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**Part three of interview with Mrs Molly Byrne recorded by Dr Margaret Allen at Seacliff Park, South Australia, on Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007.**

RECORDING COMMENCES.

**I was going to say to you about the caucus and like how did Don work, can you remember how Don worked when the parliamentary Labor Party met together and discussed things?**

Well, because he was the Premier, naturally he chaired the caucus and if any person wished to stand for the ministry or say for one of the committees, chairmen of the committees, they stood up and in the case of if they were going to stand up because they wanted to be a minister, well then after that they were chosen by the caucus, the caucus voted for who they wanted and then Don allocated the portfolios. Then of course committee members – there's a variety of committees, as you know: well, of course, the same applied to them except of course they'd be just elected to the various committees that they stood for.

Well, if any legislation was going to be introduced, well, the particular minister in charge of that portfolio introduced it to the caucus and if the caucus agreed, well, then of course it went before Parliament. But if there was a disagreement, well, then a debate took place and then a vote took place and of course the majority ruled, so that was the position that members had to abide by. Except in the case of what was known as 'matters of conscience', and then of course there was no vote on that, you could vote how you liked, like on abortion, things like that.

Also what happened was that the ministers had what they called ministers' committees, but they had no official standing so if it was the Minister for Environment he might – I've forgotten now how many, whether it was three or four people they had on a committee – and before the minister introduced that proposed bill to the caucus it was discussed by members of that particular minister's committee to see if they thought it could be improved or something like that. And then the minister introduced it to the caucus.

One thing Don Dunstan did do – and this was not really in the caucus but I suppose you could say it was like a mini-meeting – for the benefit of the backbenchers. I can't say what year this was introduced, so the backbenchers would

get full information of what was going on in various departments, so this was to avoid say a minister making a public announcement about something that might take place in a member's electorate. He used to come down once a week, and he had someone with him who more or less contacted the various departments, and reported to the backbenchers what was happening. But other than that I can't tell you a great deal about the caucus.

**Thank you. And did ever they come down and say 'This is happening' and something that perhaps you weren't very happy about, or ---.**

Well, it possibly did happen but I can't remember now. Nothing that really upset me a lot or I would have remembered it.

**So about once a week while Parliament was sitting they'd come down, was that right?**

Yes, only when Parliament was sitting this would take place, just to brief the backbenchers to make sure we were fully informed.

**Yes.**

Other than that I can't really think of anything much that would be of interest.

**But you said that when something was introduced they would discuss it within the caucus and then there'd be a vote on it.**

That's right.

**What do you think was the most interesting discussion that you heard there?**

(laughs) Nothing really comes to mind. Nothing, really. I suppose everything was important. Some things were more important than others.

**And can you remember an instance where perhaps the caucus didn't really like something that maybe Don was very keen on?**

No, actually I can't. I'm sure it did occur, but I can't remember now. Most of the caucus meetings – they were harmonious. I can't remember any where there was any real problem.

**So who chaired those meetings?**

Well, the Premier chaired them. The Premier, or if he was the Leader of the Opposition, he chaired the meetings.

**And how long would they go for, generally?**

Well, usually we had them on a Wednesday at eleven o'clock and perhaps they'd finish by half-past twelve, but I mean always by one o'clock, anyway.

**So did you do a great deal of business and go through it quite quickly?**

Well, quite a lot of it was sieved through beforehand, you see, with these committees. As I said, they didn't have any official standing, so the minister's committees had looked at most of the legislation. There'd be other things that we'd talk about that wouldn't be legislation. But no, as I say, at caucus meetings everyone seemed to get on very well, they were quite harmonious. I can't remember any time we had any real trouble.

**So sort of it was organised that this had been done and this was to be recommended and voted. It was like quite a – you know how you have a committee meeting with sort of reports and things?**

Well, yes, there'd be reports if it was necessary. But I don't know, I don't think we had any official agenda – I suppose it was done that way for years and it just continued to be done that way and everybody accepted it.

**So were there any minutes for caucus?**

If there were I can't recall any.

**So it was really an in-house, more private sort of discussion.**

Yes. I don't think there were any minutes.

**So did any matters come up when there was all that business about John Ceruto and there was things in the press, did that ever get discussed in caucus?**

Well, if it did I certainly can't remember it.

**Which probably means it didn't happen.**

Well, I can't recall it. In fact, I didn't even know who John Ceruto was, I don't think, until (laughs) it came into the press.

**Yes. And you said the ministers' committees, so like were you on any of those?**

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Yes. Well, I was from time to time. I can't remember which one, though, I think I was on the Minister for Environment's committee. I think at one stage I was on one to do with the Premier, because I can remember we had a bit of – no, that would probably not be a committee meeting. I think that was something more official, I can't remember now, that was to do with the Festival Theatre. Well, I was, but again I can't remember how many I was on from time to time.

**And so these would include the ministers and some members.**

The ministers and some members.

**So they'd sort of look over and review the legislation.**

Yes, so you'd have a look at it and say what you thought before it actually went to the caucus. It might go to the caucus and not go to the committee, but this was some informal thing, and it worked quite well.

**So it was like a sort of review.**

Yes, that's right. You might think of something that would make the legislation better or something you disagreed with.

**Or that you could foresee there'd be problems with the electorate about.**

Well, I suppose that could come up, too.

**And were any public servants, did they go to any of these meetings?**

No, they didn't go.

**What about ministerial staff or ministerial advisers?**

No, they weren't at the caucus meetings.

**Not at the members' committees or anything? Ministers' committees?**

No, they weren't on these ministers' committees. Most of the legislation would have come from their departments anyway, so I suppose some of those public servants would have been involved in them perhaps in the first place. I don't know, you'd have to ask someone who was a minister about that.

**People have said that when Dunstan wanted to get a policy through he sort of promoted discussion of it in the community first of all and let lots of people's**

**different points of view come forward and then slowly would get people towards that way of thinking. I don't know if you would agree with that, or ---.**

Well, perhaps he did, but again I can't remember whether he did or he didn't. But, see, most of the legislation would have been drafted according to the party policy, and what was put forward in the platform when the election was held.

**A lot of that would have gone on in the party, State Convention and the committee meetings.**

Yes, the State Convention would decide, would carry motions, what the policy was going to be and so that was what the ministers would be trying to do, would be to put party policy into effect. But of course they couldn't put all the policy into effect, so at an election time they put forward certain matters, or the Premier would when he gave his policy speech or the Leader of the Opposition, and then of course it would be up to the government to put it into effect.

**Yes. I was just interested that you said that he would come down and speak. This was another MP – I can't remember who it was – someone else said that they felt as if they hardly saw Dunstan in the House or hardly had any personal contact with him, that it was all very separated.**

I never felt like that.

**He'd worked on your campaign, your initial campaign, hadn't he?**

Yes. He was initially my campaign director. But if I needed some advice I rang him up.

**Yes. You had that really personal contact.**

Yes, I never felt like that at all. He chaired the caucus meetings and, as I was saying, later we had this sort of informal meeting with the backbenchers to explain to us what was happening in various departments, and he came down and did that. I don't know how he found time to do it, frankly.

**Somebody said to me that he had a lot of trouble with some of the public servants to start with, who were used to ---.**

Well, see, I wouldn't know that. I'd only know what was written, you know, that he wrote about. But I personally didn't come across any of that, just being a backbencher.

**I think this might have been going back to the days when he was the Minister for Social Welfare, you know, in the Walsh Government in those early days.**

Yes, I think that's what he put in his book.

**Yes.**

Lots of those public servants, as you know, they'd been there for years and under a different government, and so you can understand – I suppose it would be difficult for them, or both sides I suppose, to have different policies.

**Yes. And I think it's been said that some of them probably thought this government wasn't legitimate, that no Labor Government could be legitimate in their eyes, the ones who'd been there for perhaps thirty or more years.**

No, I didn't come across anybody like that because I suppose I just didn't come across them very often. If I rang up one of the minister's offices about something, they always spoke politely to me and were helpful.

**Yes, that's good. I'm just going to ask you, too, you worked with Gretel a bit on that first campaign, was it right, only on the first campaign that Gretel helped with your – – –?**

Oh, Gretel. Don was the campaign director but Gretel didn't – well, she might have latterly gone out and knocked on doors for me but I can't remember it. I think she looked after his electorate while he helped me, I think that's what happened. But she did help draft up one of the leaflets we put out, I remember she was there on that occasion.

**I was just going to say is there anything else that you wanted to say about the actual operation of Dunstan in the Parliament or the caucus or anything like that?**

I can't think of anything. I'll probably think of lots of things, but later. .... ....  
..... I can't think of them now.

**Just one last thing that occurs to me is did you want to make any comment about Dunstan as a speech maker or a public speaker?**

Oh, yes. I don't think there was anyone better. I think he was brilliant. He had a way with words and a way of putting his point of view across. I think that he was a great loss –

**Yes. Well, it was, wasn't it?**

– and through ill health he had to resign.

**Did you as a member have any inkling that that was coming?**

None at all.

**Till it was sort of announced, really.**

Yes.

**It was very sudden at the end.**

Well, he came and sort of announced it to the caucus. He might have already announced it to some of the ministers or to cabinet, I don't know that. But he come and announced it to the caucus. To me it was a great shock. I knew he was ill but I didn't expect him to resign.

**And he was quite a young man I think then, probably about early fifties, was he? I can't remember.**

Well, I think he was told by his doctor he had to resign or he couldn't guarantee what would happen to his health in the future. It could only worsen.

**Terrible, isn't it? Well, thank you very much, then, Molly.**

As this is the final interview I would like to thank the Don Dunstan Foundation for the opportunity to record what was not only an important time for me but for women in politics. As with all such accounts, not everything can be included and my memory may not be perfect. But it is my sincere wish that these interviews will shed light on that period of history – and provide some encouragement to other women considering political careers and other public leadership.

END OF INTERVIEW.