This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation’s Don Dunstan Oral History Project interviewing Mr Graham Maguire, who was a former Senator for the Labor Party and heavily-involved in student politics in the University of Adelaide in the – ‘60s, was it, Graham?

Yes.

The date today is the 30th July 2010 and the location is the Malaysian Room in the University of Adelaide. Graham, thanks very much for doing the interview for the Don Dunstan Oral History Project. You also worked in the Premier’s Department, so we’ve got a broad view from working in the Policy Division and the Premier’s Office, Don Dunstan’s office, in the mid–late ‘70s.

Just before we get into that period, can you just outline some of your education and employment experience prior to working in the Premier’s Department?

I was nearly 27 when I joined the Department. My only work experience prior to that was as a management trainee and part-time tertiary student for BP, the petroleum company, from 1963–65. I’d also worked as a research assistant to Professor Noel Butlin at the ANU in Canberra for two years in economic history while I completed my master’s degree in Economics. At that time I also did quite a bit of research for the doyen of Australian historians at the time, Sir Keith Hancock, in 1971 and 71, much of it in the National Library in Canberra.

What was that research about, can you recall that?

He was writing a book on the Monaro district of Southern New South Wales, which is south of Canberra, and I remember one of the jobs I had to do was to go through the diaries of a big sheep station in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales, from the 1800s, because he was integrating the contents of these diaries into his history of the Monaro district.

Interesting.

It was a big station called Bibbenluke.

Bibbenluke, right. That’s interesting. And at Adelaide Uni you’d done Economics; given your relationship with BP that would have been part-time or full-time?
That was a part-time course and I couldn’t get into university because in those days there were fees, of course – as there are now, in a different form – so I was really working my way through. But after two and a half to three years I scored a Commonwealth Scholarship and was able to go full-time.

That’s good. And had you met Don at university when you were there as even a part-time student and then a scholarship student?

I don’t believe I met Don at that time. But I was aware that his wife, his first wife, was a tutor in Economics when I did my undergraduate degree, but I did not know her well, if at all.

Right, that was Gretel Dunstan.

That’s correct. I was a member of the Labour Club at Adelaide University, though.

What do you recollect about that and any links they might have had with Don Dunstan?

Well, I was a member, I think – my mind got very focussed on politics because of conscription for the Vietnam War and the only things I would have done at that time in the club would have been demonstrations against the War, probably, demonstrations against conscription. I would have gone to talks on other subjects but I don’t remember meeting Don at that time – although I’d heard a lot about him from my father, who had a business near Dunstan’s electorate in Norwood, and people spoke very highly of him; but that’s all I’d heard of him.

Right. When did you actually get involved in Labor Party politics beyond the student scene, I’ll call it.

Well, because I was in the Labour Club I think I knew people who had memberships in the Young Labor Association, and I started going to Young Labor residential seminars at a place called Graham’s Castle at Goolwa, where a lot of Federal Labor Party people spoke over the years, people who were very prominent Senators and Members of Parliament. And I think, as a result of that going to Young Labor functions, I then met people like David Combe, who was on Don Dunstan’s personal staff, and in 1966 I remember joining Young Labor and in 1967 I did join the Labor Party.
So that was – what area was that at the time?

Well, I was living at Blair Athol with my parents and I joined the Kilburn Sub-branch which covered that district.

So there was what, sort of a working-class exposure to the Labor Party down in that area of Kilburn?

It was a very working-class area and quite a strong branch, actually, and I made a lot of friends there over the years.

And when did you go to Canberra?

I went to Canberra at the beginning of 1970 and I was one of those people who got a very good education as a result of the Vietnam War. I was able to avoid conscription. I was actually balloted in to be conscripted but I was able to keep getting deferments if I could find further levels of study to do. My mind was very focussed on staying out of the army and getting a research assistant’s position at ANU which I took up at the beginning of 1970.

And were you involved in the Labor Party in Canberra?

I was involved in the Labor Party in the ACT. There was only the one electorate in those days in the ACT. It was my first exposure to factionalism in the Labor Party as Jim Fraser, the longstanding member for Canberra, was retiring and there was a ballot to choose a person to replace him. It was very highly factionalised, and I think reflecting the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party – Canberra reflects New South Wales in many ways – and my eyes were wide opened.

Is that the one Peter Wilenski might have run for, or was it another time?

No, I think not. But I remember Humphrey McQueen was one of the people voting in the ballot. He was a very colourful person.

So what was the view, if any, about what was happening in South Australia from the Canberra point of view? Did they talk about Don Dunstan at all or were they pretty focussed on their local and federal issues?

I didn’t hear very much about Don Dunstan at all. But my mother assiduously cut items from the Adelaide Advertiser and posted them to me so I knew some of the major things that were happening here in politics.
So what broadly was your knowledge of what was going on over here, from those sort of cuttings, of what Don and his Governments were doing at the time?

It’s very hard to recall now. But I was aware there were changes in the air but probably not much more than that.

So how did you get to apply for the position in the Premier’s Department? What was that position?

Well, I was finishing off my master’s degree at the end of ’71 and I had a phone call from Don Dunstan, he rang me personally and said that he was rejigging the Premier’s Department and would I be interested in taking a position in economics in that department. I felt in a bind over that because going to Canberra had been my escape from home, if you like. I’d got out of my parents’ home and I really didn’t want to come back to Adelaide. I enjoyed living in Canberra. But in the end I did take his advice and moved back to Adelaide.

Can you recall the sort of things he might have wanted you to get involved with?

Not at the time. He just said that he was recasting the Department and wanted to beef up its economics area and would I join?

Did you do any backgrounding on the Department itself and what it was up to, see how you might have fitted into it?

I do remember reading at least one press cutting that my mother had sent about the Policy Division of the Department and what was going on, but of course I didn’t initially join the Policy Division of the Department.

What was the position?

I started working for Milton Smith, who was the chief officer in the Economic Intelligence Unit of the Department, and through him I did learn a lot about the practical application of economics. It was a very stimulating time, he knew his field; he was a very practised person. I do remember writing with him a joint submission on behalf of the South Australian Government to an Australian Senate committee looking into the benefits and costs of foreign investment in Australia, and I was able to, in my later career, able to point to this submission as something that I had done at a very early stage regarding the Senate.
Interesting. Can you recall what the thread of it was at that time?

Well, it was basically that Australia wasn’t getting all the benefits out of foreign investment that it should have been, and it was really to try and ensure that Australia did actually maximise the return to it from the foreign investment and not just let multinational companies and so forth take the benefits.

And can you remember what the result of the report was?

Well, I didn’t get asked to appear before the Senate – I don’t know whether Milton did or not – because that’s a normal thing, that, as I found out later in my career, they advertise for submissions and then people lodge them and then some of them are asked to appear and give oral evidence, and maybe Milton did; I just don’t know. But, look, I couldn’t say what came out of all of that inquiry. The chairman of the committee was a Liberal Party Senator from Tasmania, Peter Rae. I assume it was under a Liberal Government and the Liberals probably had a majority on the committee, but what they did with it I don’t know.

You then moved out of the Economic Intelligence Unit to the Policy Division. How did that occur and what was the position you took up?

Look, I don’t know how that occurred. Presumably there was a promotion and a pay rise involved, I just don’t recall. But just prior to that I had been a member of a working party on land prices that Don had set up, and certainly on that working party there was a member of the Policy Division, and maybe I got to hear about some of the projects in the Division and what opportunities there were working in that Division. I just don’t remember.

What was the position you took up?

It would have been some sort of policy officer. I knew the division had a very good reputation and had been written up in the media and that its staff were working on a diverse range of subjects, but I don’t remember much beyond that. I did enjoy working immensely with Milton Smith in the Economic Intelligence Unit and kept up a long-term friendship with him.

So can you recall the sort of projects you worked on when you moved into the Policy Division?
Look, I don’t. I really don’t recall projects. But later on, while I was in the Division, I was appointed to lead a small group called the ‘Policy Review Branch’ – it was only myself and one other officer – and that was to try and monitor progress implementing Government proposals. I feel that that work was not a great success, if at all. I don’t really have very good administrative skills and I think we fell down in this work. And of course there was probably inertia and resistance in some section of the public service to overcome in getting government policy announcements or pledges in elections implemented.

So did you ever think about the role of the Premier’s Department and say particularly your area, the review area – you just mentioned that there might have been inertia – and thought about change processes – there was a lot happening, notwithstanding some of the inertia – and how those things that were happening were actually being able to be got through the whole system.

There was certainly a lot happening. I do remember last year looking through my personal papers that when I saw a list of projects the Policy Division was working on at a particular time I was astounded by the range of subjects that were being looked at. And some of the projects would have been of very large scale; some of them would have been fairly minor. But in relation to the departments I think there was a bit of tension between the Premier’s Department and the Policy Division with other departments in the Government, that the Policy Division might have been seen as a bit – well, seen as Don Dunstan’s cadres or something like that, trying to get things done at a faster rate than the State could handle or the public service wanted to occur. But I don’t remember seeing or hearing of any outright resistance or anything like that; but I think the relationship between the Division and the Department and other departments was a bit tense at times and people probably felt that we were stepping into their areas and we really shouldn’t have been.

Can you recall some of the key movers and shakers, say within the Premier’s Department or even outside, that might have got some of the things moving – might have been the Ministers or the Premier himself – and how that worked?

Well, the head of the Department, Bob Bakewell, was an active person and I think interventionist in areas outside the Premier’s Department if he could have the opportunity. But I don’t recall anything much after that.

Yes. You mentioned the land prices review. What were the results of that?
Well, one of the key recommendations was to have price control brought in for the sale of new allotments and the Premier came out and made an announcement saying he was going to do that, and that really knocked down the land price spiral that was occurring, very quickly. It took a long time to implement that; it was easy to make an announcement, but you’ve really got to make it work. But the key recommendation, really, was to affect land prices by working on the supply side, and so there was a suggestion that a Land Commission be set up to expedite the supply of allotments for home building so that the market price was brought down through that means. And that occurred at a time, I think, when the Federal Labor Government had come in and was advocating land commissions, so it was a parallel thing, I feel, to what was happening at the federal level.

Just from your viewpoint of research and how that led into policy development and policy change, did you have any observations or even reflecting now about the quality of the work that was going on?

I think the work was pretty good. I thought the people in the Policy Division were good people: David Rodway, Bill Voyzey at the top, they were very good, experienced people. That’s probably about all I could say.

And when you were in the Federal Parliament as a Senator there was a lot of research being done by lots of people, I guess. Did you use or draw on any of your research experience in the Premier’s Department when you were looking at that research that was going on?

Yes, I would have done that a lot. I was the chairman of a parliamentary committee, so we had access to staff. We had access to research people in the Parliamentary Library; and I would have been able to in a number of areas run their work against what I knew from my experience working in the Premier’s Department.

And do you have any observations on respective quality – I’m just asking that because it seemed to be in that period, in the early ’70s, and the Policy Division was – I wouldn’t say the beginning, but the development of sort of centralised policy research and there was a growing area, and I guess later on would have been a bit more sophisticated; but I was just wondering whether you had any observations on the level of depth or sophistication on some of the research that might have been going on in the Premier’s Department.

I think the Premier’s Department research was at least equal to what I saw later. It certainly was not inferior. And I think it may have been a pacesetter from the point
of view that I think the Whitlam Government actually set up a centralised organisation, it was called the ‘Priorities Review Staff’, and I think that would have come after the Policy Division was set up. I’m sure it was. But I don’t know that they had very much success because they tended to focus on fairly controversial subjects and there was a lot of public reaction to some of their ideas – negative reaction – their proposals.

So, having worked in the Policy Division, you joined the Premier’s Office. When did that happen, and how?

I joined the Premier’s Office in 1977 at the suggestion of Stephen Wright, who I think was a personal assistant to the Premier. There was a vacancy: a lady called Lyn had finished working as Don’s research assistant –

Is that Lyn Chatterton?

– no, Lyn Leader, and I actually became research assistant to the Premier. I don’t know that I applied for the job, I can’t remember; but obviously Stephen had a lot of influence and made it happen. Although Don knew me by then, of course, because I’d been working in the Department and briefing him occasionally on things. And, yes, that’s how I started working for Don.

And what was your role – as a research assistant, was it – at the time?

I was a research assistant. And that was a very junior position in the Premier’s Office. It was really just working as directed by him. But that didn’t stop me from putting up ideas that I thought would be of interest. I do remember being asked to do a very eccentric thing once, and it was at the time Sir Douglas Nicholls had been appointed by Don to be the first Aboriginal Governor of any part of Australia, and Geoffrey Dutton, who was one of Don’s circle, had rung up and said that he’d heard people in the Adelaide Club speaking ill – spreading racist stories – of the Governor. And Don said to me, ‘Graham, you’ve read the Holy Bible’ – which I hadn’t, probably – ‘Look up the references of people speaking ill of others, and I want to get all the church leaders in and give them a cup of tea and get them to preach sermons against racism’. Well, I didn’t know what to do because my background was in economics; but, luckily, my mother-in-law said that she had a Concordance or a Thesaurus of the Holy Book, so I provided the reference to Don very [quickly]
– the next day, he had all the references. Anyway, but I think his personal staff talked him out of this business of getting the church leaders in. It certainly didn’t happen, because I mean somebody would have pointed out, ‘Well, this is an open society. We don’t control the churches, we can’t get them to say what we want’. But that was just one of the interesting things that I was asked to do.

**Can you remember any of the others?**

Well, a lot of it was helping draft the first draft of press releases to go out by John Templeton or Tony Baker, but I didn’t have any real influence on the final product.

I do recall spending many weeks in Adelaide and Canberra researching developments in Canada and elsewhere to limit spending in public elections, and also to publicly-fund election campaigns, and I wrote two very lengthy proposals to Don on these subjects. I don’t know whether he initiated the proposal or not, but it could have come from me but I do remember going to Canberra to speak to Fred Daly, who I think was Whitlam’s Special Minister of State who dealt with electoral matters, and got his view on these things. But in South Australia the climate never seemed favourable for Don to feel he could act on these things. Little came of this very laborious task at the time, but most of the ideas are now in practice but came in under other governments.

**Yes, interesting. Who was the chief of staff, if you like – I think it was called ‘Executive Assistant’ – at the time you were there?**

I think there were probably two. I think Peter Ward may have been there at the start and then it may have become Rob Dempsey. But certainly Rob Dempsey was there a lot of the time when I was there. I might have just come across Peter Ward through my work in the Policy Division, that’s possible.

I thought some of the time the staff acted as a restraint on Don. They were reeling in the more outlandish proposals, like the one about getting the churches to preach sermons.

**Did you have staff meetings where – – –?**

We did, actually, in his office. We had staff meetings, and some days Don wasn’t – I do remember some days Don wasn’t very well. He had very bad migraines and he would have all the venetian blinds closed in the Premier’s Office and be wearing
dark glasses, and we never quite knew what to expect on those days. But I think the senior staff had a great influence on him, people like Dempsey, Ward, Baker, Templeton; and of course Barry Hughes was there towards the end as the chief of economics and he, along with the Under-Treasurer, basically ran the economics part of the portfolio; even though I had postgraduate qualifications in economics I didn’t really have very much say over the State finances.

But I think among the senior staff, one thing I did notice that there was some rivalry; there may have actually been two camps competing for influence over Don. He may have been aware of this and also may have even liked it if he was aware of it. But of course these things can happen in the case of charismatic leaders, that lines of influence are less formalised and more personal. I think one camp may have included Steve Wright at one time and the other camp may have included Rob Dempsey. But I wouldn’t want to overstress this.

**Did that lead to creative tension or destructive tension, in your recollections?**

I was a bit too junior to know. I don’t recall.

**And generally was it a well-run office, in your recollection?**

I think probably John Bannon ran a better office, but I was only working for him as Premier for about three months. But Don, he’d surrounded himself with a lot of gifted people in his office and I guess they all had big egos and there was a lot of conflict of egos, but they were all working for a common good, I guess.

**Interesting. And when you were there – even as the junior officer, the way you put it – what were your general views about his style? You mentioned he had outlandish ideas that had to be tempered now and again. But generally was it an ordered process of policy thinking and reform, or just reacting to things all the time?**

Oh, no, no, he wasn’t a reactive person. He had his circle of friends and acquaintances outside of politics and people in the arts who would ring him up or drop in to see him at home and give him ideas on things that might be done, and he’d think, ‘Well, that’s a good idea, I’ll move with that’. All politicians have to react to situations; but Don did more than that, he had ideas, and people got onto him with ideas; and he’d think about ways and means of reforming laws and institutions in South Australia.
And when he was, say, at these meetings you were having, what was his general approach? Like, ‘Here’s an idea, go and research it for me’, or, ‘Here’s an idea and here are some broad directions I’d like you to have a look at’?

Oh, I think both approaches occurred. The thing to remember about people on his staff is they were all self-starters. I’m sure I initiated a number of things, whether they were ever implemented I don’t know. They were all self-starters and they had their heads bubbling with ideas, and Don would say, ‘Oh, I think such-and-such is a good idea’, and people would say, ‘Yeah, that’s a good one’, or, ‘No, that one won’t work’.

So generally he had a bias for following things up, not sitting there and saying, ‘No, no, no’.

Yes. I think he checked on me a couple of times to see whether I’d made progress with X, Y and Z that I was working on. But I think John Bannon was more methodical in doing things.

Interesting, yes. And can you remember any of the particular people he might have mentioned who got to him fairly regularly?

Well, certainly people in the arts, like Geoffrey Dutton; his wife, Ninette, I think; he just had this incredible eclectic group of people who dropped in. Clifton Pugh came in one day. Don had his circle out there – and I think there were people in the law who he dealt with. A lot of these people actually donated money, too, to the Premier’s Fund, I think that was called. I have trouble naming people at this point.

Yes, sure. And you mentioned he checked up on some of the work you were doing; did you, given all these things that were going on, was there some process the office had or did they work through the Policy Division just to see that things were being followed through?

A lot of it did involve work through the Policy Division. There wasn’t much formalised activity in the office at all. And the head of the Department would have had a lot of influence, too, in making things happen.

And did he talk about getting things through the Caucus and/or the Cabinet?

I don’t recall that he talked about those things very much. He certainly did intervene in Labor Party preselections and I was party to seeing that, but I don’t remember him having difficulties with Caucus or needing to work through Caucus.
or anything like that. And remember Don was a national figure, too. Because he was a State Labor leader he was a delegate to the National Conference of the Labor Party where he took positions on lots of big issues.

Can you remember any of them?

Oh, I think one of them—before my time—might have been the White Australia Policy. Another one certainly would have been the reform of the Victorian Branch of the Labor Party, which was in the hands of the mad left; and having the SA State Secretary in the form of Mick Young probably in charge of that intervention Don would have been probably consulted, I would think.

Yes, interesting. And did he ever talk about getting the community on side, if you like, or was it a process of, ‘Here’s an idea. I think the community will go with it’, or, ‘Here’s an idea, I don’t think the community will go with it but we need to do such-and-such to get them onside’?

Well, certainly this one I talked about of preaching sermons in the churches about racism, that was about mobilising the community. So he was thinking then that he couldn’t just come out and say, ‘Racism’s bad, and stop saying negative things about the Governor’; he was really thinking, ‘Well, how can I get public opinion mobilised?’ And so he was thinking, ‘Well, I’ll do it through the churches’, because that was probably a much wider group to work through than the Labor Party.

Yes. I’m just raising that or wanting to follow it through, it’s this question of leadership and the sort of leaders, particularly heads of governments, that we have—a question of the focus groups that seem to appear these days as the groups of people that seem to shape things, that constant testing of what people think before governments want to jump; or is it partly the other way round of a good idea and then a leader getting out there and selling it? Did you have any, just in thinking about what’s happening these days and what happened then, anything you’d like to talk about as far as Don’s leadership characteristics and credentials?

That’s a very good question. At the beginning of Don’s time as Premier the use of public opinion polling, et cetera, focus groups, in Australia was very embryonic. And so at the beginning of his Premiership he would have been out there at public meetings. I mean that was what happened in those days. People would go down to the Botanic Park and stand on a stump and talk about an issue. The Labor Party would be out selling issues in the community. But during the ’70s things changed in Australia and opinion polling came in, and I do remember that later in Don’s career,
certainly when I was working in the Premier’s Office, opinion polling was being used to test and see what the community thought about issues and so forth.

I do remember also in one of his campaigns it was probably the first time a leader in SA had a televised jingle or a televised commercial, or a short TV biography. I think these were all brand new things for South Australia. I think that was the 1977 election.

**Interesting. And what were your observations on his dealing with the media?**

Well, he had a frosty relationship with *The Advertiser*. Certainly in the 1960s in his first brief time as Premier *The Advertiser* was pretty crusty and didn’t really weigh in to things like electoral reform in a positive way; it was supporting the privilege that some people had. But Don was the first South Australian leader to use the electronic media I think intelligently, or use it as it is used now, and he was good on television, he was good on the radio. And he realised that, to get round the printed media – the conservatism of *The Advertiser*, particularly – he’d have to be a performer in the electronic media, and he did that well.

**Interesting. And did you ever come across his relationships with his Deputy, Des Corcoran, at all in terms of, you know, what Don’s role as Leader was and Des Corcoran’s role as Deputy Leader?** Because, unfortunately, we weren’t able to talk to Des Corcoran, but it’s not only that loyal deputy but some of the other people in the Cabinet being – I’ll call them the ‘hard heads’ and the people who got things to happen around the place, like Virgo and Hudson and, earlier on, Len King.

I don’t know much about the relationship that Des Corcoran had with Don. I know that when they wanted Frank Walsh to retire as the Leader there were sections in Caucus that wanted Des Corcoran to be the Leader; so I think between Don and Des, from Des’s point of view he was a bit resentful of Don. Certainly I had that feeling when I ended up working for him after Don stood down with ill health.

**Really?**

And I think they went along with Don, the traditionalists in the Labor Party because he delivered; and he was articulate and he could push the issues and sell them. But I’m not sure that they were 100 per cent happy.

**What, about some policy issues and some other things as well?**
Oh, style.

Yes, style.

I think the style was something that they just didn’t relate to, and Don was changing the Labor Party from what they knew and what they liked; and probably under Don the Labor Party itself had less influence over a Premier than at any time up till then. And that includes the Caucus, I think.

Was there any noticeable shift when Corcoran became Premier on how that relationship worked?

Oh, certainly the style was more workaday. But there was a lot of nervousness in the Premier’s Office about Des Corcoran coming into the Premiership instead of Hugh Hudson. Des wasn’t expected to be Premier, anyway; it was expected to be Hudson. And I think that probably percolated down into the Department, too: people just wondered what was going to happen. I was one of the lucky ones, I was fairly unaffected by the changeover; but for a lot of people, like Alan Hodgson, they were very jumpy about what might happen.

Interesting. And are you across the deal that was done initially about who was going to be the Premier after Don had retired, resigned?

Well, after we went out the Calvary Hospital and Don announced his resignation, we all went back to the office and thought – well, everyone in the office just believed that there’d been an arrangement and that Hudson was going to take over the next day, and when we went to work the next morning we found out Des was taking over, and nobody could comprehend it.

Interesting. Yes, there are different versions of what happened – I won’t go into them now, but it would be interesting to follow through some of what was going on.

Well, the only version I ever heard was that Mrs Corcoran persuaded Des to take the job. But I do not know, I wasn’t there.

Interesting. Before we get into a general roundup on Don’s legacy and the positive things that happened in his time and maybe some of the mistakes, was there anything that you wanted to say on any specific issues, whether it was the Policy Division area or the Premier’s Office area?
I saw something once in the Premier’s Office in the staff meeting that really I thought was very illuminating. Don was holding court and we were all round him, the courtiers were all round him, and Hugh Hudson asked whether he could be admitted to the meeting. And Hudson, of course, was a very senior minister and I think he had an issue, at the time one of his portfolios was Mines & Energy, and he needed to talk to the Premier about something urgently. So we were all sitting in the staff meeting; Don didn’t ask us to leave, which I thought was interesting; he invited Hugh in, they had a short discussion on this major policy item in front of all the staff. I thought it was a very terse discussion – in other words, there was very little discussion – and this was a major issue confronting the State, I think it might have had to do with electricity generating or something like that. Hugh Hudson stood the whole time that we sat, or leaned against the window ledge of the Premier’s Office, while Don was behind his desk and we were all in the comfortable chairs arrayed around the room. This was, as I say, a very major issue confronting the State and only a few sentences of discussion occurred. Later on, a couple of staff from that meeting were talking to Hugh Hudson and he told us, and absolutely floored us with a comment that that was the longest discussion he’d had with Don for years.

Really?

And I thought, well, Hudson was probably one of the most able ministers in the Government, apart from Dunstan and Len King; if a really able minister could say that, then I guess ministers were consulted very little. I mean Len King would have been an exception – he ran the legal portfolio, basically, but with some input from Don because of Don’s background. But I just thought that was a very illuminating event.

Yes, too right. Interesting. Was there anything else you wanted to cover? (break in recording)

It’s important to note that Don’s main term in office, from 1970–1978, coincided with an abundance of Federal Government funds and there was a Federal Labor Government from 1972–75 in that period. These funds were largely – well, the abundance was largely artificial because it was due to inflation and the effect of rapid inflation with a progressive tax rate system in Canberra. But Don could
actually fund a lot of things that previous Premiers couldn’t and I think it’s important to remember that there was a lot of money available in the mid-’70s for the States and that that hasn’t been matched since; that later leaders didn’t have the money, prior leaders didn’t have the money coming from Canberra. And I think we have to remember that, in looking at a lot of Don’s achievements, a lot of them were funded by federal money, and of course that reflected on him: it made him look good, he was active, he was getting things done; but he mightn’t have looked so good or active had it been at a different time. I remember somebody leaking to me the Federal Budget for 1974. I mean somebody who shouldn’t have shown me the document, but the Federal Budget had a 40 per cent estimated rise in revenue in it, in one year, which was just dreadful. We have to remember about the money, that this abundance of funds made Don look more like an active, wide-ranging reformer. I mean, for example, he got money for a Federal Land Commission in South Australia. He sold off the railways to the Federal Government and got rid of their large deficit. In one fell swoop he got rid of recurring railway deficits well into the future. So I think that’s a very important thing to bear in mind: the money was available that hasn’t been available since.

The only thing I wanted to say was, in relation to the State Labor Party, Don pretty well got what he wanted, I think. He had a big say, perhaps the determining say, on preselections for winnable State seats. I recall being present when he had a phone call, I think from the State Secretary, saying that George Apap appeared to be the front runner in the Semaphore electorate and that he would probably get endorsed, and maybe George had stood at a previous election and lost. In front of us in a staff meeting Don spoke to the party official and told them Apap was not to be endorsed. That was Don’s view, and it prevailed.

And he knew the principal trade union leaders and the key players in the old what was called the ‘machine’, which existed before today’s factions. The machine seemed to be just something that was an informal power-sharing arrangement where different views within the Party got a share of the spoils, for example preselections. I think only extreme views were excluded, and I suspect he saw George Apap as an extremist.
And sometimes Don was asked to knock heads together to get a decent outcome for the party. For example, in 1976 there was concern that a certain individual would win Senate preselection if the other two strong candidates – that is Nick Bolkus and myself – continued to contest the ballot, and this candidate had very strong trade union support, and Don was asked by the ALP Office – and he held a meeting in his office at Parliament House – to negotiate the removal of one of these two candidates from the field, and he did so in a meeting in that office.

Interesting.

And I think the other thing to remember about Don is that he showed for the first time that majority governments could be formed by a party in South Australia with most of its support coming from the metropolitan area, and up till then it hadn’t. Even Labor had held a raft of small country electorates – I mean even towns like Peterborough had a Labor electorate, and each of the Northern Spencer Gulf cities had an electorate. And I think also the Riverland had a Labor Member, as did Wallaroo, in Lloyd Hughes. And Don had the passion to reform electoral boundaries and also to bring in universal suffrage for the Legislative Council, and these reforms, he sold them to the electorate – he actually went out into the community and sold these as major requirements for South Australia – and, as a result, later on Parliament began to reflect the views of the majority.

And one thing that I thought where he did have lots of good ideas was in urban planning, and of course he was well ahead of his time in wanting to build a satellite city at Monarto, and of course the Policy Division at the time – or even Milton Smith and his unit – would have been processing population projections which showed that South Australia would have had a much higher population than actually did occur in reality. Monarto was devised with these very rapid population growth figures in mind. It certainly wasn’t one of Don’s clangers. Monarto is, in effect, being built right now; it’s called ‘Mount Barker’, and at the latter very valuable high-rainfall farms are being cut up for urban development instead of the ‘rain shadow’ land that Don had earmarked at Monarto. One legacy we do have is the greening of some of that landscape, that ‘rain-shadow’ landscape, by the large plantations that were put there for Monarto.
Interesting. Was there anything else you just wanted to talk about, just rounding up?

One of the clangers, I think, that did occur was the introduction of proportional representation voting for the Legislative Council. I think that occurred on Don’s watch, although its real architects were Hugh Hudson and Geoff Virgo. Up to that time, the government of Don’s could only win four out of 20 Legislative Council seats. It was a very wicked, evil gerrymander. Certainly there was no universal franchise either, for the Upper House. Maybe Labor had started winning some other seats above the four by getting people to enrol in those areas. I certainly remember traipsing around areas like Salisbury and Gawler and Tea Tree Gully, which were outside these four seats, getting Labor voters to enrol. But, looking back on it, I think that bringing in proportional representation was a major error by the Labor Party. Obviously they had to negotiate with the Liberals at the time to get some reform to occur, but I think surely the ALP and the Liberals could have reached an agreement on a system which gave the government of the day a majority in both houses instead of today’s result. And I think that’s been a real problem. At that time there was very little minor party support. Obviously Labor had to give ground in negotiations to the Liberals, but I’m sure that we could have got a system where the government of the day in the Lower House wasn’t blocked much of the time by what was going on in the Upper House, which is totally a product of proportional representation.

Right. That’s interesting.

A lot of people would say that the dismissal of the Police Commissioner, Harold Salisbury, was a clanger of Don’s. I don’t agree, I’m sure it wasn’t. He did the right thing because Salisbury misled him over the existence of Special Branch files on a number of people, people who no doubt protested against conscription and the Vietnam War. But there’s absolutely no doubt that the Salisbury dismissal damaged Don’s support in political terms.

And I think Don did have clangers in that, without naming names, some of the people in his very wide group of acquaintances, contacts and friends, I think some
were dodgy and they certainly didn’t help strengthen his support base when the media reported them or some of their activities.

**Was he warned about them?**

It’s possible he was warned by his staff. I mean it wouldn’t have been from me, because I didn’t know some of these people very well; but I would have had doubts about them.

**Did Don ever talk about just his very broad vision that you recollect at all, like he’d got a lot of things going but he still wanted to do some more things towards the end of his time as Premier, and at one stage he got into alternative lifestyle-type things with Jim Cairns, and I’m just wondering where all that sort of sat and what his staff might have thought about that sort of thinking.**

I don’t have a lot to say on that. But I suspect if his health had held up he would have taken action on the electoral reform matters that I had been working on: the control of spending in elections; publicly-funding elections – that might have been a bit more problematic, where the money was going to come from for that. But it’s very, very hard to know what things might have happened had he been in longer.

**Interesting. And what was your reaction when he – was it a big surprise he resigned or retired?**

Up until say the day before it was a big surprise. I think then we knew things were going to happen. It was very dramatic, I mean very theatrical, out at Calvary Hospital. I remember – it was in the days before mobile phones, and I remember journalists scrambling for public telephone boxes. You know, they were trying to find phones where they could put money in the slot and ring their editors. I remember Mike Quirk from *The News*, he was in a bit of a lather. He had the afternoon paper to get a story into and he couldn’t get a phone.

**And you were down there at the hospital?**

I was at the hospital, yes, for the thing. But, as I say, I was a very junior member; but I certainly was there.

**Interesting. And what happened after – you all went and debriefed, or collapsed?**

Well, we went back to the office and of course we all expected that Hugh Hudson would take over the next day, and it didn’t happen.
Interesting. Well, Graham, thanks very much for all that information about your time in the Premier’s Department and the Premier’s Office. Just before we finish, was there anything else you wanted to say before we sign off?

I think looking back on my time working in the Premier’s Department and Office, one of the things I did learn about politics and reform, with hindsight, is that the key way in which you reform society is not through the laws you pass or the great speeches in Parliament or whatever; it’s actually through the appointments you make, and it’s the appointments of people who really bring about longstanding and fundamental change in society. And I thought a very good case was in regard to law reform – not my field, but a very good case was Don’s appointment of Dr J.J. Bray to be Chief Justice. Now, Bray at the time had not been the senior puisne Supreme Court judge, that is the most senior one after the Chief Justice, he hadn’t been that; he may not have even been on the Supreme Court at all at the time he was appointed; but he was seen as a reformer of the law and his appointment gave the very clear message through the legal community that the law was to be shaken up in South Australia with major reforms sought by the Government.

And when I went to Canberra in my own right as an MP I had very firmly in my mind that, yes, you can make all the great speeches and pass the most reforming legislation, but really it’s the people who you appoint to fill positions who really make change occur, and I think Don realised that. He knew that these sorts of appointments were what really made things happen, and he looked for very – well, not colourful, but people who were a bit different from the people going into positions normally, and he appointed them.

And another thing was, where Don I think tried to shake up society a bit, although I’m not sure of the whole circumstances, but there was a proposal to appoint a communist, Elliott Johnston, to the Supreme Court. Now, I don’t know whether that occurred under Don’s Government; but it certainly may have been seen as a way of opening up society by not excluding points of view. And certainly Johnston was very well-qualified. I do know that at one stage a Liberal Government under Steele Hall baulked at his appointment. But I think eventually he was appointed to the Supreme Court. He was very well-qualified, but he wouldn’t have got appointed under another government.
Interesting. Well, Graham, thanks very much for that. It’s a very interesting recollection of events and initiatives and people, of course. So thank you.

I hope it helps.

END OF INTERVIEW