life’s not like that, is it?

That’s right. Did he ever mention or admit to any mistakes he’d made and wish he’d done anything better?

Look, I think there probably were some minor things in which he said, ‘Oh, perhaps we should have done this’, and sort of laughingly put it; but nothing of a very serious kind, no.

All right. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about Don?

No, I think we’ve – – –.

We’ve covered a lot of areas.

No, I think that we’ve covered my side of it. Only for me to say that I think the important period in which I played in the Dunstan Era was more in public sector reform and less in other areas, and that’s why I was brought in and that’s where I identified in the late ’60s to him that I had a passion for reforming the public service, having majored in those areas in my university studies. So that’s how I came to his attention and that’s how I was given the task and role. What followed in a broader sense in Premier’s Department was more abbreviated because he left a year or so after I was appointed.

All right. Well, thanks very much, Graham. That’s good.

My pleasure, George.
END OF INTERVIEW.