

**Mike RANN (part 2)**

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**This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation interviewing Mr Mike Rann, Premier of South Australia. The topic is Mr Rann's work with Don Dunstan as press secretary and his observations on Don's relationships with the media. The date today is the 10<sup>th</sup> February 2009 and this is part two of the interview with Mr Mike Rann.**

**Thanks very much, Mike. If we can continue our discussion about your recollections of Don Dunstan, in our first interview we were talking about Don's sense of loss and we talked about Adele Koh and some other matters. Was there anything you wanted to add there?**

After the loss of Adele, Don really poured himself massively into work and there was the Newcastle Lecture, there was a whole series of major speeches. And, as I mentioned, while we were overseas in Europe on the uranium trip, he was absolutely talking about the agenda ahead for the next few years, about going to China, about engagement with China. But certainly on that trip to London, which went via Bombay, he really talked quite poignantly about the losses in his life and also about betrayal. He talked about his love for a Greek actress.

**Yes, that's right, yes. It wasn't Melina Mercouri, was it?**

It wasn't, no. But how that he'd fell in love with her and she'd been imprisoned by the junta and how he'd negotiated to get her out of jail. It seemed amazing to me that you could, as Premier, fly off overseas for a couple of weeks without any media coverage or anyone knowing about it and had her release. And then she told him that she had met someone – I think, I guess, in jail. And he talked quite a lot about loss and he also talked quite a bit about betrayal, and that's one thing he talked about his relationship with Judith Pugh –

**Yes, that's right.**

– his relationship with Judith, and of course his friendship with Judith's husband, the painter Clifton Pugh who painted that famously broody and moody picture of Don. But he talked about betrayals and I think there was a bit of a pattern in that with Don, that Don would have – Don could I think be sometimes criticised for poor judgment

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in people. He often trusted people too quickly and then felt very let down by them on one hand, but on the other hand that sometimes people who'd been incredibly loyal to him and that he'd included in his closest circle, so they might say something wrong or he'd heard something that someone else claimed they said and sometimes it would be over-inflated, and then he would suddenly cut off relations with those people. And I've heard this from many friends of Don's, and that suddenly – they were invited to the birthday parties every September and then suddenly they were excluded. And sometimes Don could judge people very harshly if he felt that they were in any way disloyal, and sometimes he virtually axed friendships with people who were in fact fiercely loyal and were incredibly hurt by that process. Other friends would sometimes have to explain to him that in fact this person wasn't being critical of him. I think Laurie Oakes famously described him as being 'touchy'; he could be touchy and often there were friendships that were casualties, and he often – sometimes perceived slights that weren't slights. But he often talked about betrayal and people who had betrayed him in his life.

**In that, did he ever talk about his childhood and having to live away from his parents, who I think stayed in Fiji for a long time?**

Yes, and he was at St Peter's. I think there's a whole lot of insecurities. People often find it hard to contemplate that Don was incredibly shy, painfully shy. Don would be a wallflower at a party and people who saw him on TV where he was dramatic, sometimes melodramatic, theatrical, they were "performances". Every news conference was a performance. He used to go into his bathroom and he had lights around the mirror as in the theatre and applied makeup. He would come out and put on a performance, as he would with a speech, and then often afterwards he was quietly exhausted or spent, particularly in the last year or so when his health wasn't well.

But in terms of small talk, whereas Des Corcoran was brilliant in a bar, gladhanding people, shouting them beers – Des would walk around the bar. I remember this one occasion and having bought a round of beers for people and

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having been introduced to twenty-five would then go individually and say goodbye to them by name. Quite an extraordinary ability. People like Des and Jack Wright and Geoff Virgo were terrific in that thing. Don would often be *painful* in those situations. So he was quintessentially a performer who was best in front of a crowd or best in front of the television or on radio but in terms of a dinner party he'd often speak the least, even though he probably had the most to say. And sometimes people took that as him being standoffish; he wasn't at all. He was actually a very gentle person, but he was also a very shy person. And I travelled with him a lot, I've travelled with him around the world, and he would go for massively long periods of time without speaking. He would often sit there on a plane and he would be talking with his lips without making a noise – his lips would move as he was thinking about things, and often that was a sign when he was deeply troubled about things. He was very easily hurt, didn't have the kind of resilience – – –. For me, he's defined by the word 'courage', but Don would take slights personally, that he would read. Someone would criticise him in a letter to the editor, just as they do me and everybody else in politics. I just ignore them and don't even bother reading them, but Don would insist on an immediate reply. He'd get agitated about something that no-one else would have noticed – you know, it might be on page fifty-five – I'd get a phone call in the morning and you could feel his incredible anger coming down the phone as he dictated a response to something that he perceived as a slight. And I think that side of Don perhaps wasn't known. He used to be constantly phoning editors, constantly phoning managing directors of radio stations or editors of newspapers or proprietors of newspapers to complain about coverage. So, whilst he was a person of incredible courage, he was a person who did not have the hide of a rhino.

**Did he have any sense, that you picked up, of people lacking appreciation of what he was doing and that that might be a facet?**

The scene after the dismissal of Salisbury, which I talked about, when he was pacing the floor and there was fifteen thousand people outside and I said, 'How are you

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feeling, Don?', because he looked very agitated, he said, 'Like Horatius on the bridge fighting the forces of darkness': I think Don had that kind of image of himself and that he was always in battle and he was always embattled.

**You mentioned his relationships with the media, particularly the senior management there. Was he still learning as far as the media went, that is you had a role as press secretary, media adviser; were there things that you could tell him that he would listen to, or did he just ---?**

He did, but sometimes he'd have a – I think I mentioned about the calling in Graham Maguire to go and get material from the Bible, did I tell you that?

**No, I don't recall that.**

Well, one day he had heard over the weekend a series of slights against him, and it was the classic rumour mill about homosexuality, it was about alleged illnesses, allegations of psychiatric illnesses, and he'd just had enough and he came storming into the office and during a staff meeting he ordered his researcher, Graham Maguire, to go and get material from the Bible about the evil, the sin of malicious rumour-mongering. He talked about the Babel of tongues. We wondered what was going on. Anyway, he despatched Graham straight away and Graham somehow managed to get a Bible and went through the Bible, I think consulted others, and came in with a series of quotes. Then Don called us in and said that he wanted to summon all of the leaders of the Christian churches, so suddenly we had the Catholic Archbishop, the Anglican Archbishop, the Greek Orthodox, the Uniting Church Moderator – I always remember the Greek Orthodox Bishop or Archbishop coming in holding his staff or "crook" – and Don gave them a lecture about the Babel of tongues and asked them through their sermons the coming weekends to preach against this Babel of tongues that was undermining leadership, undermining public officials, through falsehoods that were being spread for the worst political reasons.

Then he insisted on calling a news conference about it, against everyone's advice. But I remember when he was agitated his knee would go up and down, his right knee. And he called a press conference in which he said, 'There are rumours being

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spread about me that are invidious', and he talked about rumours of homosexuality, of bizarre sexual practices, even rumours that he was in psychiatric care having electric shock treatment and he was sort of wheeled out for press conferences by his press secretary. We thought this was highly ill-advised politically, to just basically ventilate rumours; but he was genuinely angry and had had enough.

Then of course there was the Ryan and McEwen book – I don't know if I talked much about that.

**A bit, yes.**

Well, I remember being phoned up and it being said – which they then subsequently denied – that they had got this information about Don. I remember the words were, 'Which would do unending damage to him', because I remember writing it down, and then they said that they'd gone with the manuscript to Rupert Murdoch, that he had 'blood in his teeth' was the words. I'd never actually heard that saying before and I remember writing that down. I went in and told Don immediately about this book and their call. And subsequently, by the way, when Don mentioned that, they denied that this was ever said. But I think that this contributed to his feeling of being under siege.

That year he'd sacked the Police Commissioner and there'd been an extraordinary reaction. His popularity slumped from unbelievable heights down to fifty-six per cent – which, by the way, in political science terms is absolutely fine; most people would *like* to have fifty-six per cent. But this encouraged a kind of a siege mentality. Then the coming of the book, Adele's dying and the request to me to stop media writing about it: I think this all encouraged a siege mentality. Then he was put under pressure by people who wanted to change the ALP's policy ban on uranium mining because there had been a giant discovery of uranium at Roxby Downs. So I think that there was an almost inevitability about what happened. His physical health was deteriorating. I think that he became quite depressed.

**Earlier on, in the first discussion with you, you talked about polling and Don Dunstan, this different view about him. He was out there far ahead and wasn't**

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**overly-concerned about what the population thought; his role was to convince them.**

It's kind of like bullshit theory by a whole lot of academic wankers, some of whom you probably interviewed, who – and I want to be quoted as saying 'academic wankers' – which I read about and hear sometimes who say, 'Don Dunstan was the sort of politician who didn't believe in media grabs, didn't believe in polling'. Don was the *master* of the thirty-second grab. He knew that he couldn't rely on the newspapers; he had to convey his message through television. He was about the first politician in Australia to realise that. And he also knew that when he'd do a twenty-minute press conference, that he had to in some way, by using drama and eloquence, punch through messages like telegrams to tell a bigger story and that, by sending a series of telegrams at each news conference, you would eventually form a sentence that would then be part of a conversation and a dialogue with the public over time. You can always judge the effectiveness of a politician's communication skills by watching the television at night, and if all of the different channels who've all got twenty minutes of interviews to choose from the same thirty seconds, then you know that that's the master of communication. And he, and Neville Wran later, were absolutely the masters of the thirty-second grab. He used to say he thought it was invidious, he used to say that it was diminishing to politics, that he could only get thirty seconds up, and it went in John Bannon's time to *twenty*-second grabs, then by the end of Bannon's time to fifteen-second grabs, and now on some of the commercials it's four to five seconds and so it's becoming harder and harder. It's much more the reporter's commentary, with vision to support that commentary, and then there's a brief grab from the proponents or the opponents on a particular issue. But Don was the master of the art of the thirty-second grab, and he was also the person who hired Rod Cameron from Australian National Opinion Polls to do polling before elections. Don was one of the first Australian politicians to use opinion polls.

And this is this other theory. I mean, Don was incredibly courageous, but he also knew that he had to be in touch with the people that he led. It was this kind of notion that Don was elected and then every decision was made on the basis of principle, not

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politics: Don would *laugh* if he heard that. Basically, he knew that he had to argue a case but you have to bring people with you. Don's big message to me was that it was all very well getting elected and then doing lots of good things and then going out in a blaze of glory and then having it all undone; but the key thing was to get elected, then re-elected and then re-elected again so that you could in a sustained way enact reform but bring people with you.

One of the things that does concern me is that a great disservice is often done to Don by those who try to romanticise his legacy. When I spoke on – I'll give you a copy of the speech – when I spoke at the tenth anniversary of his death last Friday night, Don would not want us to be looking back. His whole message was about we all had to continually challenge our own assumptions, including challenging whether the policy solutions of the 1970s would apply now. He would be pleased with what we're doing on climate change, pleased with what we're doing on social inclusion, which is a different way of getting change and social justice rather than throwing money at things through social welfare payouts. Don's message was an insistent summons for us to look forward, not look back, and I think that some of the people who celebrate – rightly celebrate – his memory do not do justice to his legacy, which is about moving forwards, not backwards, lamenting the 70s.

**In reflecting on his intellectual power and the way he presented things and then got things through, were there any particular elements of the reform process that you've thought about and picked up?**

One of the things, I strongly and closely worked with him on was Aboriginal issues. In fact, I remember going to his house when he was playing Chopin and reading my draft to him for the Calwell Lecture which announced Pitjantjatjara land rights and I remember him saying that there were two split infinitives but that he liked the speech. He said, 'You know, this hasn't been approved by Cabinet', and then he said, 'And Hugh Hudson won't like it, but', he said, 'fuck it, we'll do it anyway'.

Now, one thing: did I talk to you about what happened about the night of his resignation?

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**No, not yet, no.**

Okay. Well, I'll tell you about that because that's really interesting.

**You mentioned would he get this sort of thing through Hudson and others in Cabinet. Did he actually talk about how he got people to change their mind or come along with him?**

If you talk to John Bannon and Chris Sumner I'm sure they'll tell you that Don would come in, would give a bit of an overview of what he wanted. He'd often fall asleep – and I think that was a bit of the experience he had in Victoria as well when he was CEO of Tourism – and then there'd generally be a row between Virgo and Hudson, who just could not get on. And of course Corcoran would always side with Virgo and Don would wake up and then slam the desk and say, 'I'm sick and tired of this', and then put on a bit of a turn and then leave the Cabinet room. I mean, Don got his own way and there was nothing democratic much about things. The preselections, people criticise the factional process today and machine politics. In those days, I remember being in Don's room near the end of 1978 where he'd written these names on a table. One of them was George Apap, one of them was Lyn Arnold, and others. I think one of them was Kevin Hamilton. And he'd ring up Geoff Virgo and say, 'These are the people that I want for the next round of preselections. There's this young man, Lyn Arnold, I think we should put him out in Salisbury, he's got a big future'. And then Don would ring the UTLC<sup>1</sup> or the Party<sup>2</sup> office to ALP Secretary Howard O'Neill and tell them what the ticket was going to be. So the machine really was Don, Geoff Virgo, not so much Des on Party matters; on the machinery of government Des, but on party matters it was Don, Geoff Virgo, Jim Toohey, Howard O'Neill and the UTLC Secretary at that stage I think was probably Bob Gregory. But essentially it was about five people would decide the

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<sup>1</sup> UTLC – United Trades and Labour Council.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* Australian Labor Party (ALP).

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preselections. It was a small leadership “machine faction” and was known as ‘The Machine’. It was actually known as The Machine.

**And where did the Party come in on policy issues?**

Don really got much of his own way. Don was incredibly spooked by when he learned in London about the meeting that had been held behind his back over uranium and I think we talked about that last time.

**A bit, yes, Peter Duncan.**

Peter Duncan and others. He was incredibly upset again by this betrayal and he wanted to know who was involved. And I think I might have mentioned that the group that accompanied him on the trip prepared a statement for Don which was a softening of his “play it safe” anti-mining position on uranium, but we talked quite a bit about it on the way home; and another statement was done which reaffirmed the 1977 Party policy.

**So are you saying there was a shift because Don had heard there was trouble?**

No, I think that’s a bit unfair on him. I think he thought about it. The people who went with him, which was Bruce Guerin and Ben Dickinson and Wilmshurst – well, certainly Dickinson and Wilmshurst – were strongly encouraging him, I think, and Max Scriven, to change the policy or soften the policy, and it was like calling for it to be reviewed because of changes in technologies and international safeguards. But Don genuinely believed that those issues had not been resolved, and so a draft had been prepared for him, but that draft that was prepared for him was not the statement he gave when he got off the plane in Adelaide.

**Well, we’ve talked a lot about some of the history in Don’s later years and his stresses and strains on him. Do you want to talk a bit about his resignation now, retirement?**

Yes. Look, Don should have had some time off after Adele’s death. He came back from a two week break in a very agitated state with an agenda for the future rather than easing back into it, and there was absolutely no reason why there needed to be

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such frenetic activity. But his health continued to deteriorate and on the trip overseas, I think I mentioned, he went to a Harley Street specialist. He was constantly falling asleep while we were overseas. He looked terrible, he said he felt terrible, he had this inflammation of the testicles and was walking along like John Wayne. He came back into Parliament after our return from overseas and kept telling us that he'd had feeling faint, a couple of times he was sort of rocking on his feet. But he went really straight back into Parliament, and it was while he was on his feet in Parliament that he collapsed, was taken to his room – I think David Tonkin, the Leader of the Opposition, came to offer assistance – went to Calvary Hospital, was in Calvary Hospital, and then I was asked by Stephen Wright to go and see Don at the hospital. Don told me that he was resigning the next day. I was very distressed, tried to talk him out of it, and he said, 'Look, I've made up my mind'. He then dictated a press release – I didn't do shorthand, so I wrote it down laboriously – and then told me what was going to happen, and he told me that Hugh Hudson would take over as Premier because Des was not up to it, health-wise, and he told me that this had been sorted out. There'd been a small group come to see him. And he told me that it was really important for his agenda to continue, and he was particularly talking about industrial democracy and some other things, and he said that he knew that I'd probably want to work for Jack Wright because Jack and I were mates and Phil Bentley worked for Jack, was a friend; but he said that he wanted me to stay on and have a senior position on Hugh Hudson's staff, maybe as even an executive assistant, so that the Dunstan Agenda could continue. Anyway, I had to go away and prepare this release, it was all top-secret, there would be a Caucus meeting, Caucus would be told the next day so no-one was to know about that, and that as soon as Caucus was over he would have a news conference – well, he would have a news conference during the Caucus, while Caucus was on, from memory – and then Des would come out and announce that Hugh Hudson was the Premier.

I was very distressed. I went back to Parliament House to Don's office. Don's outer office where I worked was empty but I could hear loud conversation coming

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from Don's room. Des had moved into Don's room and I walked in, I was welcomed, there was a group of people there – I think Des, Geoff Virgo, some of Des's staff, there was a guy called Norm –

**Dalton, yes.**

– and Tom Loftus.

**Tom Loftus, yes.**

And what happened was that Virgo – I'm not sure if Loftus was there, but anyway – Virgo was – everyone had drunk a fair bit and they seemed genuinely emotional. Virgo was trying to talk Des into running rather than letting Hudson be the Leader. I stayed there, had a beer or so, I went home and then my next role – I went into the office, typed up everything, was ready to go – my job was to ring around the media and tell them that there was a major announcement being made at Calvary Hospital, and of course it was the famous press conference with the dressing-gown-and-shortie-pyjamas Don. I said, 'Do you want me to get a wheelchair?' And he said, 'No, this is not Hollywood and you're not Cecil B. deMille'. But he was telling me that he was giddy on his feet. He walked into the news conference, I had handed round the story. The media were going crazy. There was speculation that it might be a resignation. My instructions were not to confirm that or deny it but to make sure that everyone was there, and I remember ringing round and saying, 'Look, I can't tell you what it's about but it's a major announcement', and someone said, 'Well, we're not coming if you don't tell us'. And I said, 'That's fine. But when you miss it you will be going crazy because your Sydney/Melbourne/Canberra correspondents will be saying, "What the fuck are you doing?"' So what happened was that I walked in with him, Steve Wright was there, so was Bruce Guerin and Don did his news conference almost word-for-word the same as the release he'd dictated the night before. He talked about how his health was not well and how it had been affected by the loss of his wife. And the journalists were marvelling that what was on the press release Don had delivered almost word-for-word, because it had been so much in his

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mind, he'd gone through it again. And that was it. And I left, and my job was to go back to the State Administration Centre to the eleventh floor and wait for the arrival of Des and Hugh Hudson.

When I got to the office, the Caucus meeting was still going and I think Tom Loftus said to me, 'Whatever you heard last night, you forget'. I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. And then Des came in and announced that he was the Premier. At first, I thought he was the Acting Premier because I had a press release drawn up announcing Hugh Hudson as Premier and Des as Deputy. And then Des told me to rip that up, that he was the Premier, and that there would be an election for Deputy. Anyway, so what had happened is that Virgo and I think probably Carmel Corcoran had talked Des into running and, because Caucus was totally caught by surprise and was shocked at Dunstan's resignation, they immediately turned to Des, his trusted deputy, and I think Hugh Hudson from memory didn't contest – I'm not sure on that; I don't think so.

But later on there was a ballot for Deputy, was Hugh Hudson versus Jack Wright, and what happened was that Hugh Hudson walked in to see Jack and said, 'Look, I've got the numbers, this is my list', and then Jack showed him his list, and what they noticed was that there was – I won't name the person, but there was one person who was on both lists; otherwise, it was exactly right what they expected. It was a tie. And so what they did, which was a bit naughty, was that with both of them in the room one of them – I think probably Jack – phoned up the MP concerned and said, 'Look, I'm just doing my final numbers, I think I'm almost there. Can I be assured of your vote?' And that person said, 'Absolutely', with Hugh Hudson listening in. And then Hugh grabbed the phone. So that was a little bit of an aside.

But I have to say that, look, I was a very great friend and fan of Des, and Des believed in the ideology of commonsense, but it was quite clear that Des in many ways had resented Don. He'd been the loyal deputy, it was sort of Kennedy and L.B.J., and Des really felt that he'd done a lot of the hard work behind the scenes and that Don was this glamorous intellectual figure, and I think there was quite an

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element of envy and quite a bit of jealousy, and he made various references about Don – there were personal slights about him.

Don was pretty distressed that his choice wasn't supported and he was worried that Des would not pursue his agenda. I was thinking about shifting to Jack again, and again Don told me I had to stay on in Des's office. I kept in touch with him quite a lot and then, because he'd come out of hospital, I'd pop round to see him in Norwood and see if he was okay. But Des then said to me one day that I was Don's spy and all of this sort of stuff and it was very difficult. Don then went overseas – he left Parliament, obviously, because he said that he felt that there would be 'invidious comparisons' – he went to Perugia and I'd ring him occasionally in Perugia. And then of course Des called the election.

And the election story – it's not really part of your brief, I suppose, but it is about the Dunstan Era – Des was brought up to about sixty-five per cent approval ratings, strong lead in the polls, but there was no reason to call an election. There was the 1979 Federal Budget that had been brought down by Fraser and his new Treasurer John Howard. It was expected to be a horror budget, but in fact it wasn't, and when the Budget came down – Des had done some work with the advertising agency because he was considering on calling an early election. Des kept saying he needed a mandate in his own right, he was obsessed that he needed a mandate in his own right because Dunstan had been elected and not him. He could see that he was strong in the polls – in the *published* polls; but there'd been no Labor Party polling whatsoever, and you never, ever call an election without your own intelligence, your own polling, which is much more sophisticated than the horse-race figures in a published poll. So what happened is that Des called a meeting at Parliament House at night after the Budget. The Budget was much more benign than people had expected, but Des told us that he was thinking of calling an election the next day, and he went round the room and most of us – including me – opposed the move. I said, 'Des, it'll look like you've gambled on a bad Budget in which you were going to come out and call an election saying, "Send a message to Canberra against these

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horrors that you've inflicted on the public", but it isn't seen as a bad Budget. It'll look like you've gambled on a bad budget. Hasn't happened, but stuff it, let's go ahead anyway'. Almost a bit like what happened in Western Australia last year with its snap election, which was cantilevered off Troy Buswell being the Leader, but then the Premier, Alan Carpenter went and they called the election anyway. So most of us argued against it.

When we left Parliament that night it was pouring with rain. I remember walking behind Des, going out into the street. The steps of Parliament were incredibly slippery, he slipped and fell and I was ahead of him – I turned around and caught him. I have to say it was hard to hold him up because he was a big man. And then suddenly messengers and other staffers helped me, because I was about to drop him. And if I hadn't caught him there wouldn't have been an election. He went home that night, as I understand it, and he spoke to Virgo and spoke to Carmel, who encouraged him in going ahead and calling an election. The next day he told me that he'd called the Governor in the morning and called an election. We were totally unprepared in policy terms, there was no polling, there was an ad that was called 'Follow a leader, get behind the man', and that was very much about Des's own ego and his feelings of insecurity in relation to Don. Don was in Perugia. He came back and of course saw the loss of the election and after the election talked about weeping for South Australia. I should say that I kept in touch with him a lot over the coming years, saw a lot of him socially.

He got involved in all sorts of ventures: editing the glossy *Pol* magazine, which was pretty much of a disaster because he got a whole lot of people to write articles for him – I wrote one against uranium mining, which was promoted on the front cover. I remember being told, 'You'll get five hundred dollars to do this', and I wasn't really interested in the money anyway – but he asked a lot of other people to do it, and then *Pol* magazine didn't pay people's bills and so there was quite a bit of ill-feeling amongst lots of people who just weren't paid, so that turned out to be a bit of a débâcle. He made the ABC series "The Dunstan Documentaries", some of

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which were very good, about planning and urban development and design, Aboriginal land rights one I think was a good episode. It got mixed reviews. He seemed unsettled.

He wrote the book *Felicia*.<sup>3</sup>, I offered to help him with *Felicia* but I think he dictated it to Anne McMahon, his former secretary. I think his autobiography did him a grave disservice. It was hurriedly put together, captured none of the romance, excitement or the reformer's zeal; it was more like, 'We did this on this day, passed this legislation'. He really did himself a disservice. I'd offered to help him write the uranium, industrial democracy, women's rights, Aboriginal land rights sections, and he said no, he was fine. He told me the name of the book, '*Felicia*', and I remember saying that I thought this was extremely ill-advised, that people would either think or would joke that it was about oral sex. (laughter) He got extremely cross with me over the phone for saying that. I said, 'It should be *Dunstan* by Don Dunstan', but he went ahead anyway and I think it had very poor sales and did not get great acclaim. And so Don seemed unsettled.

He went off to Victoria. I think it was Landeryou, Minister for Tourism, who employed him and convinced John Cain to hire him. The reports from Victoria weren't good, they were saying that Don was falling asleep in meetings, although I think he really enjoyed living in Melbourne. He'd always had a big following in Melbourne. I remember going to Melbourne with him when he was Premier and I remember a poll came out saying that he was their most preferred Premier! And then we opened a tourism office in Melbourne and he was just about mobbed – in fact, going down the street, Melbourne more than anywhere else, people were yelling out, 'Good on you, Don. We wish we had you over here' – incredible support amongst Melbournians. And so that really didn't work out that well, I don't think he got on well with – John Cain was a delightful wowser and Don couldn't be more different. You'd go to a restaurant with John Cain and he'd be drinking milk.

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<sup>3</sup> Dunstan, Don (1981). *Felicia: The Political Memoirs of Don Dunstan*. Griffin Press Limited.

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Then he came back from Melbourne and he was, I think, commissioned by Greg Crafter to do a report on Aboriginal affairs.

**That's correct, yes: community government or something like that.**

Yes, like a local government status for Aboriginal communities. He was very cross when he went up to the Pit Lands and, even though he was the person who had pioneered land rights – although his land rights bill was put on the end of the list by Des and therefore had to wait till David Tonkin to be enacted, somewhat modified – and Don had been part of the campaign, he'd meet with the elders in Victoria Park, sat down with them, there was a big land rights rally in 1980 with him and Gough Whitlam. Gough had given a terrific speech about how people would never drill a hole through the floor of the Sistine Chapel or St Paul's Cathedral or in Mecca or something but these were sacred lands of these people, this was their church, their land and so on; and then Don gave a speech – this is while John Bannon was Leader of the Opposition – gave a speech that was fantastic, amazing speech, and Gough turned to me and said, even though Don was retired, 'This young man will go far' – –. (laughter)

There's one thing that I don't know if I mentioned before, because it's always hard to remember and because I've been speaking to lots of people about Don on Friday night, but while he was in Perugia he was asked to be the Secretary General of Amnesty International and he phoned me from Perugia and said, 'Mike, I need your help. I've been approached to be Secretary General of Amnesty International and I would like you to work for me as my executive assistant. It'll mean you'll have to quit the job with Des, it'll mean that you'll be based in London but there's a lot of travel to New York because of the UN General Assembly'. He said, 'But I need to put together a group of referees and I'm contacting some myself, but I'd like you to phone Gough Whitlam', which I did. And that list of referees included Whitlam; Sir Michael Somare; Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara; Olaf Palme, Prime Minister of Sweden; I'm not sure if it included Kreisky in Austria but that name was mentioned; and he also mentioned Harold Wilson. And he said, 'If you speak to Whitlam will you ask

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him to talk to Somare and Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara?’ – who, funnily enough, Don of course clashed with over the coup in Fiji. But it was only a couple of days later that Don phoned me – I’d spoken to Whitlam – to tell me that it was all off, that his doctor had gone crazy. He told me the doctor said: ‘You’ve just gone through this, you’re in recovery phase, you’re not up to it. It will kill you’. Gough said to me over the phone that he thought Don would be *ideal* for the job with his commitment to human rights, civil rights and civil liberties; his experience as a barrister and as a political leader; his empathy with people from other nationalities and indigenous peoples; and also his sense of theatre and dramatics. So Whitlam thought it was the perfect job for Don, and I must say I did too, and, rather than try to discourage him, strongly encouraged him and absolutely would have jumped at the chance to work with him again in that field. I don’t think that’s ever been revealed publicly, ever.

**Interesting.**

No-one would have mentioned it to you, would they?

**The only thing I recall is Don was involved with Amnesty International, possibly as local president or something like that.**

Yes, but not the world head of it.

**But not the appointment, yes.**

Then, of course, what happened was Don was very upset, having been a champion of the Pitjantjatjara, having been champion of Aboriginal land rights, that when he went up on that local government thing the Aboriginal people wouldn’t meet with him, and I think you should talk to Graham Nill[?].

**Graham Nill, yes, I know Graham.**

Graham travelled with him, he was his sort of ADC on the inquiry, doing the leg work. That’s my memory, and that they camped in the bush. I think one night, I think it might have been over Maralinga way, the tent was blown down by these gale force winds and a sandstorm and I think Don lost his trousers and it was this kind of

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running around at night in the pitch dark trying to get his lost strides. I think there'd be some nice stories from Graham Nill about that.

**Yes, interesting.**

Then after Greg Crafter, Terry Hemmings became Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and then I became Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in November of '89, and that report came out then and there wasn't a great deal of enthusiasm. There were a couple of bits of it that I embraced, which was the setting up a business advisory group for Aboriginal people, which included, funnily enough, the guy who was the boss at Roxby Downs at the time, but also a range of other people who were there to – businesses small and large- to help Aboriginal communities set up business and help them become more business and financially-aware. There's a number of things that we did.

But then suddenly I stopped hearing from Don. Couldn't understand why. And then – we lost the State Bank Election – and I became Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and I think it was while I was Deputy Leader of the Opposition that I was called round to Don's place to tell me that he'd been cross with me because he anticipated that he would be asked to do a second report on Aboriginal affairs and which he would be paid for, and that this didn't happen. And he felt I'd done him an injustice, considering our friendship and mutual loyalty, that he couldn't understand, all this. But I said, 'Don, I've been incredibly loyal to you'. In fact, on numbers of occasions in his retirement he'd ring me up as if I was a staffer – 'Can you write me a speech on this? Can you write me this?' – sometimes with no notice, even though I had other things to do, and I always delivered it. And I said, 'Don, I can't operate by ESP. No-one told me anything about a second report. *You've* never told me anything about *wanting* to do a second report'. So this came as an incredible surprise, that he'd been sort of brooding on what he felt was yet another friend had slighted him, and I guess that's kind of almost a vignette of – but then after that it was reasonably okay, but never as close as it had been. And that tended to be Don's story.

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I understand Judith Pugh's written a book –

**Yes.**

– which talks about the baby and getting pregnant and all this.

I mean, he talked about the affair, Judith losing the baby, and certainly some of the things that she said in the book equated with things that he'd told me on the uranium trip, on the plane to Bombay.

The last time I saw him was a few weeks before his death, when there was a lunch at Maggie Beer's restaurant. Were you at that?

**I was at one of them, yes. Was that when Gough was there, or was that another one?**

I think Gough was at that, yes. And there were ex-staffers and people there. There might have been two parties, actually. But anyway, there was one that was not long, a few weeks before he died. And he sat next to me. I wasn't one of the speakers; I think Chris Schacht was a speaker, I think Neal Blewett was a speaker.

**Did Tony Baker speak? He spoke at some stage, maybe not that one.**

I can't remember Tony Baker. And what happened was that while I was sitting next to him – and of course at that stage I'm Labor Leader, in my second term as Leader of the Opposition; Don, by the way, had recorded a radio ad for me for the '97 election and phoned me the following week to congratulate me on the electoral outcome because we got a nine and a half per cent swing – I asked him whether, should I be elected as Premier at the coming election, and speaking in the knowledge that he wasn't going to be around much longer, whether I could have his permission to name the Festival Centre Playhouse after him, which he agreed, and said that would be very nice. And I also said that I intended to establish a film festival, an international film festival, that would commission films rather than just screen films, and I asked permission if we could have the Dunstan Awards, which we've done. In fact, my first act as Premier was to ban privatisation – which I also promised him I would do – any further privatisations. The first signature I put on anything as

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Premier was a sort of decree, sent to all ministers and departments, banning any future privatisations, and I had him very much in mind given his opposition and his support in *my* opposition to the selling of ETSA,<sup>4</sup> which he thought was an absolute disgrace, getting rid of a strategic asset. But one of my first public functions was to go down to the Playhouse and to announce that it was being renamed the Dunstan Playhouse. I think it's really important for you to talk to Mary O'Kane, have you done that?

**No, not yet.**

She and Vini and others, but particularly those two, played an important role in nursing him in that final year, and he lived next door to Mary and I think Mary became quite close to him. I think she'd give you quite a different perspective. I know that during the 2006 election Don's partner, Stephen, joined with the Democrats who were dressed in safari suits and announced that Don Dunstan would not have voted Labor in that election. I guess that was Don's final betrayal by someone that he loved, who claimed to love him. The thought of Don voting for the Australian Democrats, who got wiped out in that election because they'd totally lost touch with the people of this State and were on about fripperies, it was just an absolute outrage. But I actually believe that that press conference, where they claimed Don's heritage – and really the heritage was with Don Chipp, not with Don Dunstan – did the Democrats enormous damage. They lost both their seats that were up for grabs. Annihilated. And the fact that Don's partner was involved in that is shameful, in my view, given that Don was all about the Labor Party and was a great supporter of mine personally, and encouraged me from the age of twenty-five to go into politics in South Australia and not go back to New Zealand, and was strongly supportive of me when I became Leader of the Labor Party. So I have to say that's something that has caused resentment. And what had happened is that Stephen had lobbied us to change the law to make Don's superannuation retrospective in his

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<sup>4</sup> ETSA – Electricity Trust of South Australia.

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name. Subsequently we've changed the law; but to make it retrospective, an Act about one person, would have been an absolute outrage. I'm happy for all that to go on the record.

**Okay. Just in reflecting about Don, we know about his legacy for this State; what about nationally? (break in recording)**

Look, I think that Don's impact nationally perhaps has not been fully appreciated. Basically, what he did was make South Australia a test bed for policies and ideas. So equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, gay rights, consumer protection laws, a whole range of initiatives that were tested here by his Government, put in first and then later on adopted elsewhere. A decade later, most of the other – not all, but most of the other States had enacted similar legislation by Labor Governments, but they did so under the cover that the advance guard, the Spitfire out front, was Dunstan. And that of course was his huge legacy, that he was out in front and leading, and other States could then demonstrate that it hadn't caused the end of civilisation to have a Lotteries Commission or to have gay law reform or to enact rape-in-marriage laws and so on.

However, I think there was even bigger. He changed the Labor Party. Don was the seminal force in ending the White Australia Policy. I said publicly, I said the other night, that in my view, that in terms of a modern Labor Party – Dunstan realised that you couldn't just rely on your union base, on your working-class base. You look at the election in 1977. Two elections, back-to-back, in South Australia: one a national election and one in South Australia. There was about a ten per cent difference. There was a ten per cent Dunstan factor. Dunstan taught the Labor Party nationally that on top of our working-class base we had to win over people in the arts, intellectuals, public service leaders, and even some – but not very many – business leaders; environmentalists, professional people, professional women. Dunstan taught the Labor Party that you needed that extra factor. And of course with the declining union base even more so, that you just couldn't rely on your working-class base; you had to still keep in touch with your working-class base, and that's

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why he needed the Jack Wrights and the Virgos and the Corcorans, but you actually needed to build a bridge to new frontiers of political support and devise policies that would appeal to them. I mean, a lot of the things that Don did had no appeal, in fact *negative* appeal, to working-class voters, like Aboriginal Land Rights,, but they trusted him with the basics like education and health.

I still think that Dunstan, more than anyone else, was the architect of multiculturalism. Don had seen it for himself in Village Norwood and no-one worked their electorate harder. He had a marginal seat. Most leaders have safe seats. And he had a marginal seat and worked it so unbelievably hard. He engaged with the Italian community. That was the other group. He absolutely engaged with the Greeks and Italians and other groups. And what he saw in the 1950s and '60s was Italian kids going to school and being mocked because instead of having Vegemite or bung fritz in their sandwiches that they would have their traditional fare, and my wife's one of those people, she said she was constantly teased. She used to dread the fact that her Dad would give her salami because she would be constantly teased at school for being a wog. Greek friends have said the same thing. So Dunstan saw the suppression of cuisine and the suppression of culture and the suppression of language. So what Don saw in Norwood, and later forged with the Ethnic Affairs Commission, started the concept of multiculturalism in Australia.

And I think Don's concept of multiculturalism or 'ethnic affairs' in those days was to encourage migrants and their kids and their grandkids to celebrate their cultures and share those cultures with the rest of us, and that he felt we'd be a stronger community and a stronger State and a stronger nation if we allowed a thousand flowers to bloom. And he was the only person in the world who had a restaurant policy, and he had good ties with the Indian community and the Chinese community. So he was passionate about cuisine and how we had to break out of the meat-and-three-veg rut so that we'd actually be a more sophisticated, more cosmopolitan, more resilient, more outward-looking, more modern community if we allowed people to celebrate their cuisine, their dance, their music, their language, and

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that rather than assimilation about making sure that people passed on their languages to the next generation. And I have to say that people like Chris Sumner deserve enormous merit for being, in a sense – he and Lyn Arnold later put an intellectual framework around that. In fact, ‘multiculturalism’ was even defined in law here.

So I regard multiculturalism as Australia’s greatest social achievement since the Second World War. Dunstan was the architect of it. It was taken up by Gough Whitlam and, to his great credit, embraced in a bipartisan way by Malcolm Fraser, who deserves great credit for it. But Dunstan was the architect. So I always say that Whitlam and Dunstan were the Washington and Jefferson of Australian Labor politics of the postwar era, and that’s where his great legacy for Australia, in my view, was his passionate commitment to multiculturalism.

But also the arts, I should have mentioned the arts. I mean, no-one did more for the arts in Australia than Don Dunstan. Okay, people say that there was an Adelaide Festival of Arts; yes, there was. But it flourished and became nationally and internationally prominent under Dunstan. It was Dunstan who thought up the Jam Factory, Dunstan was the State Theatre Company, Dunstan the Festival Centre, Dunstan the Opera or the Australian Dance Theatre. And I think that what we saw here was then copied across the country so there’s now a festival in every State. The Film Corporation with Phillip Adams, I mean the Australian film industry, the modern Australian film industry, began with Don Dunstan, advised by Phillip Adams, which is why on Friday night I’ve announced that because of Dunstan’s commitment to social reform that our National Centre for Social Innovation was dedicated on the tenth anniversary of his death with Phillip Adams as the Chair supported by Tim Costello and others.

So I guess Aboriginal land rights and multiculturalism, the end of White Australia, Labor being electable and re-electable, are his enduring legacies, nationally.

**Just in rounding up, your own thinking and practice as Premier in these days, how do you connect with your experiences with Don in the ’70s, if at all, and how does it**

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How does it work?

**– help you in your premiership?**

Look, I had a fantastic apprenticeship. I worked with Don Dunstan, Des Corcoran and John Bannon professionally, and David Lange, and also worked – not directly, but worked for Hawke, I worked on election campaigns for John Cain and other Premiers, Bob Carr particularly, around the country, and for Wayne Goss. So I had an extraordinary mentoring. And I worked for Jack Wright here, worked for him as a staffer. I could not have had a better apprenticeship. I learnt from all of them. I learnt from Don about the importance of sticking your neck out and I learnt most of all from Don that a small state didn't have to have a cringe about the bigger states, that a small state could be a test bed for reform. Hence, for instance, I think about Don by the fact that Al Gore said the best place in the world on tackling climate change was South Australia, that we are massively leading the rest of the nation on climate change reform, climate change legislation. Eight per cent of the population, fifty-eight per cent of the wind power, thirty-five per cent for solar power, at one stage fifty per cent, but we want the other states to follow us. So we've been the national exemplar on climate change legislation and the others have been following us. We're planting millions of trees and a whole range of things on that. Other states are following us, other states overseas. Social inclusion policy, which was about Don Dunstan's social justice agenda: we're the only state where homelessness has gone down. We had an experiment. We have David Cappa on school retention. We've now reversed, we've now got a thirteen-year high in school retention. Aboriginal issues. A whole range of things we basically, through social inclusion, we are easily the national leader and, as with climate change now, there's a national social inclusion initiative under Julia Gillard with David Cappa as the deputy, and it's being adopted in Tasmania and in other states. Our Common Ground homelessness initiative has been copied by other states nationally. Therese Rein is the patron of it – the Prime Minister's wife. So in social inclusion and climate change, particularly those areas, and early childhood, we're once again national

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leaders. People are looking to our – – –. Constantly having visitors coming here to see what we're doing, from Manitoba and other places overseas.

The other thing that we did, Don was on about planning, and we of course have got a South Australian Strategic Plan where we went out and consulted with the people, ten thousand people were consulted in a series of summits, and basically signed off on a ten-year plan for where we wanted to be as a state and how we were going to get there. I think Don would have greatly approved of that.

I also think, because Don was about ideas, that he would have strongly supported our Thinkers in Residence programme where we bring in world-class experts for three months to run master classes, sit in on Cabinet, sit in on senior management council, work with bureaucrats, help us develop legislation. Stephen Schneider advised Arnold Schwarzenegger on climate change. Baroness Greenfield, Director of the Royal Institution of Science which will be established here, I think Don would like the fact that the Royal Institution after two hundred years is establishing in Adelaide. He wanted us to stand out from the crowd. Carnegie Mellon University. University College London establishing here in Adelaide. About building our intellectual clout. We've got people – a whole series of international leaders: we've got Moira Smith on bioscience, we're spending sixty million dollars on a bioscience precinct. Our latest Thinker in Residence is Professor Laura Lee, who's a world expert on architecture and integrated design, which Don was on about. So I think he would have loved thinkers in residence because it's about us challenging and leading again.

So I think ultimately the biggest message was, 'Mike, you've got to get elected, and then you've got to get re-elected, and you've got to lead but you've got to stay in touch with the people that you lead'. But he also wanted ideas and he wanted us to be a State of ideas, what Geoff Mulgan calls the place where the future comes first, and that he wanted us to be a test bed, a laboratory for reform, building on traditions from the 1890s, and that's what we're trying to do in a range of areas. Not the same,

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not aping him or emulating him, but using his example of being leaders, not followers, nationally.

**Great. Thanks very much, Mike, that's great.**

Okay?

**Thank you.**

END OF INTERVIEW.