This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan History Project for the Don Dunstan Foundation. Today is 3rd July 2008 and I’m interviewing Mr Kelvin Bertram. Kelvin was Don Dunstan’s private secretary for a while and then worked in the Policy Division of the Premier’s Department. The location is Mr Bertram’s home.

Kelvin, thanks very much for doing this interview for us. You’ve got a lot of insights about Don, and before we get into some of them can you just talk a bit about your jobs in the public service with Frank Walsh and then how you got to work with Don, and talk about Frank first?

Well, Frank Walsh decided that the Premier’s Office should be upgraded and he decided that it should be a department, which it had not been, it didn’t have that status up until that point. And so very hastily some arrangements were made and positions created in the public service to enable that to happen. He appointed a head of the department which he created, and that was John White, and then called for people, created positions which people could apply for, and one of them was initially called a clerk. At that time I was working in the Children’s Welfare and Public Relief Department as paymaster and accounts clerk, and so I thought that it could be a bit of a challenge to apply for that position in the Premier’s Department because I’d worked in the Premier’s Office some years earlier, back in the 1950s. So I applied and my application was successful and I started as a clerk, and that position was eventually upgraded to senior clerk, and other officers were appointed and we were located in the Police Building. I’m just trying to think: I’ve got an idea it was on the eleventh floor.

In Angas Street?

Yes. It was with mixed feelings we were (laughs) received there, because that took a fairly large piece of territory, as it were, office building. However, they were very helpful to us and provided facilities – photocopying and all those ancillary equipment things that were needed – and I suppose vacated an area so that the office, the Department, could be established.

Can you remember, was it a busy time? A new Labor Government had come in, and were there lots of things to do? Like you were the senior clerk and lots of correspondence and things to chase up.
Yes, it was. But at that time the new Department took over some of the roles which had been previously assigned to the Chief Secretary’s Office, so there was a time of transition whilst some of those things were sorted out.

What were those things, can you remember?

Well, one of them was, for example, protocol –

Protocol, right, yes.

– and all the associated things. There was a lady called Siuta Awan[?]. She eventually took over that role, after me. But at that time there was just me, so I used to get sent down to the airport to meet the VIPs, which was always a bit of a problem because they look like everybody else.

Except for the Queen.

Well, yes. That’s a little story in itself; I’m not sure what we can talk about on that, except to say that all of the arrangements for that were handled by the Chief Secretary’s Office, which was located on the same floor. And I’m trying to think of the man –

Bill Isbell was the boss.

– Bill Isbell, who coordinated all those arrangements. So when I came in for some criticism (laughs) about the matter, the location of the matter, who did what and so on, I was able to sort of hand all that to Bill. (laughter)

To Bill, yes. Now, the Chief Sec’s Office retained the job of organising the Cabinet submissions for years, didn’t they?

Yes. Yes, they did.

They hung onto that one, interestingly.

Yes. And I must say that, from my point of view, I was rather glad they did because I was well aware of the amount – well, the traffic of ‘dockets’, as they call them in the public service, which came to and fro, in and out as it were, purely to put them through Cabinet. So I was rather relieved that that arrangement was worked out. However, as I said, the VIP thing, somehow or other certain sections of it landed on my table and – well, that was
a bit inconvenient, but never mind. It meant, for example, things like Cabinet lunches became my responsibility and I had had no experience in that whatsoever. In hindsight, it was probably a good thing because the person who organised the Cabinet lunches also had the key for the grog cupboard, and they all knew that I didn’t drink alcohol, so there was some kind of inbuilt security about that. (laughter)

**Yes, they could never blame you for the levels dropping.**

And they all knew that, you see. On the other hand, it became a bit embarrassing when the level did drop. Oh, the other part of it was that I used to sit in on the Cabinet lunches because I organised them and I had to make sure that everything – that was the kind of bonus; but also I had to make sure that everything worked on time. So because the guest of honour would be there and so we had to look after him or her, and the host, which would be the Premier or one of the Cabinet ministers, I had to make sure that proceedings were wound up in time to get him or whoever it was down to Parliament House if the House was sitting.

**Interesting.**

So we had to have the lift standing by to get the Premier or whoever it was and the driver, and of course the inconvenience that we had in those days was there were no such thing as mobile phones, and we have to hold all of this in the context of that. It made a huge difference.

**Yes, incredible. And what were the lunches like: quite informal or very formal?**

They were formal and, in many cases, the Premier, for example, would take the opportunity to enable his guests to sample the local product and he was very proud about that and he had a very good knowledge of it and he expected me to know all about it. And of course I didn’t.

**This was Frank, yes.**

Well, both.

**Frank and Don, yes.**
Yes. (laughs) One time I remember when Don was Premier and I was sitting on the sideline, as it were, doing my little job, tasting everything, the wine came around and of course the first one was the white – and then the red, and so on – and when I tasted the white, and I’d done this several times at that point, it just didn’t seem right. I didn’t quite know why, and of course it had corked.

What, outside somewhere somebody had – – –?

No, no. No, well, presumably in the period while it had been waiting in the cupboard. And so I was offered the wine and I thought, ‘That’s no good’, so I as it were, as we say, sent it back and asked the lady to bring another one, another bottle, and yes, that was much better. But of course I don’t drink.

You don’t drink. Had to spit it out.

I simply – oh, no, I drank it – but noticed the difference. Afterwards – I told her to put it aside and I later in the day asked the Premier, ‘Did you have a problem with the wine?’ He said, ‘Yes, it was off. I meant to tell you’. ‘Ah, good,’ I said, ‘I was a little bit concerned about it, so that confirms – – –.’ (laughs)

Very good, yes. And the lunches Don had, how did they compare with the ones Frank had, can you remember that?

More frequent, I have to say. Frank didn’t enjoy that part of the job at all. In fact, strangely enough, he didn’t really like the prominence. There were a couple of occasions that he very much resisted – for example, some of the things where he had to dress up in what we call ‘white tie’: he steadfastly refused to do that, he would not wear a white tie, until one day John White got to him and said, ‘Look this is’ – it might have been one of the Spastic Children’s events, I suspect – ‘You really have to, you and Hilda actually do dance very nicely’. They used to do this, before he got into politics, they were quite well-known for their dancing skills. The problem was that Frank had long since let his white tie outfit get out of shape. So John White said, ‘Look, I’ve got an old one, Frank. It’ll fit you nicely’. But of course it didn’t, and I can remember seeing it on television and I thought, ‘Oh, goodness’. It was dragging on the ground.

Yes, because John was quite a tall man, wasn’t he?
Yes, he was. And it looked like the original penguin outfit. It was really quite sad. But yes, Frank didn’t like that part of the job and resisted as much as possible.

**What about Don? Did he like small talk or not?**

Well, strangely enough you should ask that: he was very good at it, but that doesn’t mean he enjoyed it; he didn’t. The other thing that people may not recognise: his sight was a problem. He used to have these little lenses –

**Contact lenses, yes.**

– contact lenses – and he had great trouble with them and sometimes he would try and operate without them. And I can remember quite often I would be alongside him and have to quietly tell him who it was that was coming, ‘This is So-and-so’, because he would not have recognised them. Having found out who they were and realised that, he would then engage in conversation quite readily at whatever level, but I have to say he didn’t enjoy fools. He was an intellectual man, very cultured and very clever. No, he did not readily suffer fools.

**Can you recall any time that say an Italian dignitary or a Greek dignitary came and how he related then?**

Nana Mouskouri.

**Nana Mouskouri, right.**

It’s funny you should mention that one because, you see, what used to happen, all of the invitations, as it were, for the Premier to – I’m talking of Don now – to go to various functions, and there were a lot of them, a lot of them sought out his company, but among the group of people that would be invited to accompany the Premier – because he had to go accompanied by somebody, and I would go round the staff, as it were, and call for volunteers, and this day I had an invitation to go to Nana Mouskouri for him and no-one else was even vaguely interested in this – surprisingly, because on his staff was – remember Tony?

**Tony Baker, yes.**
Tony Baker, among others, and I thought Tony was – well, I don’t know why, but Tony wouldn’t do it. Anyway, it landed on my lap and I said to Don, ‘Well, look, I’d be quite happy to do it. I thoroughly enjoy Nana Mouskouri’s work’. ‘Fine. Good.’ He said, ‘You come with me and bring Margaret with you’. And we had a ball, thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. What was interesting, and perhaps this is a real insight into the man, at interval time – they had a sort of place for the VIPs, so to speak – and they came, and this was in the – there was a basketball stadium down at Richmond.

Oh, yes, the Apollo.

The Apollo, yes. It was in that stadium. And so they came and brought us around to this place where they were having drinks and everyone’s having a little nip of something or other and Don intervened immediately and said, ‘Oh, look, if you wouldn’t mind, Margaret and Kelvin do not drink alcohol. Could you please find something for them?’ And there was a great embarrassment – pregnant pause, so to speak – and eventually they found a couple of cans of orange. And I always appreciated that.

Yes. He remembered, yes.

The fact that he remembered and the fact that he was prepared to save us that embarrassment. And, interestingly enough, Nana Mouskouri, she had just broken up with her husband but they were still playing together in the band, and she took over the conversation at that point and she said, ‘Well, I have to tell you now that I never drink alcohol during a performance, until it’s over. I save that up until our celebration at the end, because’, she said, ‘I used to get into the ouzo’, and then she said that she often did during rehearsal, too. And she said, ‘Then we listened to some recordings of our work and we realised that, as the performance continued, the quality of our work deteriorated, and so in order to maintain a proper professional standard we have a rule: I do not drink alcohol until the performance is completed’.

Interesting. And how did Don relate to her?

Oh, he was in his element. I don’t know whether they chatted away, whether she shared any of the lingo with him, I don’t think she did. But yes, they struck a real note, rapport.

Did he talk about the Greek classics and all that sort of stuff?
Yes, yes, all that stuff, yes; which I have to say was in sharp contrast to her husband, who was – he was into music and that kind of thing, but he wasn’t into the classics.

Interesting. And were you there when Mikis Theodorakis came to Adelaide and Don was seen – – –? There were photos with him that I’ve seen.

Yes. I didn’t get the invitation that night so I can’t tell you what happened, but I was probably a bit envious of that one because, yes, I would have enjoyed his work, too.

So how did you get to know Don? You were working for Frank and then Don came in as the Minister and later as Premier: is that when you met Don?

Yes. I was a clerk and became senior clerk, and that was while Frank Walsh was there. Then, of course, there was a gap while Steele Hall was in power and so I retained that position because in fact I was one of the original public servants who had been trained from our earliest years to serve the government, and whilst we might have had a personal preference about who was in government and who wasn’t, we served the Premier, the Minister, the Government. And I got on quite well with Steele Hall. I remember he went crook at me one day because I was always walking around with a pencil in my ear. (laughter)

Not a shade on your head?

No. But he did make the comparison between me and what he called a ‘bookie’s clerk’. And of course I didn’t call him ‘Steele’, I called him ‘Premier’, mostly. But I got on very well with him and I have to say I admired him in the sense that he had the courage to break the deadlock with the gerrymander and that was a very courageous thing to do.

The other thing I admired him for in my work as senior clerk, every time the Premier went off to Canberra or wherever, when he came back – of course, I didn’t go with him at that stage – I would prepare a little document which was a typical public service claim for expenses, and it was based on the going rate, as it were, one for Premier, one for whoever went with him – in most cases it would have been John White – and then, having done that, I would get a cheque from Treasury to reimburse them, so to speak. I remember one day I turned up with the cheque for John White and a cheque for Steele Hall and Steele Hall looked at it and he said, ‘What do I get that for?’ And I said, ‘Well, sir, that’s your
entitlement for the time that you were away’. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I didn’t spend that much’. I’ll never forget that.

Really?

John had already put his in his pocket. This was very embarrassing, because Steele Hall said, ‘Look, I didn’t spend that much. I can tell you how much I spent, and that’s all I will claim’. So I just said something like, ‘Well, if you’d like to amend that for me, sir, I’ll – – –.’

‘Fix it up’, yes.

(laughs) And immediately John pulled his out and said, ‘Oh, yes, you’d better do that for me, too’. (laughter) But it indicated the integrity of the man, which I still remember.

And how does that compare with – I don’t want to talk about integrity so much, but about Don was a bit more interested in – – –.

No, he had the same kind of approach. I have to say that he was always out of pocket, mainly really because of his own generosity. But he did draw the line between what he felt was his responsibility in paying for whatever and what he felt was the State’s responsibility. He was quite specific about that. And, (laughs) well, all I can say is that ever after that I would wait for instructions.

Right, yes.

(laughter) I would get some indication from them – I didn’t ask them for receipts and all that sort of thing, but I would just go and ask them to tell me how much they wanted me to claim on their behalf.

You mentioned Don’s generosity: to who? Like what sort of people?

Well, if it was in Canberra, for example, I suppose he was always running into people and he’d get them a drink or he’d get them a meal or whatever. But not only there. I can remember one stage where we were on a trip in the car, went north – way, way, north, I can’t remember where – and he saw this Aboriginal man on the side of the road and stopped. Bronte was the driver.

Yes, Bronte.
Bronte Faehrman. And he told Bronte to stop and offer this fellow a ride. Took him into town and I don’t think we ever saw him, or I didn’t see him again, but I know that he headed straight to a hotel where the man could have got a bed, certainly got him a meal. And, of course, as usual he was in a frantic hurry, but he made sure that it was done before he left.

The reason I ask that is that’s what I’ve heard, like people used to come to his house and he would help them. It might be an Aboriginal person who’s come down from the North or somebody from around Adelaide who needed some help.

Well, yes, he did. And at times he worried me, because I remember one fellow who bought a very extravagant motorbike, an Italian motorbike – can’t remember the name of it now, doesn’t matter.

Ducati or something?

Yes, yes, it was, Ducati. Terribly expensive thing, and I used to think very fragile because motorbikes in my mind are (laughs) dangerous, to say the least. Anyway, this fellow – I think he was from Don’s electorate but he may not have been, I don’t know – but anyway he came to Don’s place, and I’m just trying to think whether it was in Clara Street. No, I think it was – – –.

George Street. George was his first house in Norwood and then Clara.

I’m not sure. No, I can’t be clear about that: memory’s not that accurate after all this time. Anyway, and I probably didn’t hear about it till the next day, I think, because he gave me these papers that he wanted me to witness as a JP.1 I’m not supposed to read them through, of course, because JPs don’t do that; they simply witness the signing thereof, so to speak. But he volunteered and told me that he had gone guarantor for this fellow. And I said something like, ‘Don, you really can’t afford that and you don’t need to do that. Motorbikes are dangerous things and they’re not a very good security risk’. And he gave me that look which I always knew was, ‘You’re intruding’, and really meant,

1 JP – justice of the peace.
'I wasn’t asking for your advice; I simply want you to witness the documents and my signing of them’.

Interesting.

So I did, as indeed was my job to do. But I worried about it on his behalf because I knew that his generosity had no bounds.

There were times I heard he might be at a restaurant but he didn’t have any money so somebody else had to pay for him as well. Was that anything you recall? Like he just didn’t think about money.

No. Well, yes, that’s true. Of course, mostly – or very often, anyway – there were people who were friendly, only too willing to pay for him in that sense, felt it a privilege. I don’t know that I felt it a privilege; I felt it a responsibility, really, because I wanted to keep him afloat and I knew that at times he had been more generous than he should have.

Interesting. So when you started working – well, Don came in as Premier – what did you know about his politics and what sort of person he was, in any event, and what did you think?

Very little, actually. I thought it was going to be a challenge. The position of personal secretary was created. I was unhappy about it, and I told John White that, because of the way the position was advertised. It was more or less divorced from the public service and I didn’t want that to happen; if I was going to apply for the position, well, it would be just that.

So this was a ministerial position, as I think they call them now, anyway.

Well, it’s very common nowadays; but in those days it wasn’t. And in fact at one stage I just refused to apply for it, and John White was getting very agitated about it. He said, ‘Well, I know that he would like you to do this’. I said, ‘Well, that’s too bad. I’m a career public servant and this prejudices my situation in a way that is — — —’. So I said, ‘I’ll wait until they regularise the position and then I’ll apply for it’. And I don’t know what happened behind closed doors, but I’ll just say that pressure was exerted and I was assured that my fears were baseless, that at the end of this time I would revert back to the public service stream and there would be no problem. And it was presented to me by John White, ‘This could be a very exciting time. You’ll probably have
to do a fair amount of travel’ – which really didn’t intrigue me at all – ‘and’, he said, ‘Don does obviously appreciate your work and your company and I think it would be a good thing if you did it’. So I said, ‘Well, have you got any other applications?’ And he said, ‘Yes’. He said, ‘Obviously, it wouldn’t be appropriate for me to discuss those with you’, so I never got to see them. And eventually I was cajoled, as it were, (laughs) to apply for the position.

You were given an offer you couldn’t refuse.

Yes; but, strangely enough, (laughs) it wasn’t any kind of incentive. There wasn’t any promotion. Some people sort of had the idea that I was a highly-paid public servant; in fact, the reverse was the case. The position eventually was upgraded to ‘Principal Private Secretary’, and that shows on my documents, but there was never any upgrading of salary or allowances or anything else.

There was, of course, a change of function because Don wanted to introduce later on the reporting system, which – – –.

Oh, yes. This was in the ’70s when he came back, was it? Was this when he was Premier first time?

The second time.

The second time, yes.

And it was about three years after he started that time, and I’d been working as private secretary for some time, about three years, and he said to me one day that he was being frustrated at one level because his backbenchers didn’t know what was happening and in fact his ministers often didn’t know what was happening in their departments, and there had been several instances of ministers being frustrated because the Opposition had asked a question and the minister didn’t know what it was all about. There wasn’t a good flow of information, as it were, between departmental heads and ministers. Ministers weren’t being thoroughly briefed on the operations within their departments, and so he wanted to introduce a system – which turned out to be, I have to say, a rather elaborate system and nevertheless quite effective – and my job then was to set this up.

Right, and you were still a private secretary?
No, this was when I was Principal Private Secretary.

**Principal Private Secretary, yes, okay.**

Yes, and that’s when we were in offices down on the tenth floor and I used to get all these – he sent around a note to all ministers and to all heads of departments that on a weekly basis they were to send information about the activities for which they were responsible. Now, I have to say that this system did work quite effectively. I don’t think it was very popular. It was very popular with the ministers because they weren’t getting any more surprises. And one of the things that I did very early in the piece in establishing that system was to insist that no information came to me that had not been vetted by the minister, so that the head of the department got the information and he was responsible to send it across to the Premier and I was simply the mailing box and developed this system whereby it could be dissipated from there on a very confidential basis. Now, whether it still works I don’t know. I rather suspect that it doesn’t.

**Well, these days we have computers and I guess that makes it a lot easier to assemble information pretty quickly, anyway, so yes, it’d be interesting.**

Yes, that’s right. I guess that underlines the kind of frustration that governments had at that time, because heads of departments, senior public servants, could either not inform their departmental head or their minister or they could keep him in the dark, so to speak.

**Yes. Now, you used to take this information to the caucus –**

Yes.

– **that is, the Labor Party backbenchers. What did they do with it?**

Well, it wasn’t just the backbenchers; the ministers turned up, too.

**Yes, including the ministers.**

Well, it was an information sharing thing and they would sometimes – well, quite often – ask for more information.

**Right.**
But they knew the process as to how they got the information and of course if it affected them in their electorate they were all aware of it. I remember one thing that at that time generated a lot of interest was the Freeway.

**The MATS Plan.**

No, no. No, the road from Adelaide through Mount Barker, Murray Bridge, through there. And of course there was a lot of land that had to be taken over, there was a lot of construction work and finance involved with that. The progress of that was something they all wanted to know about. And of course they wanted to know about it before – or at the same time, at least – that the Opposition got the information. They didn’t want to be embarrassed about [it]. That really set the whole thing in context.

Were there any glitches – that is, departments not giving information or a minister thinking, ‘There’s too much information around’, the opposite?

I can’t recall any problems with that, but I do remember that there were a couple of occasions when reports came and I thought, ‘I wonder if that minister knows about that’. It really put me on my mettle and at times I would actually pick up the phone and talk to the minister or his secretary and say, ‘Are you sure the Minister knows about this, is he happy about this information being released?’ Sometimes they could and would put an embargo on it, particularly if they were on the verge of making a press release about something, they might say, ‘Well, yes, I know about all that and I’m quite happy about the caucus knowing about this but I would like the information deferred until my press release’. Sometimes they’d actually send a copy of the press release. So there was a position of trust and I suppose it was up to me to make sure that I didn’t abuse that trust in any way.

And did Don ever talk to you about what his thinking was or ask for any advice from you on what he might do on anything? You were Principal Private Secretary for a while and then you picked up this other work you’ve just talked about, but were you also asked for policy advice of any sort or did he bounce ideas off you?

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2 MATS – Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Study.
Yes, he did, but only in a very informal way. And I didn’t see that as a great responsibility in that sense, it was more like a second opinion, and I would think that he probably had a group of people who he would talk to. For example – and some of them might surprise you; this one certainly will – one of the people that he had enormous respect for was Sir Thomas Playford. And this was in his first stint and my first stint, as it were, in office. I was quite surprised the first time when he came into my office and said, ‘I want you to contact Tom Playford and arrange for him to come and see me at the House’. So I worked out this plan, I would ring Lady Playford and tell her that Premier Don had asked for some time with Sir Thomas and could she arrange a time. And I would try and arrange a car, but very often Tom would not allow me to do that, he’d make his own arrangements. But he would turn up at the appropriate time, he would of course go straight in to the Premier’s suite, and I can remember several occasions when this happened and yes, it was, there were several. I never knew the subject of those discussions, didn’t want to. My role was simply to facilitate the visit, the talk.

Well, I remember the first time it happened Sir Thomas came in and of course I knew him from years, literally years, earlier – some thirty years earlier, when I was the office boy – and so we had a lot to talk about. (laughs) I recall those times with a great deal of pleasure. Anyway, he turned up and of course I knew perfectly well that he would want a drink of orange – I got that one right – sat him down, and of course the House was in session and of course you can hear the proceedings. They have a speaker –

A radio system, yes.

– in the room so that you can actually – you can turn it off, too, if you want to. And there were two rooms in the Premier’s suite. So I simply chatted away, entertaining Sir Thomas, as it were, with small talk and reminiscing, until the door opened and the Premier came in. Now, what was interesting was that every time when Don came in to talk to a guest he would simply sit at his desk and talk to them; he never did with Sir Thomas. He would say, ‘Oh, you’ve got a drink, Tom’, he would get himself a drink: that was my cue to skedaddle off. (laughs) But what I noticed before I left was he sat down alongside of the great man. He never talked to him across the desk. Treated him as an equal. Which I thought was very significant.
Interesting, yes. And did you ever see Don talking to captains of industry, the local establishment, or people like that?

Yes. In my first experience of that I probably wasn’t properly prepared for it. The rule, really, for public servants in a situation like that is to keep quiet, for the most part, not to participate. (telephone rings, break in recording)

I think so far as the big industrial people were concerned they had a high regard and great respect for Don and recognised the fact that he was very progressive in his approach and their particular industry, whatever it was, had its best chance of success and survival under his management, as it were, and [he] did everything he could to help them. I think he probably picked up the mantle again from Tom Playford with developments out at Elizabeth, he could see that the opportunities were still there, land-wise, for areas of capital to be invested there; and not only there, wherever the opportunity occurred – Mitsubishi, a lot of the other industries.

Chrysler, then Mitsubishi.

Yes. In fact, he spent some time – I can remember at one stage rushing about trying to get a – he was going to a meeting somewhere and he always, when he did that, wanted to have material in – I was going to say ‘the local language’, but that’s not quite right. If he knew that his audience was going to be predominantly Italian or whatever, ethnic people, he would try to make sure that they had the information in their own language. (laughs) I can remember one time – and I can’t remember what the meeting was or where it was – there was a need to have some material translated into Bulgarian and I had great difficulty finding someone who could do that reliably. But we found someone down in the factory that made things for your car – sorry, I’ve just forgotten –

For motor vehicles.

– yes, but they made – – –.

Bumper bars?

No, not bumper bars. To do with your suspension.

Oh, right: shock absorbers.
Shock absorbers, down here on South Road there was a group that made them – and I’m not sure whether they’re still there – but anyway, I tracked down this fellow who could speak the language fluently and got the material translated. So it wasn’t just a matter of talking the captains of industry, which he did very well, he was keen for shall I say the workers to understand what his plan was. But he had a concern, a genuine concern, for their needs, their wellbeing.

Did you ever see him talk to Gough Whitlam, any meetings or discussions?

Yes. Not a lot. The most outstanding one, I suppose, was the time when he came to Adelaide for the opening of the Festival Theatre.

Festival Theatre, yes.

And I had the job of lining up seats for all the official party, which included Gough, of course, and his wife. Yes, there were a couple of times when Gough came to Adelaide. Then there was a time when I got a job that he appointed me to do for ... ... ... Socialist International.

That’s right, yes.

And there was a series of conferences which was held in the old – now, what the building’s called, the old bank building, the one that was saved.

Yes, Edmund Wright House.

Edmund Wright House, yes, that’s right. So I got involved in that.

And how did he and Gough get on, can you recall that?

Well, it wasn’t ever a battle of the giants; it was a discussion of the giants, because they were both great intellectuals. They both had great skills with language. (laughs) Gough particularly, of course, showed off his classical Latin. But I think Don probably could match him fairly well, and that probably came out at official functions making speeches and that sort of thing. There wasn’t a competition, but they both were able to demonstrate their expertise, shall we say, and of course their skill at oratory was quite outstanding.

And did Don tell you or pass any comments about what he thought Gough was doing in Canberra, was it positive or was he concerned about what was going on?
He was thrilled when it all happened, of course, and of course devastated when it came apart.

**Do you know if he rang up Gough at all about it?**

Oh, I’m sure he did, but I wouldn’t have been present when that happened.

**When we were talking informally the other day you were talking about some of Don’s working habits, like he worked very long hours well into the night. What were your recollections about that?**

Well, I’m sure it made inroads into his home life; it certainly did in mine. In fact, quite often there was nights spent down at the House when, to be honest, I should have been home with my family and then probably he should have been, too. But the demands of public office are such that, well, you just have to do it. *He* did, and I didn’t have to, but I sort of felt that it was my job to be there whenever I was wanted.

**Yes. And you got early morning calls, that sort of thing?**

Oh, yes. I don’t think I was ever late for work (laughs) because I used to find that the extra half-hour or so when I was there before the phone burst up I could put to good use.

**And you mentioned Don was a speed reader and could pick things up very quickly.**

That was astonishing, yes. I don’t know, he must have done [a course]. I did a bit of a course on the same thing, so I knew how that worked. But he was exceptionally good at it, and the only thing that held him back was, as I said, his eyesight and quite often he’d have to take his glasses off [?to be able to see it?]. He was actually frustrated by his sight, or lack thereof, and it caused him a great deal of frustration.

**What other things frustrated him, did he talk to you about any of those, in his politics and policy and people’s demands on him?**

Oh, no, I think he just accepted – very largely, accepted people as they are. In actual fact, one of the things that surprised me about him, especially those who were closest to him, Don was, as I said, quite an intellectual, a very clever man: he assumed that the people around him had the same level of ability. But they didn’t – or very often they didn’t. Now, whether that frustrated him or not I don’t know, but I think people tried to keep up with him and in most cases they didn’t.
That was his ministers or private staff as well, or other people in the office, senior public service?

Well, I guess he had that in mind when he picked his staff, I don’t know – although he didn’t have much choice in some cases. (laughter) But yes, I know that there were some senior public servants who caused him frustration, and I won’t name them but perhaps it’s best to say that their agendas they saw as more important than his. That would have frustrated him. But I guess he just understood it was public service versus politics.

Was that in his first term as Premier or his second and later terms in the ’70s?

I think it’s something that grew.

That grew. Really?

It’s something that I think he didn’t expect in the first term, but as time went on it became an increasing problem. As I said, I won’t name anybody, but there’s one that stands out.

In his own department or another department?

Both. (laughter)

Okay. Both, right. I was going to ask you about who did he see as his key movers and shakers to get things moving along, but whether it’s ministers or public servants, because he had a lot of ideas and he needed people to pick them up and, one, develop them further and then get them implemented.

Well he had people in Treasury, some of those people were very helpful. Yes, I think once they let him down, well, he obviously looked elsewhere; but there were people who did frustrate him and I suppose what he had to do was to work around them and find people who could be relied on to share his passion for the things that to him were important.

I think one of the things was that public servants, they loved to use this term ‘permanent public head’, and that sort of made them believe that they could anything, that they were there forever and that the minister or the Premier, whoever, would eventually go away and they would get their way, kind of thing.

What about his ministers, like Hugh Hudson and that?
Well, he was an outstanding person. Sadly didn’t live very long, didn’t have a long life. But he was brilliant. Don Simmons was another one.

Des Corcoran?

Oh, Des Corcoran – I mean, I guess he was one of those people you loved him or you hated him, mainly because – he’d embarrass me, actually, because of his turn of phrase, shall we say? His language.

Yes, use of colourful language.

Colourful language. (laughter) But you’d have to say about Des you knew where you stood. You knew exactly what he meant, and he left no doubt about what he wanted. And again, he couldn’t suffer fools. He wanted something done and he wanted it done now, and if you were prepared to help him achieve that, that was fine.

So you’ve got this sense that Don had a group of key ministers he just relied on and expected to get on – like Hugh Hudson.

Yes, absolutely.

Geoff Virgo, Des Corcoran, Jack Wright later on.

Well, Geoff Virgo was a go-getter, too, very much a performer. He didn’t always – (laughs) well, I can remember one thing: he had a fight with the Police Department and it was about having airconditioning in their cars. Geoff just refused to do that.

Really?

And he was wrong. In the South Australian summer they should have had air conditioners long ago. But no, Geoff just dug his toes in and –

Thought they were getting soft.

– (laughter) yes.

Your time in the Premier’s Department, how did you see the role changing – not your role so much, but the role of the Premier’s Department.

Ah.
Like you mentioned public service heads and I'll mention the name: Bob Bakewell came in to replace John White, and one of his roles was to move and shake around the place and he used the Policy secretariat and Division to help him do that with people there.

Well, the Premier’s Department itself grew like Topsy. I mean, when I first went there I think there were six or seven people, including one economist and a couple of typists. And I don’t know how big it is now, but it’s –

Multiples bigger.

– (laughs) I can imagine that it would have grown greatly.

Did you get the sense it was a powerful department?

Well, I’m sure it is now.

No; before.

No. No, it wasn’t. And in fact the two gentlemen that you mentioned, in fact it really was quite a contest as to who really was the boss.

Really?

Yes, all sorts of things were done to try, one by one, to achieve some degree of superiority over the other. It was quite a contest.

Interesting.

And a very public one, actually. But that didn’t achieve any degree of efficiency whatsoever. I think as time went on, and I’m sure it’d be now the case, the Department became much more professional. I would hope so, anyway.

Yes. Interesting. And we talked about you and you being the Principal Private Secretary for a while and then you picked up this role in the Policy Division, but when you were Principal Private Secretary who else was in the Premier’s Office there, who were the people? Lyn Scott at the time, was she there?

Yes, she was.

Peter Ward?

Peter Ward, Tony Baker.
Tony Baker. John Mitchell for a while?

I don’t remember him. There was a girl – no, I can’t remember her name – the typist and there was –

There was Zeta Nalty, the typist.

– Zeta, yes; but there was a little short girl, who got married. Married a banker. I can’t remember her name (Nanette Rankine)

How did all those people get on? Like their job was to support Don –

Yes.

– and write press statements and speeches and Peter Ward policy ideas and that. Did that all gel, in your view?

Well, it virtually meant that what I guess really happened was you had the Department and then you had the personal staff.

Yes.

I had a secretary at one stage, too, and ..... because that area became so demanding, especially with all these lunches and so on, because that part of it was all previously done by the Chief Secretary’s Office. And there was a kind of, I suppose, a sorting-out whereby the Chief Secretary’s Office decided, ‘We will do this and you can do that’, kind of thing, and there were some things that got more emphasis than others. (telephone rings, break in recording)

Was Peter Ward’s role an ideas role, like policy ideas?

Yes, I used to have a lot of trouble with Peter. Mainly because I was always trying to check the diary and say, ‘How are we going for this?’ He didn’t like me putting pressure on him to write speeches, and I can understand that, really. I mean, you don’t just sit there and say, ‘I’m going to write a speech about something’. But in actual fact, that’s what I was doing to him.

So your job was to organise these other people.
Yes, and to make sure that things were done on time. Had no trouble with Tony: he was a prolific writer, brilliant. And who was this other lady you mentioned?

**Lyn Scott.**

Lyn Scott was good in that, too. She was a sort of research officer –

**Yes, that’s right.**

— who probably provided a lot of material for both of them. And Peter was somewhat moody.

**Moody, right.**

Sometimes he would be quite friendly and approachable and other times almost dark — that’s not the right word, but aggro.

**Yes, aggro.**

(laughter) And he certainly didn’t, I think, appreciate this young quasi-public servant person coming along and prodding him and saying, ‘Look, we’ve got a thing on tomorrow, we need’ — whatever it was.

**And did you ever have joint meetings and Don would be there and say, ‘Look, this is what we want to do for the day or the week’?**

Oh, yes. Not as many as I would like, because very often he just didn’t have time. But that made my job more difficult; it would have been much easier if we had — we started to, by the way —

**Yes, right.**

— but that kind of fizzled out a bit. That would have been the ideal way to have done it. Everyone would have known what each one was doing and at what stage. It meant that I had to then sort of go around independently and check on this and, ‘How are you going on that’?

**And there was no bouncing around of ideas.**

Not as much as there should have been. Sometimes there would be a meeting in my office, for example, very informal, where Peter and Tony or whatever would come and
have a discussion, or I would go into their room and do the same thing, for that reason. But I would much have preferred to have had meetings in Don’s office where we could have each had some input and, in my case, it would have been an information-gathering thing where I would have said, ‘This is what we have agreed ..... .....’, or, ‘This is coming up; who’s going to do what?’ I don’t know that we were all that organised. We probably started off that way.

Yes, with good intentions.

Yes. (laughs)

And what would happen if there was a crisis, like some news event had hit and there had to be a quick response, or there was some area causing problems like unemployment or whatever and demands being placed on people?

Well, the biggest crisis, of course, was the Commissioner of Police.

Right, yes.

And of course we knew that was imminent and there was certainly discussion in closed doors about that. But when the announcement was made I was actually down in Don Simmons’s home, simply because I’d taken work down to go through. Don Simmons – because, you see, at that time –

He was the Chief Secretary, wasn’t he?

– yes – and at that time I had left the Premier’s Department and gone across to be Simmo’s CAO.

Right, yes: Chief Admin Officer.

Yes. And so I used to spend a fair amount of time in his home, and he had this big case and I’d take stuff down there for him to sign. And we used to call him – we had a name for him – the ‘Chief Clerk’.

Chief Clerk, right.

The Chief Clerk Minister. Because he checked everything so thoroughly. And this is not in there, but in actual fact I was pleased about that because at one time I had been CAO to Alan Rodda and he was frankly hopeless. He would sign anything I put in front of him.
But Simmo checked everything, and that was good because at the end of the letter was *his* signature, it was never going to be mine. And so he signed it and he was responsible for everything above it. Anyway, yes, I was there when the call came. But, yes, that threw everything into chaos and I can remember looking out of the window and seeing a great crowd out on the lawn.

**Interesting. And did you ever see Don get angry about anything?**

Only rarely. If he did, he was always very controlled, even when there was the fear that there was going to be a flood.

**Yes, the tidal wave fear.**

Tidal wave, and he just walked out on the jetty. And there was also a time when he addressed a meeting on the street, in front of the –

**Hindmarsh Building Society, yes.**

– yes, just grabbed a microphone and [spoke]. He had a marvellous ability to be able to just put [down] those sort of rumours – because that’s all they were, of course – and with great credibility, people understood what he was saying and believed in what he was saying and suddenly realised how stupid it was that the press had been able to do this – that was one of his favourite words – the ‘beat-up’ of the press.

**The beat-up, yes.**

So he didn’t have a lot of respect for the press. Sometimes they did, they did behave. I can remember there was one reporter, Rhys Clark[?] his name was, and I can remember once I actually gave him a press release early, inadvertently, and I thought, ‘This is it. I’m gone’.

**You’re gone, yes.**

And I rang Rhys and I said, ‘Look, mate, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have given you that. It actually has got an embargo on it’, and there was no embargo on it. ‘But’, I said, ‘there is, and we’ve reissued that’, and he said, ‘I’ll bring it back’. And to this day I always remember Rhys Clark walk in my office, just gave it to me and picked up the other one, which had the limitation on it.
The embargo.

Embargo.

Gee, that’s interesting, yes.

But he’s the only reporter that ever did that. I, from that, learned a great respect for the press – not generally, but individually – because there were people, there were individual people whom you could trust, though not many. (laughter)

Yes, not many. This is along the same theme, but Jack Richards, some of those, or Doug Claessen was –

Yes.

– they were in the Inquiry Unit.

Yes.

What was Jack’s role? He was in Norwood and –

Yes.

– I forget whether he was the Mayor of Norwood or not.

Yes, he was. He was.

But where did he come in to support Don? There was the Inquiry Unit, but was he involved in other supportive things?

No, actually it really was a case of having someone on hand who could deal with problems. Not problem people, but people who had problems. You know, very often people in difficulty – yes, they need their problem solved, but initially they need someone that they can talk to, someone who listens. And that was Jack’s role: that he could work through their problem. And in very many cases he couldn’t solve them; sometimes he could; but at least that person knew that they had done everything they could, they’d spoken to someone who cared, they’d been to the Premier’s Department, here was a man who was, shall I say, a friend of the Premier’s, and he was interested in what their problem was and was doing his best to help them.

Good. Well, we’ve covered a lot of areas, Kelvin. Is there anything you wanted to say that we haven’t covered, just to round up our discussion?
Yes, well, it was a very challenging time in my life. I would never have probably chosen to go down that path.

**And you resisted it, you said, too.**

Yes, I did. But it ended on a happy note and probably when he told me about this other job that he wanted me to do, this reporting system, and we went out to lunch – and I paid – then he said to me he had a free day on the weekend and he said, ‘The time that you’ve spent with me has cost you a lot in terms of family and so on and time with them’. He said, ‘Next Saturday, I’m free. If you could, I want you to bring your family to my house and we’re just going to enjoy each other’s company’. There was nobody else in the house and it was something I’ll always remember. The kids thought it was great because they could have a swim in the pool, and he cooked for me, and we just had a time together and he got to know the children, Margaret and so on. At the end of it he opened up the piano and he said, ‘What would you like me to play?’ ‘How about Beethoven’s Ninth?’ (Third Movement, Ode to Joy) Sat down and warmed his fingers up, (makes explosive sound) straight into it, without any music.

**No music.**

I’ll always remember that. So that was my sort of parting gift.

**Right, very good. Well, thanks very much, Kelvin, that’s been great.**

END OF INTERVIEW.