

Mike RANN

This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation interviewing Mr Mike Rann, Premier of South Australia currently and former press secretary to Premier Don Dunstan. The date today is the 28th January 2009 and the location of the interview is at the State Administration Centre, Victoria Square, Adelaide.

Mike, thanks very much for doing this interview for the Don Dunstan Oral History Project. Can you just talk a bit about yourself so people have got an idea of who you are?

Okay. Well, I've been Premier of South Australia for very close to seven years and I've been Leader of the Labor Party for over 14 years and I've been in Parliament since 1985. I was elected in December '85 out in Salisbury, where I still hold the seat. And previously to that I was a press secretary and speechwriter to three Premiers of South Australia: Don Dunstan; his successor, Des Corcoran; and then John Bannon, both as Leader of the Opposition and as Premier of South Australia. And I've also worked at different stages for various other Premiers around the country and also Prime Ministers, both in Australia and in New Zealand. I have a political science background, I have a master's degree in political science from Auckland University in New Zealand, and then became a political journalist.

Good. When did you first meet Don Dunstan?

Well, it's quite interesting. What happened is I was studying politics in New Zealand and I was doing Australian politics as well as other areas – politics of race, where actually Dunstan came up again because we were doing a comparison between the Australian Aboriginal people and the New Zealand Maori and the African Americans then known as 'Negroes', and obviously what he was doing in land rights came up in that. Then I was asked at one stage to do – it wasn't examinable, but we had to sort of pick a topic for a discussion for a dissertation and I chose to do Dunstan. At that stage, I think I'd been to South Australia once to visit my brother who'd moved here in 1972, and it was interesting that my lecturer thought it was a good speech, a good dissertation, but he said he thought at times it sounded a bit like a eulogy – he thought I was being obviously too praiseworthy of

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him. So I kind of admired him from afar. And then I was visiting my brother on successive visits to Adelaide and one day in the airport I saw him, went up and introduced myself – I was a student – and said I admired what he did, and he was very friendly.

But what happened eventually is I was over in Adelaide in January or February of 1977 and I saw an advertisement in a newspaper with the heading, 'Premier's Department Publicity and Promotions Officer in Industrial Democracy Unit of the Premier's Department'. At that stage I was a political journalist in New Zealand in current affairs, but this just interested me and I thought it would be great to be part of the Dunstan Experiment in Australia, and I spoke to various friends in the Labour Party in New Zealand and they thought it would be a great experience for me because my game plan really was to go back to New Zealand and eventually work for the Labour Party there and run for office, be a candidate in an election. So people like Mike Moore, who became Prime Minister of New Zealand, thought it'd be great for me to do for a couple of years, then come back with the experience I learned; because at that stage, of course, the Dunstan Government – there was Muldoon in New Zealand, we had Fraser over here – so it was a bit of a beacon light for social democracy and we wanted to learn from it.

So I applied for a job, I rang the number, a guy called Phil Bentley answered the phone. I explained to him that I was on holiday and he and Charles Connolly[?] interviewed me the next day; and then some time later, when I was back in New Zealand, I was informed that I had the job. So from memory I arrived around about April of '77, round about the time of Anzac Day. It was in Currie Street, so I didn't really have much to do with Don directly even though I was part of his department.. Phil Bentley reported directly to him. But I was involved in writing some speeches for Dunstan on industrial democracy, which was then very much a political hot potato.

And what particularly struck you about the industrial democracy area? Was it seen to be radical?

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Rupert Murdoch's News Limited local paper (The News) described it as the 'Worker Control Unit', and so it was very controversial. We had a group of business leaders and also union leaders who saw benefits in what we were advocating, because really the message was that shareholders have a stake in an enterprise but so do workers, they invest their lives and skills, and no-one was suggesting that we wanted to have equal numbers of workers' representatives on boards, nothing like that; in fact, what we were advocating then that was then so threatening is now basically the company policy of companies like Holden's and BHP Billiton, which is about basically involving workers in decision-making because it improves the product and improves the productivity. Smart employers got it; the dumb ones were threatened by it. Most of those dumb ones are out of business now.

And did you see it as pushing the envelope at all?

Absolutely. It was interesting that, whilst Jack Wright was Minister for Labour and Minister for Industrial Relations that the Unit, because of its importance, reported directly to the Premier, although Jack was involved, and it was later mainstreamed into the Labour Department. But I guess I'm doing the same: I bring in various areas like climate change under me to push, and then in other areas I've done the same thing – I brought Aboriginal affairs into the Premier's Department – so I learnt from that experience that, when you've got something that's cutting edge like social inclusion is now you bring it into the centre of government to give it the push it needs rather than see it strangled by bureaucracy, and that's really something I learnt from Don. I did meet him a couple of times later on, and then I was told that his press secretary, John Templeton, had resigned – that was later in the year – and Phil Bentley spoke to me and he said, 'Look, I'm not trying to get rid of you' – and, you know, I was only twenty-four – 'and you're unlikely to get the job, but his principal press secretary/speech writer's position is available. Why don't you apply for it? At least it'll get you known and I know you're interested in a political career, that maybe when a position in a more junior minister's office comes up this'll get you known to Don'. So I applied for the job with Dunstan.

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And the result?

Well, what happened was that it was quite funny and I think the story says quite a bit about Don. I was terrified, so terrified that I had to have a stiff drink beforehand with Barry Hughes, who was Don's economic adviser, and with Phil Bentley, and then I went up to Parliament House, I walked into the office. This was probably about October, late October/early November of '77. And there was Don in the office that I now occupy down at Parliament House in sort of a white – almost bright white, from memory – safari suit, and he said, 'Oh, please sit down. I'm sure I'm much more nervous than you are'. He must have guessed that I was nervous, and said this to me to put me at ease.

Interesting thing is he talked to me at length about my hinterland in the Labour Party in New Zealand, and also I was very much involved in the campaign against French nuclear testing in the Pacific and, you know, New Zealand peace groups had sent boats to Mururoa Atoll, and I was involved in all of that, to sit in the testing zone and defy the French, and then we got the Labour Government to send an unarmed frigate into the zone with a cabinet minister on board, and Don was fascinated about a group of kids, really, taking on a superpower and winning. And then we talked quite a bit about New Zealand and then we talked about industrial democracy, there was a big controversy going on about whether we were going to use coercive or prescription legislation to introduce industrial democracy or whether we would let things grow organically, and there was an international conference on industrial democracy coming up the following year in mid-'78. And we had a mutual friend in Clive Jenkins, the British trade union leader who later on became President of the TUC,¹ and so we talked a bit about that. Anyway, after about an hour's conversation he said would I like to have dinner with some of his staff. So I went for dinner with some of his staff and met Bruce Guerin, Graham Maguire and Steve Wright and probably Barry Hughes, from memory; and he then said to me, at this stage feeling somewhat exhausted – I was actually due at my brother's place for

¹ TUC – Trades Union Congress.

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dinner – and he said to me, ‘Look, Gough Whitlam’s in town tonight. Would you like to meet Gough Whitlam?’ So I travelled in the Premier’s car with another staffer and Don. From memory it was in Glenelg, Glenelg Town Hall – Barbara Weiss was with Gough and Margaret – and I was introduced [as] someone applying for a job with Dunstan. I seem to remember Gough saying something – either at that stage later – along the lines of ‘Go east, young man, go east’. But this has later been reframed and Gough now tells everybody that it was he who convinced Don Dunstan that night to hire me.

So I went home that night without knowing whether I had the job or not but telling my brother – he said, ‘Where the hell have you been?’ And I said, ‘I’ve just had about five hours’ job interview with Don Dunstan and Gough Whitlam got involved and so on’. I said, ‘Look, I probably won’t get the job but it was a great experience’. And then the next day I was phoned up by Steve Wright and asked to write a speech by the end of the day for Don Dunstan on industrial democracy. I was a bit cheeky and what I did was I, within 20 minutes, had delivered to him a major speech on industrial democracy that I’d written for him before and he’d given, but clearly whoever passed it on to him hadn’t told him that, that I’d actually written two speeches that he gave without change. So I sent it over – it was about two months old – and said, ‘Well, here’s one I wrote two months ago and I think the Premier had liked that speech and didn’t realise I’d written it for him’. Then I got a phone call saying would I come down to Parliament House, he wanted to re-interview me. I thought, ‘I don’t think I’ve got anything left to say’, and when I went down there he gave me a glass of wine and said, ‘Welcome aboard’.

Right – amazing. And did you have any sense of it being fairly free-flowing and that’s the Premier’s Office, did you have any idea of what you were getting into?

No. And I think I started at the very beginning of ’78, it was like January 1. And he said, ‘Look, don’t worry, start in January, have a soft start so you get to know things. Things are quiet in January’. On my first week, of course, was the crisis over Harold Salisbury –

Oh, really.

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– and so suddenly I was thrust in more than the deep end. I mean we had 20,000 people protesting outside the office and I had to write the press release that Don expected, because of the findings of the inquiry by the judge, that Salisbury had wilfully misled the government of the day and therein caused Dunstan to mislead Parliament. Dunstan expected Salisbury, given the findings of Mr Acting Justice White, that he would resign. In fact, I remember writing the press release saying, ‘Police Commissioner resigns’. But the Police Commissioner couldn’t be found. Again, these are days before mobile phones. I think it turned out that he was fishing on Kangaroo Island with Ted Chapman, a Liberal MP and future Cabinet Minister. And by the end of the evening there was all sorts of goings-on that the press release was then changed to, basically, ‘Police Commissioner dismissed’. I remember giving my opinion that the story – and I did this very tentatively, given that it was my first couple of days in the job and I was still only twenty-four and everyone else was much more senior than me – I said, ‘Wouldn’t it be a good idea to release the report first so that the reasons for his dismissal would become known? Rather than the story being the dismissal, you’ve got to kind of establish why, but if you don’t the story will be about the dismissal, not the reasons.’ And I remember someone there saying, ‘I don’t think you know what you’re talking about’, and so I shut up. In retrospect, thirty-odd years later, I think I was absolutely right. Everyone was talking. It led to a royal commission, whereas I think basically that Salisbury, if he’d been suspended and had been asked to respond to the judge’s findings, he would have cooked himself because there was no legitimate response to the judge’s findings of improper behaviour by the Commissioner in misleading Parliament, let alone breaching the civil liberties and privacy of countless innocent South Australians. And then he started coming out with bizarre things that he had allegiance to a higher authority, to the Queen and to his “chaps” and so on. I mean, the guy was a fool.

So the other thing, on the more funny side, was that we went with Don dressed in lederhosen a couple of days before, where he opened the Schützenfest in, I have to say, a somewhat Colonel Klink-type accent and he then was invited to participate in a German slap dance where you slap your thighs and slap hands and pretend to slap

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faces, and unfortunately he swung round and this guy slapped him and then he got a black eye. And Don became extremely cross about whose idea it was – thank god it wasn't mine. And so during the whole Salisbury Affair he had a “shiner” and he had makeup to disguise it, which I think put him not in a good mood.

Somebody said he was very vain, was that part of it?

Look, Don was theatrical and he had, in the Premier's Office, he had round the mirror the sort of light bulbs like you do in the green room or dressing room of a theatre, and he used to apply makeup to himself before news conferences. Yes, he was vain absolutely, I think that's probably true.

Interesting. You mentioned the press release you did on one of the speeches; what were some of the other major ones you worked on? It was a relatively short time, I guess, from '78 through to when Don resigned, but can you remember any of them?

There was the Calwell Lecture, which was on Aboriginal land rights. Now, the reason that we chose Calwell – I mean, it was an incredibly busy year. When you think about it, the sacking of Salisbury and the subsequent royal commission, big debates over uranium mining, and the trip overseas which I went with him on to Europe with Bruce Guerin and others; there was women's rights and the international industrial democracy conference; there was the big, internal disruptions inside the Labor Party over uranium as well; and, of course, the death of his wife Adele Koh and her illness, which was diagnosed in March of April of that year, and I could tell you some of that story as well. But certainly the Calwell Lecture, he asked me to pick the topic. I said, 'Well, Calwell was a bit of a racist, "White Australia" and everything else. Why don't we do one on land rights and announce what we're doing with the Pitjantjatjara land rights legislation?' And then there was the Newcastle lecture, which was the end of the year, Newcastle University, and I immediately thought, 'Let's be quirky again. Newcastle's often seen as a men's-type "blokey" town; let's do the Newcastle lecture on women's rights'. And so I think a couple of us, Denise Bradley and I, wrote the women's rights lecture. And I remember going round to Don's place on the Pitjantjatjara land rights lecture, which

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was given in Melbourne, and he got me to read it while he was painting, I think. And at the end of it he said, 'Two split infinitives', or something, which was also an obsession of Gough Whitlam's, and I never changed it of course because it ruins the flow if you get too hung up on that. But then he said, 'You know this hasn't gone to Cabinet?' And then he said, 'Oh, fuck it, we'll do it anyway'. He said, 'Hugh Hudson (the Mines Minister) will complain'.

And there was the big, international industrial democracy conference with people from Sweden and Germany and Clive Jenkins from Britain and that was a big affair. That was mid-year.

Very good. And how did that work? Did Don give you some broad ideas, or he just told you what he wanted – well, you mentioned there was a bit of interaction on what you were actually going to talk about.

Yes. What would happen is that I would kind of – it's done quite differently these days, but I'd be just told, 'Look, you've got to write this speech'. I'd talk to some of the people in the departments, I'd talk to some of the staff, I'd talk to Don. Often it'd be fairly brief. He'd say to me, 'Look, what do you think?' I'd think this, 'I think that we should focus on this particular point, talk to this person'. I think he said, 'Talk to Chris Cocks', over the Pitjantjatjara land rights, he was a magistrate who had done a report on inalienable title for the Pitjantjara Aboriginal people. With industrial democracy, he'd say, 'You and Bentley know what to do', and there were actually a series of major speeches that year on industrial democracy, which made it easy for me. But when I think about it I was principal press secretary, I was in charge of all the other press secretaries, all of whom were older than me, and I was his speechwriter. I always point out to my staff there are four senior people doing the job that I had to do alone. So I'd do the press secretary stuff during the day and write the speeches at night, sometimes till three in the morning.

Very busy, yes. And was that within some sort of an overall policy framework, like the party platform or the Government's election statements?

Well, not so much the Party – we had the Policy Division and so they would feed things up. Don wanted us to continually be – which I thought was terrific – that we

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were a small state, that we should be a leader in ideas, we should be a social laboratory, which is the sort of thing we're doing in social inclusion now and climate change now, where we're massively ahead of the other states. So that was, in a sense, what he wanted to do, he wanted to keep pushing the envelope. But, you know, there's quite a bit that gets romanticised, which does Don a disservice. He was a politician, not a saint. ---.

I went to a function once where a number of people were speaking, academics, and I remember one standing up, someone I don't think had ever met him, and saying, 'Don Dunstan, unlike the politicians of today, didn't need opinion polls'. It was Don Dunstan who introduced opinion polls! So we always have to – reminding myself of what my senior lecturer said to me back in the mid-'70s about hagiography, Don absolutely used opinion polls and also was the master of what was then the 30-second grab to punch through a telegram on television – telegram, he thought in telegrams – to punch through a policy, and his point was you have to lead but you also have to be in touch with the people you lead. And Don was a canny political operator who ran a machine, a political machine that included people like Geoff Virgo and Des Corcoran and also Howard O'Neill down at the Party office. I mean in those days about four people decided the pre-selections for candidates. There was no Party democracy. And so I always say to people – I listen to people – 'I think it does great injustice to Don to romanticise him. He was a tough political operator and the word that defines Don more than anything is "courage", but he knew you had to lead, he knew you have to be in front, but you couldn't lose touch with those who elected you'.

Were there some way-out things that he wanted to do that you recall that you had to restrain him on?

Well, there was one way-out thing that I was attracted to, and that was that I'd told him about a policy of the New Zealand Labour Government under Norman Kirk[?] called the Ohu Scheme, which is O-H-U, and it was basically about setting up communes and people living sustainable existences. It was a commune policy! And Don asked me to write a commune policy because he said he thought there was a

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whole lot of unused Crown land that could be given to people to lead alternative lifestyles. So I wrote this policy. Thankfully, no-one can find it! And I remember it actually kind of surfaced back through the bureaucracy at the time that Des Corcoran – it was like within days after Don going; Des went mad when he saw this stuff. And the other policy that Des ripped up afterwards was Don's Royal Commission into Decriminalising Marijuana, which was also the year that I worked there, and I must say I thought that was politically extremely dangerous, and Des basically ripped it up. Des said we would be encouraging young people to become hippies, smoke dope and have sex on Crown land.

But when I think about that time, the dominating issues were uranium mining and the debate over it; the Salisbury Affair and the debate and royal commission over it, and that took a real toll on Don; and also, of course, the illness and then eventual death of his wife, Adele Koh.

Yes. Do you want to talk about Adele Koh?

I remember going up to the Riverland for a large, I think it was a Greek function from memory, certainly multicultural function, and I was in the car with Don and Adele, and Adele had a bad cough and she actually mentioned that she just couldn't shake this cough, she had this sort of a bug that had lingered. And I remember having a dance with her at the function and she had this sort of dry cough. And Don said, 'Look, you've got to go and get this checked out'. And we were down at West Lakes opening, I think, Delfin Island, from memory, and I'd written a brief speech, and he said, 'Oh, Adele's been to the doctor. He wants her to have an X-ray tonight in regard to this damn cough'. And I remember him saying that she'd had TB as a kid or as a young woman, I think as a kid, and he was thinking whether this was some sort of residue of that. That night, we were due to have dinner at Ayers House with Brian Talboys, who was Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand, Conservative, and also he was Minister for Trade, I think he'd been Minister for Agriculture: a very nice, more genteel, wasn't a Muldoon bully type. And because Don went to the hospital with Adele and because I was the resident Kiwi, I went to the restaurant first of all and was talking to Mr Talboys and then Don arrived. And when he

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walked into Ayers House I saw he was extraordinarily distressed and I went up to him and said, 'Are you okay?' And he called me aside and said, 'Adele's got lung cancer and it's terminal'. So he met Talboys briefly and then went home, and I think someone else arrived, maybe one of the heads of government departments, to sort of fill the gap.

But what happened was that Adele believed that she could beat the cancer and what happened was that as soon as she was diagnosed, such is the nature of the Adelaide rumour machine – particularly as it was on Don Dunstan – that wild rumours started circulating of all sorts of illnesses and what have you, and it appeared that someone in the hospital had leaked it to *The Advertiser*. Well, Don met with me and said, 'Look, under no circumstances can there be a story run. You must stop them from running a story'. That's pretty hard to do. And he said, 'Adele's doctors say that psychologically she's very fragile and if there's a story written that'll have a negative impact'. And I said, 'Don, that's not an easy thing to do. Everyone is talking about it'. And he said, 'I'm asking you to stop them to run it'. So I must say I found this an enormous pressure.

What I decided to do, which was risky, is bring all the journalists in on an off-the-record basis and talk to the editors on an off-the-record basis, so editors of television, radio stations and the two newspapers, and say, 'This is the story. I'm going to tell you what it is. She's got lung cancer. But her doctors have said that such is – – –.' So I told them the truth, but on an off-the-record basis. And they respected it and didn't run the story, and unfortunately I was away one weekend and – just trying to think of the former New Zealand journalist who had a talkback show in Melbourne.

Hinch?

Derryn Hinch phoned Alan Hodgson, who was Don's other press secretary but really only did arts stuff and said to Alan, 'I'm really sorry, mate, to hear about Adele. I'm a big admirer of Adele', and Alan didn't realise that he was being recorded and they ran it on air. It caused enormous distress to Adele, to Don and to poor Alan, who only had great love and affection for Don and Adele, and I had to

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come back and then kind of still invoke the rules, which caused resentment. And then I was getting phone calls, sometimes six a night, wild stories that she'd died, her body had been taken to Malaysia because she didn't like South Australia, that Don had had a nervous breakdown, all of this stuff. And then obviously she died in October, he'd nursed her – he showed extraordinary courage. He had to go through the whole Royal Commission with her really dying at home. And then he took her on an overseas trip, they went to Algeria, Libya and then the US and Europe. It was a very long overseas trip, Alan Hodgson went on that one, and she was seeing various alternative – some of them I think you would say questionably alternative – as well as mainstream experts. She even wanted to see Milan Bryck, the controversial cancer fake artist. She had, I think, the British spiritualist Doris Stokes visited her; and I'm told at one stage there were various people staying in the house who were practising alternative medicines and theories and meditations, which I think actually put a lot of strain on Don [when] he'd come in from work. And he'd come into work each day and he kind of visibly aged during this period, because it was a difficult time politically – there was Premiers Conferences with Loans Councils with Fraser, big cutbacks – and then she died. And the funeral was a very private one and she was only about thirty-six. I went to the funeral. There was no media. And he took a very brief time off, maybe ten days off, called me round a couple of times to discuss things and then really went into a period of extraordinary overdrive. He wanted to kick-start the next period of reform. So I remember writing till three in the morning every night. It was about October of '78 and we did big speeches on industrial democracy in Melbourne and Sydney. We did the women's rights lecture. In fact, I had a discussion the other day with High Court Justice Michael Kirby – who would be worth interviewing, I think –

I've asked him but he said he didn't have much to do with Don.

– oh, right. Well, that's interesting, because Don had given the Newcastle lecture. The Deputy Chancellor was Michael Kirby and his driver drove us back to Sydney that night from Newcastle and I sat in the front with the driver; Kirby and Dunstan sat in the back, and I've always said – and in fact had a discussion in the last two

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weeks with Michael Kirby about it – that I thought the conversation, which was about land rights, women’s rights, gay rights and civil rights, civil liberties, would have been a fantastic Phillip Adams program. It was one of those conversations that was a privilege to sit in on.

So he then was in overdrive. I went back to New Zealand to see my mother, who was sick, and then I got a phone call while I was in New Zealand saying, ‘Come back. Don wants to go to Europe on uranium mining’, and then that was the next episode.

Do you want to talk about uranium now?

Okay. Well, he in ’77, at the Perth National Conference of the Labor Party, had been one of the instigators of the ban on uranium mining and in ’78 he saw the economy start to – he called the ’77 election because I think Barry Hughes warned him that the economy was about to downturn and unemployment was about to go up so he wanted to get in early. Don was the master of the snap election. And what happened was that he – and then, of course, there was a discovery of Olympic Dam, so he’d instigated the ALP policy ban on uranium mining, which was binding on all state Labor governments, and he was under enormous pressure from the business community who said this could be South Australia’s big chance.

So he went on a trip over to Europe. He asked me to accompany him as his sort of anti-uranium adviser – how things have changed – and then Bruce Guerin was there as his chief of staff and head of policy. There was Max Scriven and there was the guy –

Ron Wilmshurst?

– Ron Wilmshurst and –

And there was Ben Dickinson.

– great guy, Sir Ben Dickinson – and we went to Sweden, South of France – and I’ve just recently found the protocol book for the trip; South of France and to Nimes, where we looked at the fast-breeder reactor; we also went to the vitrification plant. And of course the message being sold to Don by everyone, including Bruce Guerin,

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was that things had changed, the technology had advanced in terms of vitrifying the nuclear waste, and for Don his opposition basically fell on two things: one was on waste disposal, whether the nuclear waste could be disposed of safely; and the other one was the international safeguards regime. So in Sweden we met people there who were for and against, although I think overwhelmingly there were people that were pro uranium and pro- nuclear power.. Went to Germany, went to Bonn where we met with Richard Butler who was our guide, he was a consular official – he'd be worth talking to, he had quite a good relationship with Don – he was the First Secretary and was also Australia's representative on the International Atomic Energy Commission. And then we went to Holland – some funny stories occurred in Holland, but of more of a personal nature – and then we went to Britain, where he met with Tony Benn, who was the British Minister for Energy. In fact, in Benn's diaries he mentions the visit about these people who were sort of *pro* – he saw Don as leading a pro-nuclear group.

While we were in London there'd been a meeting of Labor Party people back home that included Peter Duncan I think and others – I think even maybe Chris Sumner, I'm not sure on that – and Don became very agitated about this meeting, was outraged that it occurred while he was out of the country, he felt that it was undermining, he felt that Duncan was betraying him, that Duncan was using this as a way of getting rid of him and putting himself in. I didn't see that as credible because Duncan just didn't have the numbers and the people like Des didn't trust Duncan, neither did Hudson, neither did Jack Wright. He was no real threat. But Don had a bit of a paranoid streak – most politicians do; some call it 'paranoia', some call it 'an instinct for survival' – but he certainly became very, very agitated about this.

I think Don was impressed by vitrification, but he felt, having spoken to Tony Benn – Tony Benn actually played quite a role in this – that he could not assure South Australians or the ALP nationally that the international safeguards regime was tight enough, he thought you could drive a bus through it. He thought that that might change. So I think he definitely modified his position. Two press releases [were prepared] – this has never been revealed before – one was Don endorsing a

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change in the policy and then I wrote another one saying 'Play it safe', basically, which was about the safeguards, and then he decided to go with the one that I wrote.

He was sick during the trip – maybe I could say some of the personal things because the anecdote sometimes can be helpful – he was sick, he was suffering and he had been suffering during most of 1978 from a blood pressure problem. That blood pressure problem was that he had variable blood pressure. If you've got high blood pressure that can be treated, you just lower it with drugs; his problem was his blood pressure was variable so the drugs that were used to keep it from going dangerously high caused problems when it went down and then he would faint, he'd become dizzy. He was asleep at many of the meetings overseas. It wasn't Don's fault, he wasn't well. He shouldn't have been on the trip. A lot of this was this kind of growth spurt after Adele's death and various things that followed Adele's death. I think that Don was suffering from depression, in my view; he also had this viral inflammation of the testicles, so he was walking along like John Wayne or Gary Cooper in *High noon*. So he had sore testicles, he kept falling asleep in meetings – I'll give you an example of that: there was one in Holland that he entirely slept through, had to be woken up at the end, which was embarrassing to the delegation I think and to the host. And then there was one where he wanted to meet anti-uranium people in London, so I arranged for him to meet Walter Patterson, the nuclear engineer who'd become anti-nuclear and was predicting Three Mile Island-type, or the Three Mile Island occurred and that was the year before Chernobyl – was the same year as Chernobyl, but beforehand. And I also introduced him to Amery Lovins, who is still a very world-famous, soft energy, one of the great proponents 30 years ago of alternative energy. So I had arranged for them representing Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace and I said, 'Let's have dinner with them. You've met all these pro people, you're not meeting any anti people', and Don agreed. I think this was at the zenith of his not feeling well. And Don said, 'Why don't we go to the Savoy?' So Don always lived somewhat like a Medici prince, and we had dinner at I think it was a private room at the Savoy with a butler, this magnificent dinner. All these guys arrived in mid-January, freezing cold, in anoraks and fishermen's-type jerseys, and after the soup Don fell into a deep and

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abiding sleep. At the end of this fairly boisterous dinner, which I enjoyed enormously – and they knew me from my Greenpeace days in New Zealand – we sort of woke Don up and we got into the chauffeur-driven car, ‘Adelaide 1’, taking us back to the Howard Hotel and Don said, ‘I know these are friends of yours but I must say I wasn’t very impressed with their discussion tonight’, and I was too kind to say, ‘Well, you didn’t actually hear a thing, you were fast asleep’.

Gee.

He went to a Harley Street specialist for his testicle problem and he was told – I’m trying to think of the name of it: it was something-itis, but it was epididymitis or something, inflammation of the epi-whatever-it-is in the testicles. And subsequently I’ve been told that that and the treatment make one more depressed, so I think that he was affected by his medication.

I do remember an incident, he was unable to catch up with his old friend Olaf Palme in Sweden, but I do remember when we got to Holland we had a night off and he said he was going out with some friend who was, I can’t remember, a famous cellist or famous whatever, musician – concert pianist or something – and he said, ‘You should have the night off. Why don’t we go from The Hague’, where we were having meetings, ‘to Amsterdam, we’ll go by car and get the train home?’ And he’d been told the last train left at midnight and we’d meet on the train. I went out to various bars and I caught up with some Scottish people and then arrived at the railway station in Amsterdam and promptly got on what I thought was the midnight train to The Hague, given that we were leaving the next morning for another country, Sweden I think; I got on the wrong train. And there was a Hague Central and there was a Hague 3. I think I got on the Hague 3, which was like being in the outer suburbs of The Hague, and Don meanwhile got on the other train and was searching for me and became extremely worried for my welfare lest I’d fallen into a canal and he had to inform my parents in New Zealand that I’d drowned. I was let off on this railway station pouring with rain, I had no raincoat, walked back to the hotel and there was a message under the door, ‘Please ring me when you get in, I’m very concerned, da-da-da-da’. And it just showed he had enormous concern for his

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staff. Even during the Salisbury Affair when I was working really – I remember working 20 hours on the first day, he phoned me at home to say, ‘Look, is there anything I can do? You’ve worked for 48 hours straight. Have a night off, other people can do this’. So Don could be moody, he could be broody, but he was fiercely loyal to his staff. He could be touchy, but he was also extremely considerate as well.

Just on the uranium, what was the upshot of that whole – was there an agreement that was signed by some of these people who went to it?

No, they kept going. We came back and he announced that the thing – there’s no doubt that he was concerned about the Labor Party splitting on the issue, and of course then came back to Parliament to report on the issue and report on our trip and then he collapsed in Parliament. And I went to the hospital with him.

Right, okay. You mentioned earlier on Don had lots of ideas. Do you know where he got these from, was it staff, or you mentioned the Policy Division – – –?

I think some of the ideas were Don’s, some – like all of us – he pinched ideas from other countries: ‘Why can’t we pilot that here in Australia?’ Staff ideas, Policy Division ideas. I think the Policy Division was good at bowling ideas up to him. Some were his own. He had a kind of a wide and discursive group of people. At Don’s house there might be Rudolf Nureyev or Cleo Laine – he had this extraordinary circle of people. Phillip Adams was very close to him; in fact, Phillip should be spoken to.

Yes, I’ve talked to him.

You’ve done him? Yes. Phillip, by the way, will be announced at Don’s party (the Tenth Anniversary of his death) as the Chair of the National Centre for Social Innovation.

Oh, really? Amazing.

Yes.

Mike RANN

Good work, terrific. You mentioned some of these important people; what about the industry people, because that's an area we haven't tracked down yet, but there were some --.

He had a quite good relationship with Menz.

Was it Christopher – no, that's the Art Gallery guy.

I think he got on pretty well with the Simpson Pope guy – still around.

Uhrig?

Uhrig, John Uhrig, even though he was quite conservative.

Yes.

I think it's fairly true to say that he was treated with great suspicion by people. I think, by the way, the Dunstan bashing and Dunstan – he was either loved or hated, he really polarised people, and during the process of Adele's illness he got absolutely sick and tired of hearing bizarre rumours, to the point where he called a news conference, against my and everyone's advice. He came in one day and said to Graham Maguire, an economic adviser/researcher, 'I want you to go through the Bible and find allusions to the Babel of Tongues', or some damn thing, 'and about how un-Christian it is that people are spreading false rumours'. And we thought this was a bit odd, and he then called in all of the bishops, archbishops and the Greek Orthodox Archbishop, who arrived carrying a 'crook', and then gave them this lecture about how there was this invidious and evil gossip – there was this evil of malice around in Adelaide about him and his wife and him and his sexuality. And then he did this extraordinary news conference where he said, 'There are rumours being circulated that I am involved in bizarre sexual practices. There are rumours that I'm suffering from mental illness. There are rumours that I'm basically having electric shock treatment and I'm sort of wheeled out only for news conferences by my press secretary, da-da-da', and his knee was going up and down. The journalists were absolutely stunned by this, and the pressure on him that year was extraordinary.

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You mentioned earlier on his 30-second grabs for television. How would you rate him as a media performer?

He was very melodramatic. Neville Wran and he were the two people who understood television and the power of television before anyone else. Tom Playford would have one press conference a week for the *'Tiser* and the ABC. Don knew that, because *The Advertiser* and News Limited loathed him, that he had to communicate to people through television. In those days, he'd do a 20-minute news conference, as I do, and he'd get 30 seconds on television, and he used to lament this. But these days – it then went to about 20 seconds when John Bannon started to 15, 12 seconds the time Bannon left; it's now about five seconds and you get dopes come up to you and say, 'I saw you on TV last night. Why didn't you say this?', thinking that the five seconds they used was all that you said that day. But he was the master of getting – if you checked the TV news that night, instinctively the message out of the 20 minutes was the same 30 seconds on each television station. It was the same with Neville Wran. So he was able to punch through and get a message across, and he was extremely dramatic and melodramatic, which helped. He was great at doing indignation as well as passion.

Right, yes – keep some of the people on the run.

Yes.

See some of those interviews – – –.

I remember, as an example, the day that the Salisbury demonstration outside was. He was pacing up and down in his office and I said, 'Are you okay?' and he said, 'I feel like Horatio on the bridge fighting the forces of darkness'. There were often these kind of allusions. And he did feel that people were out to get him, and I think later on, after he retired he almost relished their enmity towards him because he threatened the cold citadels of privilege. This became an enduring comfort to him.

And just the working of the Premier's Office, how would you analyse and rate that?

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He'd call staff meetings. He'd often have a red light on, which meant that you couldn't go into his office, and then there'd be a green light which meant you could. He was very close to Stephen Wright, who was his best friend, really. It was very much a collective. Really, it was Barry Hughes, Steve Wright, me, Bruce Guerin and Graham Maguire were the kind of key staffers, where there was a kind of A team and B team – I guess there generally is – and we worked together on things.

Don gave me permission, when he was not contactable, if I was being rung by journalists, to issue things in his name, which I'd often check with someone and there'd be two of us would agree on something and I'd then ring him: 'I think you should know I've told *The Advertiser* this', if I couldn't find him. If not, he would dictate over the phone and I had a sort of bug in my phone that I could record from. I'd ring him in the morning when the news and if you put in some criticism his voice would be tremulous with anger about it. So he took things very personally, and I think that's why it took a real toll on his health. I think the job did take a real toll on his health.

Was there any sense of order in what was going on? Like would you meet early in the week and 'This is what we're going to do over the week', or was it – – –?

There were staff meetings but it wasn't like what we have every day here at eight-thirty. It wasn't quite as set as that, from memory.

Just there was some sort of agenda, but things'd come up.

Various of us would go into different meetings. We'd have the program would be in advance and I would go in and see him a couple of times a day. Also there was one that I always thought was a mystery, it had 'Studio' on it when I first started, 'Studio', and I found out that actually meant American Health Studio, he used to go and work out with Steve Wright pumping iron. There's quite a funny picture of – he got the rest of us down there a couple of times but the rest of us weren't keen.

The other thing that was interesting, he used to have – I should mention this – that he'd use the tea break to meet with his staff. So rather than eat at Parliament we'd be invited to join him at Decca's Place or the Ceylon Hut or Asio's or the

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Magic Flute, various places, and we'd have these kind of jam sessions in restaurants where we'd talk about the program ahead.

Interesting. Just looking at Don in various dimensions: one is he's the Premier of the State and then he's also the Leader of the Labor Party and then he's also an MP, and that's obviously like the work you do. How would you rate him as, say, the Premier of a state?

It was one of the great privileges of my life working for him, and his whole thing was that a small state like South Australia could stand head and shoulders above the crowd, that there was a cringe in South Australia and a kind of an eastern envy – which still exists – and that we had to break out of it, we had no reason to be. And during his premiership – you asked about inputs – mainly because it was what Clive Jenkins described, that he was a 'beacon light in the night of Australian ignorance', and therefore the people who – the Whitlam Government had gone – came from other places, people like Jane Lomax-Smith and I came from other countries to be, in a sense, part of the Dunstan Experiment. There was a real feeling that a small state could be a leader, that we were a laboratory for social change and that we wanted to be a part of it. For me, the sadness of the time I worked with him, I mentioned Adele, but it was also his clearly-deteriorating health and also deteriorating mood. There was the book that he knew was coming on the Salisbury Affair by Stewart Cockburn; there was the *Grossly improper* book by Ryan and McEwen that he knew was coming; there was the whole Ceruto episode.

I could tell you – and this is sort of out of place – but I could tell you a bit about his resignation, would that be – – –?

Yes, sure.

Because I was probably more involved in that than anybody else.

Right, yes.

What happened was he went to Calvary, he collapsed in Parliament, we took him into his office, David Tonkin, the Leader of the Opposition being a doctor came over and offered assistance and said we should take him to – and David Tonkin was a very nice man – and we took him to Calvary Hospital. The one thing I can't

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remember was why it was Calvary. I think it was his idea, or maybe it was his doctor, I don't know. And then we went to Calvary. And he had spoken to me on the uranium trip, in the plane on the way back – on the way out, he talked to me about loss in his life. He talked about Adele and he talked about other love affairs, he talked about a Greek actress that he'd fallen in love with who was then arrested by the military junta and that while he was Premier he went overseas to Greece to negotiate to get her out of jail and did, and when he got her out of jail he took her back to her village and was given a hero's welcome. None of this got into the media because no-one knew about it, and that's the difference today: it's constant contact. And then she told him that she'd fallen in love in jail with this other man and Don was heartbroken and went off to Sweden. And then he talked about another woman that he loved who was, I think, the daughter of Diamond Jim McClelland, the former Federal Labor Minister and then Judge, was an actress, was very, very beautiful, and that I think she preceded Adele, but he'd still – – –. And he went to see her – in fact, I was in the car – and he went to visit her and she told him that she was about to go off and get married and Don came back to the car in tears. And so he talked about love and loss. He also talked on that trip away that one day he would retire, but he didn't want to retire yet, and he was talking incredibly intimately, and he talked about living in France or Italy for a year to clear the air and maybe learning Italian or French, which of course is what he did at Perugia.

But on the way back he talked much more positively about the future, so all of this conspiracy theory that Don was going to retire, he was going to quit because of the scandal that would be generated by the Ryan and McEwen book and all this sort of stuff – – –. He started telling me that he was going to go to China and he wanted me to accompany him to China, and he thought that China was going to be the way of the future, the rising giant – this is January '79 – and that we should embrace China and that we should embrace Asia much more. And he said that, 'This year we're going to introduce true industrial democracy into the South Australian Public Service so that we can be an exemplar, a template, for industry'. And then he talked about the Ohu Scheme and he talked about, yes, going overseas, and that that would be middle of the year and he wanted me to be on that trip. He also talked about my

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own political future and he said to me, 'Are you going to go back to New Zealand? You should stay here, da-da-da-da', and I said to him, jokingly – I remember what I said – I said, 'Yeah, I think I want your job', and then he laughed and said, 'That sounds like a good idea'.

What happened was that after he went to hospital I got a phone call from Stephen Wright saying, 'Don needs to see you and I alone'. I can't remember whether Bruce Guerin [was there], he may have been there, but there was a small group, and we went to Calvary and he told us he was resigning the next morning. I was absolutely shocked. I was absolutely shattered and tried to talk him out of it, and he said his doctor had told him that he wasn't up to it, that he was in danger of having a cerebral haemorrhage because his blood pressure was just raging, and I said, 'Well, what's going to happen?' And he said, 'Hugh Hudson will be Premier. Des is not up to it, Des is sick. Des has got this rheumatoid arthritis' – and he'd spoken to Des, I think he'd had a brief meeting with Des and Virgo – and that Des had accepted the fact that, even though Des and Virgo couldn't stand Hudson, that it would have to be Hugh and that Des would be an interim premier until things were sorted out but then there'd be a Caucus meeting and Hugh would be Premier. Then he started talking about staff and I said, 'Well, I'd like to work for Jack'. I was very close to Jack Wright, the Minister for Labour. And he said, 'No, Mike, I know you'd like to work for Jack but you have to work for Hugh, maybe as an executive assistant, but work for Hugh so that we can keep going with all of our projects. You need to be the person who's pushing the Dunstan projects', and in a sense a link to him. So he dictated a press release about Adele and the toll that had taken on him, I went back to Parliament House to pick up some gear and then to go home, I was very upset. I was in Don's outer office and I heard noise in the inner office and I opened the door and there was Des and Geoff Virgo and Tom Loftus, Des's Press Secretary, and others. I think a fair bit of alcohol had been consumed. Virgo was trying to convince Des to run. Des said, 'Look, I've already told Don and I've told Hugh that I'm not running, I'm not up to it with my health', and Virgo was pleading with him.

The next morning I went in early, I'd typed up Don's announcement, and my job was to go to Calvary, and I remember saying to Don – showing him what I'd typed

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up, which he said was correct, he was in his shortie pyjamas I think it was and dressing-gown – and I said to him – because he was still fairly wobbly on his feet – ‘Do you need a wheelchair?’ And he said, ‘No, I don’t. He said, ‘This is not Hollywood and you’re not Cecil B. de Mille’ or something, and so he walked to the press conference and announced that he was going, and what he said, the was almost word-for-word what was in the press release. He’d been composing it in his head. I then went straight from there back to State Administration to the eleventh floor, and there was a Caucus meeting on, and the first thing that was said to me by Tom Loftus was, ‘Whatever you heard last night didn’t happen’, or something. I thought he was talking about Virgo trying to convince him to run and him arguing against it; but what had happened is that Virgo had finally convinced Des and Des had decided to make a bid and caught [Hudson] totally by surprise. And so Des became the Premier.

Don wasn’t happy about it, he didn’t think that Des was the right person, although he had loyalty to Des for being a stalwart Deputy. And then of course there was the big race for Deputy between Hugh Hudson and Jack Wright [in] which they then compared who had promised them the ‘yes’ vote and some of them had overlapped, and one sat in the other’s office while they rang and said, in front of the other one, ‘You did pledge your vote to me?’ Caught a couple of people out, or at least one. So that was an interesting story.

Too right, yes. Amazing.

END OF INTERVIEW.