This is an interview with Don Hopgood for the Don Dunstan Foundation and the State Library of South Australia on Tuesday, 20 November 2007, interviewer Rob Linn.

Don, you were one of the enduring faces of South Australian politics, if you don’t mind me putting it that way.

Twenty-three years in the Parliament, yes, my word.

That’s right.

Yes.

Tell me how you came to go into Parliament in 1970. What’s the background?

Well, it depends how far you want to go back. The immediate background to it is that I joined the Party in 1965. I went to the local sub-branch meeting immediately after the 1965 State election and got elected as the president of the branch, much to my amazement. (laughs) Then I became Secretary after a year or so – I realised the president doesn’t do much; the secretary does all the work – and therefore got very involved in Hughie Hudson’s re-election campaign in 1968, in fact I was effectively his campaign director.

When they reallocated the boundaries in ’69 he came to me one day and said, ‘Look, Hoppy, you want to throw your hat in the ring for one of these new seats? And I’ve got to know by tonight because we’ve got to line up the votes within the Party’. And at the time, of course, I’d left teaching, I was up at Flinders, I was doing my PhD, wasn’t sure where this was going to take me, said to my wife, ‘Well, what have we got to lose? If I don’t get elected I don’t get elected; I’ll continue in the academic sphere’. And of course it all happened a year before I expected it to happen because Steele Hall called that early election in ’70; next thing I knew, I was in Parliament.

Now, that was the election on the boundary issue, wasn’t it, primarily?

Chowilla.

Sorry; correct.
Yes, Chowilla. Yes. But, of course, my interest in politics go way back before then and it probably begins with Don’s broadcasts. Now, as you probably know, the Labor Party had a minority interest in radio station 5KA; the majority interest was the Adelaide Central Mission at the Methodist Church; the holding company through which the Party had its ten per cent, I think – might have been twenty; I think it was ten – was the *Workers’ Weekly Herald* of the ALP, which was pretty well defunct but it was still listed. And I don’t know that the Labor Party ever got much out of that association, except that every week Don would have his program and I was an avid listener to this bloke, who of course had this ability to enthuse and to energise people and to have people sit in and saying, ‘Yeah, he’s right, he’s right, yeah, that’s what we should be doing’, *et cetera, et cetera*. So that was really my first contact with Don: over the air.

**Well, Don, what type of issues was Don Dunstan talking about in those early interviews?**

They were mainly domestic issues. Didn’t get into the – well, I don’t recall him getting into any national politics to any great degree. Issues to do with poverty, to do with social welfare, to do with the whole question of the electoral boundaries, which you hinted at earlier – the gerrymander, *et cetera* – all those sorts of issues.

**So can you think back further when your political interest had been awakened? Was it those interviews themselves with Don that did that? Sorry, they weren’t interviews; they were speeches, more or less.**

Yes, just listening. I don’t know. I mean, I can still remember the 1946 State election, when I was seven, when in Prospect Whittle, the Liberal candidate, Bert Shard, the sitting Labor Member – Bert later went into the Upper House – and I was on Shard’s side at that stage. Now, my parents were Labor, Dad always maintained Labor, but he never really took politics to me; I made up my own mind. So I’m not quite sure. It’s almost as if I sort of seeped it up from my environment.

**What were the social and economic conditions that you were growing up in and amongst that really led you to have an interest in what Don was saying?**

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1 ALP – Australian Labor Party.
Well, look, my dad worked for two days a week driving a truck during the Depression, but he was also one of those – what are they called? – the ‘Lucky Generation’ who, at the end of the [Second World] War, suddenly found that there were jobs everywhere, and he settled into a reasonably comfortable sort of a job, so there was always food on the table. But, nonetheless, you had to watch the budget in my house. My mother was a very frugal sort of person. So I guess we always saw ourselves as being part of the working class, as it were, even though many of our social habits – you know, my dad was a non-smoker, non-drinker, non-gambler, that sort of thing – were quite different. So it may have been that.

It might have also simply been that I was trying to make a bit of sense of the world. I was a young Methodist. Methodism has always had a sort of a social gospel aspect to it, and I sort of tried to put the two together: was Jesus the first socialist? What about all those things the early Church did about sharing their goods in common? Et cetera, et cetera, trying to work towards a synthesis about the world which would satisfy both my faith background and my growing interest in politics.

**Did your parents encourage you in education, Don?**

Oh, very much so, very much so. Clearly they went without in order that I should have a good education. Mind you, I won scholarships, so that helped. That helped a lot. Not only scholarships, but also when you got to Leaving if you were going to be a schoolteacher you could become a preliminary probationary student and I think they paid you fifty-five pounds a year, and that developed the bond, of course: if you stopped teaching before three years you had to pay back the money they’d paid you over a period of time. So there were all those things that helped; but oh, yes. What they said was, ‘We never had a chance’. My dad had to leave school at the end of grade seven, although he had very good marks, because he was the second-youngest of seven children and they were battling down there at Brompton. Mum went to Adelaide Girls’ High School for a year, did a commercial course, but then got a job – not without some difficulty; she talked about her mother taking her round from one employer to another and ..... ..... getting interviews, et cetera, till she finally got a job.
So where did you go to high school, Don?

Adelaide. Adelaide Boys’ High School. The first intake at West Terrace.

Yes, after the observatory was smacked over.

That’s right. The observatory was still actually there.

No, sorry; that stayed until ’62 or ’3, I think.

Well, there were two observatories, remember: there was the weather bureau, which was right on the corner; next to it was the school and the other side was the old astronomical observatory with the transit telescope.

And I think Charles Todd’s house had been where the school was.

Oh, possibly, I’m not sure about that, I’m not sure. I know there was a good deal of controversy about whether the school should ever have been built there on parklands, and the administration of the school tried to make the issue that in fact the area had always been set aside for defence purposes and so it wasn’t, strictly speaking, parklands. Now, I thought that begging a number of questions, but nonetheless that was what was said. Todd might have actually lived at the observatory, yes.

And, Don, was it from there to Adelaide Teachers’ College?

Adelaide Teachers’ College and Adelaide University, that’s right.

So were your political thoughts sparked up a bit in those tertiary years?

Yes, they were. But interesting, you know: when I first went to the uni and, ‘Oh, I’d better go along to the Labor Club’, there wasn’t much happening on campus about politics. That came later. Don would turn up occasionally and speak to the Labor Club, et cetera. But there wasn’t really very much happening and the word was, ‘Well, the Labor Club’s too intellectual, the Liberal Club’s too social, so blow all that stuff’. But what the real issue was, of course, was
religion. It was the Christians – the SCM$^2$ and the EU$^3$ – against the agnostics, and that was what galvanised the campus more than politics; but politics came later, you know, you suddenly get people like John Bannon and so on who are getting active and so it goes. But there were political meetings held at the uni, and I think that – see, I’ve never been quite sure how the Oaklands–Dover Gardens Sub-Branch got hold of my name and approached me in 1965 and said, ‘Will you help in the election?’ I suspect that they got it from the Labor Club.

**So were you still living out at Prospect at that stage?**

What happened was that I started teaching in – get it right, Hoppy – [1960]. I did three years teaching at LeFevre Boys’ Technical High School and I was living still at home; ’63 I was transferred to Whyalla, to Whyalla Technical High School, and I got engaged that particular year and we married at the beginning of ’64 when we both came down here to teach at Westminster School –

**Oh, that’s right.**

– the Methodist school at Marion.

**Yes, following another Whyalla Person, Doug Forder.**

Well, you see, Doug knew my dad, because Dad used to go – as a paint salesman, used to go up to BHP, he was an industrial paint salesman. And he met Doug on one occasion, and Doug had just got the appointment to Westminster, and Dad said to Doug, ‘Oh, my son’s a schoolteacher’. ‘Oh! Any time he wants a job, let me know.’ Now, eventually I did apply for the job and, when Doug discovered that I was also a lay preacher in the Uniting Church, he said, ‘You’ve got the job’. (laughs)

**No bias.**

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$^2$ SCM – Student Christian Movement.

$^3$ EU – Evangelical Union.
Didn’t ask me too many questions about my teaching qualifications at all. ‘Oh, that fellow. That fellow. Oh, yes, I’ve heard of you. Yeah, you’ve got the job.’

So that brought you down into that area, then, when you moved to teach at Westminster.

We built at Briardale Road, Sturt, just above Sturt Road there, and yes, I can still remember the day Peter ….., the then Secretary of the Branch, turned up and asked me to give out or put some things in letterboxes for Hughie Hudson, be on the polling booth and then, of course, as I say, a month or so later I was invited to go to the local sub-branch meeting.

What were the issues for you in that mid-’60s to late ’60s, Don, the issues and the excitements?

Mainly just I was dedicated to Labor at that point, I dearly wanted to see a Labor Government. I thought a Labor Government could do a lot in the State. I had certainly accepted that the gerrymander was one that had to be got rid of and I wanted to be part of that, I could see no reason why some people had a vote for the Legislative Council and others didn’t; and so I embraced all of these issues, I guess.

Now, when you were approached to stand yourself, that would have been initially for the seat of Mawson?

Yes.

Would that be correct?

Oh, well, it’s a bit more complicated than that. At one stage they wanted me to stand for Mitchell.

Did they?

Yes. Which Ronnie Payne eventually got. And someone else was going to stand for Mitchell, and anyway the someone else got sick, got an adverse report on his heart, Ron emerged as somebody that was being pushed by Geoff Virgo, but there was a blue in the Party down here. A fellow who’d been our candidate in 1968 and nearly won the seat when it was the old Alexandra seat decided he was interested in Federal politics, so when the ’69 election came
along he said to another fellow down here, Les Drury, who later got into the Parliament, he said, ‘Look, I’m not interested in State politics any more; I’m going to get preselection for Kingston and you can have the State seat’, sort of, (laughs) you know – not that it was his to give, as he discovered. Anyway, Richie Gunn came along and this fellow, Bob, didn’t get the preselection for Kingston, so he came back to the other guy and said, ‘Well, the deal’s off. I’m going to have another run at the State seat’, and the other guy said, ‘The deal is not off’, and all of a sudden you had people taking sides down here. So again my mentor, Hudson, came to me, said, ‘Hoppy, neither of these guys’ll do, given the state of what’s going on down there. We need a compromise candidate: we reckon you’re the one. Will you throw your hat in the ring for that one?’ So, ‘All right, Hugh. Okay, I’ll do that’. He said, ‘I think you’d better shift house, too, while you’re about it. You’d better shift down there’. So I said, ‘All right. Well, I guess we could do that as well’. We lived there for seven years and it all went from there.

Now, how did you find Hugh Hudson?

Ah! Well, Hughie – fascinating character. First of all, in terms of a mind, as good as you’ll get anywhere in politics at any time. An enormous capacity to absorb information, to analyse it and to use it. I can recall years later, after he’d been away from the State, Sue Lenehan had him back to do some work for us on water – water rating and that sort of thing – and the second day he was back he was on the ABC being interviewed and there’s all this information just being poured out, and I thought, ‘You haven’t forgotten a thing, mate. You haven’t forgotten a thing’. The other classic one was one occasion when Des Corcoran was away – this is when Hugh was, I suppose he was still Minister of Education –

Yes.

– yes, I suppose he was; because I took over from him as Minister of Education, he went to another portfolio. But Des was away for a few days and Hughie had the Works portfolio, which

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4 ABC – Australian Broadcasting Commission, later Corporation.
 included E&WS. Now, at the time, Warren Reservoir had to be opened because there was a concern that the wall was going to collapse, and Hughie’s under questioning in the House about this. And he’s pouring out all these statistics, you know: ‘So many thousand kilolitres here and so many thousand kilolitres there’, not a note in front of him. And Jack Wright turned to me and said, ‘Hoppy, is he making all this up?’ And I said, ‘Well, none of us’d know, would we, Jack? None of us would know’. (laughter) But no, he had this enormous capacity to absorb and deal with information.

His Achilles heel was he couldn’t keep out of a fight. Dean Brown used to bait him from the Opposition benches –

Yes.

– and we would say to Hughie, ‘Look, just ignore him. Don’t fight below your weight, mate’, you know? Famous saying from Arthur Calwell. But no, he had to bite back, he had to bite back. And in Cabinet things would be going on for a while about something and Don, who might have almost nodded off at this stage, would say, ‘Hugh, is there really any point in going on with this argument?’ ‘Don, there are some things that need to be said.’ And I joke that, on Hughie’s tombstone, the epitaph would be: ‘There were things that needed to be said.’

Because the other thing was he could be prolix in the extreme. We used to joke that he’d be answering a question – you could tell from the body language: if hands were in front of him on the front bench then its going to be a short answer; if he worked his hands around so he was into his pocket, it’s going to be a much longer answer; and, if he got into the hip pocket, forget it. Forget it. Half an hour later the next question would be – – –. (laughter) So he was a great guy and he influenced me a lot – marvellous wife, Ainslie[?], who I’ve heard the other day she still lives in Sydney – and, as I say, one of the most capable people we ever had; but, if there was an Achilles heel, he couldn’t keep out of a fight.

So at the time that you’re asked to stand for a seat, Don, socially and economically South Australia’s come a long way over a decade and a half by that time.

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5 E&WS – Engineering and Water Supply.
Don HOPGOOD 9

SOHC/OH 715/6

Yes, but we’d had a bit of a mini-slump in the mid-’60s. We’d had a bit of a mini-slump and were just coming out of that. But yes, we had come a long way, had come a long way. You can go right back to the industrialisation of the State, although I’ve got my own ideas about that: I think some of the conventional wisdom about when that started was probably wrong. But nonetheless, nonetheless, we’d come a long way from being really an agricultural State to being manufacturing industry, to defence-based to a degree, all that stuff. And then, of course, we’d already gone through the reforms of the Labor Government of the ’60s.

Of the Walsh and then the Dunstan Governments.

Yes. They said, ‘The Premier’s name is Walsh, spelt D-U-N-S-T-A-N.’

Yes. I once heard a Clyde Cameron story on that, which I will not talk about. (laughter) So, Don, that’s a time of some excitement, I would have thought, still, even though there’s been that patch of a downer there.

Oh, yes. Yes. And the other thing you’d say, also, I think I was one of the candidates that helped to confirm Don’s leadership, because Don’s assumption of the leadership in ’68 was by no means clear-cut. He didn’t beat Des Corcoran by all that much. Then, of course, we lost the election, even though we had a majority of votes – and Don blamed himself for that, which was a silly thing to do, but he did – and I think he probably felt that he had enemies in the Party and all the rest of it. So he was pretty keen to ensure that the crop of new candidates – and there were a lot of them in ’70, for a number of reasons – very much reflected his view of the world.

So you knew him before you stood for the seat, did you?

Not all that well, not all that well. You’ve got to understand that, in some ways, nobody ever knew Don Dunstan. Very, very private sort of a bloke. You had to know what levers to pull to get any sort of small talk out of him at all. And the big lever was his kids. You ask him how the kids – because I knew his children quite well, particularly Bronwyn, who was a teacher in the time that I was Minister of Education – and then he’d open up and he’d talk; but otherwise, hard to get two words out of him because his mind was all full of the dreams and the visions and
Don HOPGOOD

SOHC/OH 715/6

the policies and all the rest of it. So I didn’t know Don all that well, but I think I was seen as very much a Dunstan man – in fact, perhaps a little more than I was, in some respects.

I can recall – during that brief Liberal Government, you may recall that Robin Millhouse had changed the laws related to abortion.

Yes.

Actually, what he’d done was made it a statutory thing rather than the common law. We didn’t have any law on abortion; all that an Act said – it was probably the *Criminal Law Consolidation Act* – was it laid down penalties for a criminal abortion without saying what it was; so Robin defined it, you see, in an Act of Parliament. Well, when I came in, of course the Parliament and the State were still reverberating over this and there were those people who were determined to turn the clock back, and they would have been, within the Labor Party, the Corcoran people. Terry McCrae, a mate of mine but a classic example of somebody...-

So is that a Roman Catholic side of things?

Oh, yes, absolutely, absolutely. And Terry, for example, did introduce a private member’s bill to try to amend what Millhouse had done. Now, I was a little startled to read in the paper at one stage that, ‘Oh, this young Don Hopgood is sort of Dunstan’s man on these sorts of issues’, because I really wasn’t quite an abortion on demand person, but it was presumed I was because I was seen as one of the Dunstan stable, you know.

So Terry McCrae, a lawyer, I think.

Yes, that’s right.

Very, very good lawyer.

Oh, yes, my word.

And a very active politician, too.

Yes. Well, he got elected the same election as me, eventually became Speaker –

Yes.
but stepped down, I think, the election before me. And he died only earlier this year.

Yes, correct. So, Don, you’re seen as a Dunstan man even though, as you said, you didn’t know him very well.

Yes.

Can you describe that 1970 election and all that went with it?

Well, it was a very exciting time. Everything’s new, everything’s fresh. I did a number of things that I didn’t do ten years later. For example, I campaigned in the streets. Now, nobody does that any more. And even ten years down the track from then I didn’t do it. I can recall we pulled up with a truck, flat truck, at the shopping centre up here with a loud-hailer, which we’d borrowed from the Vehicle Builders’ Union, and I harangued the crowd (laughs) as they were going into the shopping centre. Apparently that was going right into the shopping centre.

Was this at Marion, Don, or where?

No, no, just up here, the Reynella Shopping Centre.

Oh, Reynella!

Yes. Oh, yes.

True?

That’s right. Which was the only shopping centre around in those days, of course; none at all. There were two public meetings, one which I shared with Hughie Hudson in the Brighton Town Hall, and the other was up here in the community hall, whatever they called it in those days, at Morphett Vale, and Don came down for that.

That would have been the Institute building, wouldn’t it?

The Institute building, absolutely. Now – I’ve been thinking about this since you rang me about the interview – I would have thought that, as a young, untried sort of a bloke, Don would pull me aside beforehand and say, ‘Now, mate, these are the things you can say and these are the things you can’t say, and steer away from that’. None of that, none of that. No briefing at all,
no briefing at all. What he did do, of course, was make sure he spoke second so he could pick up anything I dropped along the way; but no, there was none of that. And it’s interesting. I mean, back in those days – and I presume even now – there’s little in the way of an apprenticeship for young parliamentarians; it’s just presumed by your party that, if they trusted you enough to preselect you, they’ve also trusted you enough to know what to say and when to say it, *et cetera, et cetera*. And certainly Don was like that and it was the same when I became Minister. My first ministry was Development and Mines, which I took over from him, and Minister Assisting the Premier, which was a lot of housekeeping stuff that didn’t amount to much – except that it did involve some of the Monarto work. Now, again, you might have thought that he’d sit down with me and, you know, da-dah, da-dah. I think we had one brief conversation, about assistance to industry, in which he displayed the way in which he thought we should go about that, but other than that left to my own devices. He just trusted me to do what I should do; and I presume he did it all the other ministers as well.

**So 1970–73, when you pick up those ministries, Don –**

Yes.

– **what’s the Parliament like?**

Well, first of all, there were a lot of new Members. Twenty-one. Now, remember we’re talking about a House of Assembly of at the time – well, even now – forty-seven and a Legislative Council at the time of twenty, and I think there were twenty-one new Members. For at least three reasons. First of all, there’d been a change of government. Now, when there’s a change of government there’s always going to be some people that lose their seats and others ..... There were some Liberals lost their seats to Labor people. Secondly, the Liberals kicked out about three of their people on preselection. And thirdly, with the increase in the size of the House from thirty-nine to forty-seven, there were a number of new seats. This one was produced from the northern end of the old Alexandra electorate, which was why we didn’t win it in ’68. So that was the first thing, there were lots of new people, lots of new people in, and it was one of
the reasons why I nearly got a ministry in ’73. I didn’t, which was probably very fortunate, it enabled me to finish my doctorate and all that sort of stuff. Lots of new people.

It was, secondly, dominated by several early issues, which I thought were going to imperil our majority. One was the shopping hours debate, and the second thing was of course the Vietnam Moratorium and all the stuff that went with that. But the third thing, of course, and the dramatic issue of that first Parliament, was of course Steele Hall’s resignation. I can still remember it. My brother had come into the Parliament – brother’s always been active in Rotary – and they were going to do a debate on payment of Members and he wanted a bit of information about it and I got some and I said, ‘I’ll photocopy it for you’, and I went into the messenger’s office to do some photocopying, which meant I was going to miss prayers and probably the first question of the day, but I thought, ‘It doesn’t matter, it doesn’t affect me’. I was still on the back bench anyway, you see. I probably had a question lined up for about an hour’s time or something. Well, I come out of the office and people are sort of standing around in the corridor and I heard one of the messengers saying, ‘He’s on the cross benches’. I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ They said, ‘Steele Hall has resigned as Leader of the Opposition’. Well, I threw the papers at my brother, raced in there and sat down next to Ernie Crimes, Member for Spence or whatever – it’s called Spence these days. I believe Ernie’s still with us, at the age of a hundred. And Ernie’s saying – I think he was a bit overwhelmed by the emotion – he said, ‘I don’t think we should take too much pleasure from what’s happening in front of us here’. (laughter) He really was, of course, you know! We’d just been handed the next election.

Yes.

But yes. And obviously Hall was reacting to pressures that had been on him from the more conservative wing of the Liberal Party going right back into the period when he was Premier and finally telling them they could stick it. And that led, of course, to the short-term formation of the Liberal Movement within the Liberal Party and so it went on from there. So that was really the first Parliament, the first three years. Pretty exciting, pretty bubbly.
Did you know Steele Hall at all, Don?

Not all that well. Steele was another one of those guys was very hard to get to know, very hard to get to know, and I think people on his own side found exactly the same thing. Saw himself as a bit of a man of destiny treading the halls of power, not the sort of guy that would sort of unbend too much.

So what was Don Dunstan’s view of the world in that first term of Parliament, for you?

Well, Don had a reform agenda. He wanted to move on with it as quickly as possible. He saw that the reform of the electoral system and the Legislative Council was the most important thing. Of course, we weren’t able to achieve that until after the ’73 election, but nonetheless there were some of the things he was doing. He put a lot of support behind Hugh Hudson and the picking up of the education system. Now, ‘Dodge’ Jordan, Professor Jordan – Professor of Chemistry, actually, at Adelaide University – had been asked by the previous government to do a report into education reform, and they never got a chance to do much with it because it lobbed not long before Hall called the election, you see. So this was all on Hughie’s plate. He had in Alby Jones a Director-General who was very keen to see these sorts of reforms occur. Alby wore his political credentials on his sleeve, which you’re not supposed to do as a public servant, but there’s no doubt he did, and they were a great team. They were a great team. So I suppose, apart from all of the – oh, I’ll come to something else in a minute – but apart from the electoral, constitutional stuff, education was the second big thing.

The third big thing was social welfare. Don was very much concerned that he felt that social welfare had been more or less a plaything of the philanthropists; it was time to put it on a more professional level, and of course he had this agreement with Len King. Len King came into the Parliament on the understanding that he would do two terms as Attorney-General, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Minister of Community Welfare. And the other thing that he did as well as reforming the Community Welfare Department, or whatever it was called in those days, was all of that consumer protection legislation. Just came, just kept coming, just kept coming.

So that was the ’70–’73 Parliament: a pretty busy time.
Did you have any idea, Don, where some of that reformist stuff had come from?

Oh, I think it had been around for a long time but the Liberals hadn’t got around to doing much with it, I think that was as much as what it was. There were people in the public service who were keen to have some of these things happen and so worked very enthusiastically with the Government.

It’s interesting: the fellow who was in charge of the Department of Labour and Industry – can’t remember his name for a moment; he was a Uniting Church bloke, I think he’s still around the place – in the previous Liberal Government he’d had to do a bit of the hatchet work because of where he was in his department, see, so he was detested by the trade unionist. But, once we got into power, quite different. Lindsey someone, I think. ‘Yeah, right. Oh, yeah, yeah.’ You know? Couldn’t do enough to help the Government, because he saw that as a professional public servant, anyway, I guess he saw that as his role; but I think he also realised it was time for a few changes to occur and so he co-operated very much with the Government in that respect.

Don, you mentioned the rise of education as a focal point –

Yes.

– and it had been subdued for decades.

Yes.

Now, was Jordan’s report before or after Peter Karmel’s report?

Oh, good question. They were round about the same time.

Same time.

No, I think it was before. Well, Karmel’s report was a Federal one, wasn’t it?

It was, indeed.

Ah, well, no, no: well, Karmel’s report I think was after Jordan’s, yes. But they dovetailed tolerably well.
Yes, that’s my memory of it, too. I’ve just read some stuff on Jordan’s report –

Yes.

– and Peter Karmel, of course, was very instrumental in the shaping of the modern education system.

That’s right, that’s right, particularly at the tertiary level.

Tertiary level, yes.

I knew Karmel quite well because I was on the Council of the Flinders University and he was at the time the Vice-Chancellor.

Vice-Chancellor, yes. So, Don, just within your first term again, what was it like in Caucus? How did that function?

Functioned very well because Don got what he wanted and there were very few arguments.

Is that right?

Oh, yes, yes. The biggest tensions, as I say, were over the abortion issue and the attempt by some who, as I say, were largely identified with dear old Des to put the clock back a bit so far as Millhouse’s – – –. I mean, remember this: it was Liberal legislation, it wasn’t Labor legislation – although you had what’s called a conscience vote, a non-party vote, and there were probably as many if not more on the Labor side that had favoured the reform than had been against it. So that was probably the main tension; but, beyond that, no, no. Don got what he wanted, everybody realised that we were in power because of Don’s leadership and so we sort of moved on.

How did he actually run Caucus?

Don was pretty laid back as a Caucus chair. But on the other hand he was just as likely to say – I mean, he’d let it run on a bit if it had to, then he’d say, ‘Well, that’s it, that’s it, come on, come on. We’ve got to make a decision here’, so a vote was then taken and you’d move on. But he wasn’t the schoolmaster type at all and, as I say, in Cabinet sometimes if they were droning on a
bit Don was just as likely to turn off for a while and (laughs) then bring us back to the matter in hand.

**So had he predetermined the agenda, largely, in those meetings?**

Caucus, no. Well, yes and no. Remember, much of the business of Caucus is dealing with the legislation that the Government is going to put before the House in the next couple of weeks so, to the extent that it’s been to Cabinet before it’s ever been to Caucus, yes, I guess you can say that – and given that Don had a big hand in the legislation, yes. But nonetheless, nobody saw this as dictatorship or anything; it was just that, well, it was good that in fact the legislation was referred to the Caucus. I think there had been those political parties down the years where the government of the day, the cabinet has determined the legislation and the parliamentary party were just expected to vote for it, whereas we had a fairly sophisticated system. I don’t know whether this actually happened immediately after ’70 but it happened soon after. Each minister would have their own Caucus sub-committee, so there’d be an Education Sub-Committee under Dunstan; there’d be a Community Welfare Sub-Committee under King; *et cetera, et cetera*. So the legislation would have been referred to them first, and they would come to Caucus and say, ‘We’ve considered the legislation and we recommend that it be approved and be introduced’, or they might suggest some amendments; although what’s more likely is that if they had some real concerns the minister would take it back to the department and fix up their concerns before it ever came back to Caucus so, by the time it comes back to Caucus finally, it’s pretty well cut-and-dried.

**So a pretty smooth procedure.**

Pretty smooth procedure. I don’t recall any real problems in the Caucus in those early years at all.

**Don, come 1973 and, as you said, you’re promoted to Minister Assisting the Premier, then Development and Mines.**

Yes.

**Who had that before you?**
Don, that was, was it?

One of Don’s long list of portfolios. (laughs)

Correct, it was indeed, that’s right.

Yes.

Yes. Now, what were the main issues for you in those portfolios?

Well, now, Mines, of course, that was the Department of Mines and the big issue there was the development of the gas fields in the North of the State. And I guess you can say, although we always got on extremely well together, there was always a little bit of a clash of ministerial interests between Des and me because I was representing in Cabinet, as it were, the interests of the producers and Des, who had some – I mean the Gas Company was never a department or anything, it was a private company, but nonetheless there was an Act and ETSA, of course, was a government instrumentality – so Des was representing the consumers. So I’m arguing that, in fact, we need to put up the gas prices to give the producers greater incentive to find some more so we don’t run out, and Des of course is arguing, ‘Well, if you do that, then everybody at home’s going to be paying more for their gas, they’re going to pay more for their electricity’, et cetera. I mean this is the normal stuff of government, you know, that goes on all the time and eventually, of course, you had to come to some sort of a compromise. Then, of course, there was the complicating factor of Rex Connor in the Whitlam Government when they came along and all these great plans for gas pipelines all over Australia, et cetera, et cetera. So I guess yes, that was the major issue for me.

I claimed at the time that I would have been the only Minister of Mines that had ever studied any geology at tertiary level, because I did Geology I as part of my degree, you see. So I used to go down to the Department, very interested. There was a palynologist in the Department, a

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6 South Australian Gas Company or SAGasCo.

7 ETSA – Electricity Trust of South Australia.
guy interested in fossil pollens and dating strata by the pollen, so I encouraged him and got very interested in what he was doing; went up to the gas fields on a number of occasions, all that sort of stuff. So I really enjoyed the Mines portfolio, even though there were tensions with the mining industry, particularly through the Federal Government more than us.

Just going back a little bit there –

Yes, please, yes.

– one of the criticisms of Don in that portfolio earlier were that he’d actually sold out the gas to New South Wales at a price well below what it should have been.

Yes.

And you inherited that.

I did, indeed. I can’t remember actually an argument about the price – anyway, it was before I was in Cabinet, obviously.

It was, indeed.

What I do remember is that when the plans came up for the Redcliff petrochemical plant there were concerns that some of that gas, which was going to AGL, would have been very valuable in ensuring that Redcliff went on, you see. ‘But it’s dedicated.’ And Hughie Hudson saying, ‘We’re going to have to get it so-and-so undedicated’. ‘But we can’t do that.’ Of course, the thing was that the producers were going broke and I think they would have gone under but for that sale to the Sydney market; and in fact there is a – long-since dead now – there was a well-known South Australian businessman, who was also for a while Treasurer of the Liberal Party, who had a dinner with Don and me and some of Don’s staff down at Ayer’s House one evening, and he said, ‘Don,’ he said, ‘they’re going broke. You are going to have to nationalise them. You’re going to have to take them over and run them as a State instrumentality’. In other words, this bloke was a Playford Liberal, you know, that sort of approach. Now, it didn’t

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8 AGL – Australian Gas and Light.
happen, it didn’t happen, although, of course, under Hughie Hudson we passed that special legislation to protect the producers from – what’s his name? The guy that built the tower on the beach at Scarborough in Western Australia. Alan Bond.

Bond.

Alan Bond, because Alan Bond was going to buy in and then, so it was claimed, strip the asset and then where would we be? No gas for the oven for tea, you see. So the producers were very close to government in the sense that their interests were our interests, but we had sort of a double interest: we had to keep them in business but, at the same time, we were trying to keep down the price of electricity and gas to the South Australian consumers.

I guess one of the reasons I asked that question, which was before your time –

Yes.

– was that I’ve had some people say to me that Don’s negotiating skills weren’t always up to speed. Now, I wanted your view on that.

The only experience I’ve got of that is, in fact, the sale of the railways to the Commonwealth when, of course, the Commonwealth were even keener to get the railways off us than we were to give it to them. I mean Gough was just saying, ‘We need your system, we need your system. We want everybody’s and we need yours’. And I recall I was in Kirribilli House the day that Don and Geoff Virgo finally got the deal with Gough because I then went to lunch with them. I was there for a different reason. Bruce Webb and I, Bruce being the Director of the Mines Department –

Oh, yes.

– Bruce and I were talking to Rex Connor about gas; in fact, I’ve got a classic story you might like to hear because, as I say, Rex had all these grandiose schemes. Anyway, we’re ushered into his office, he’s got another group of people with him, and on the screen – he’s doing what we would now call a PowerPoint presentation – on the screen there is a planetary body which I presumed was the moon. Craters everywhere, you see? And he says, ‘Oh, gentlemen, just sit
down. Bear with us for a few minutes’, he says. ‘Oh, this is the planet Mercury.’ And I thought, ‘He’s finally done it. He’s taking out mining leases on the planet Mercury’. (laughter)

In fact, what he was doing or they were doing in explaining to him was how meteorite impact had produced the gas field at Pound Valley, because it’s shake up the crust of the earth and the gas was able to get closer to the surface. I thought, ‘Yeah, he’s finally taken out mining leases on Mercury’. (laughter)

But, getting back to your question, that’s the only real information that I’ve got on Don’s – that’s the only experience I had. But that was an easy one for him, because Gough wanted it more than he wanted to give it to Gough.

So what about in the way you assisted Don as Minister Assisting the Premier?

Ah, yes. Well, look, it wasn’t as grandiose a job as the title sounded. Minister Assisting the Premier meant that there were a number of administrative functions which Don was too busy to do but he still wanted to keep that as part of his portfolio, so that, for example, strictly speaking, he continued to be the Minister for Monarto until I think Hughie Hudson took it over, but I did a lot of the administrative work. I worked with Ray Taylor and Tony whatever-his-name-was, who was the general manager, in a lot of the stuff.

I also had to sign the cheque of the week. Interesting little procedure. This happened after Executive Council on a Thursday morning. The Under-Treasurer would turn up and meet with the Minister Assisting the Premier to sign the cheque of the week. Now, this was the cheque, which, if you dropped it on the street, nobody could use it; but nonetheless it was for audit purposes and it covered the whole of the government operations for the previous seven days.

So this is Gilbert Seaman coming in?

Gilbert Seaman, exactly. Yes. And the first one I had to sign was for five million and my hand shook a bit; I think it got up at one week to ninety million, signing a cheque for ninety million dollars. I thought, ‘My glory! Why am I doing this?’ (laughs) So there were bits and pieces like that that the Minister Assisting the Premier did, but it wasn’t a grandiose job at all, really; it was keeping the kitchen tidy.
Don, could we talk for a moment for some of the other issues that were coming through in that early ’70s period –

Yes.

– like Monarto –

Yes.

– which were highly controversial at the time?

Yes. They probably weren’t controversial – Monarto wasn’t controversial at the beginning. I think most people saw Monarto as a sensible way of controlling the spread of urban Adelaide. The problem was we were all working under a demographic assumption which was wrong and wasn’t shown to be wrong until the Borrie Report came out. The figures we were using were the figures that – and the name’s, almost had it then, the town planner, Hart.

Stuart?

Stuart Hart. Stuart Hart wrote up the Adelaide Town Plan in 1962.

Yes, for Greater Adelaide, that’s right.

For Greater Adelaide. Which set out things like, for example, the Hills Face Zone, all that sort of stuff. And I read this avidly because I’m a bit of a frustrated geographer, I’ve ruined any number of social occasions here by saying, ‘I’ve got a map on that’. Next thing you know there are maps all over the floor. I’m in love with maps. So I read this and my first public speech down here – to the Rotary Club, actually – was about town planning because I decided that not only was I interested in it but also it’s the sort of thing that should be of interest to people living out here on the fringe of Adelaide: how do you do urban design better? Also at the time Hugh Stretton had written Ideas for Australian cities and I thought, ‘This is the greatest thing since sliced bread’ – except, of course, that Hugh wanted a twin city, he wanted the next urban node to be down there at Willunga–McLaren Vale, you see, and that would have simply meant more sort of expansion.
Anyway, getting back to Stuart Hart’s town plan, there were a number of population forecasts in there which were also used for the MATS\(^9\) Plan, in studying the MATS Plan, and when the Borrie Report came out it was quite clear that they were grossly over-inflated. I used to actually quote the figures, you know: ‘This is what Hart had predicted City of Noarlunga would have by 1976; this is how many we’ve got’, \textit{et cetera}. And as soon as it became obvious that the population simply wasn’t going to be there the bottom fell out of it. By this stage, of course, Hudson had the portfolio; I’m in Education, so I don’t know the day-to-day things that happened there. But that was what it was, the population that had been predicted was not going to be there – drop in fertility, all that sort of stuff; Adelaide not getting the same share of perhaps migration that some of the other cities were getting – end of story.

Now, the controversy, of course, which we never had to face, was that it had been determined by government that two or three of the government departments –

\textit{That’s right.}

– would transfer holus bolus to Monarto, one being Agriculture and one being Lands – I later had the Lands portfolio – and there was one other, I don’t know what the third one was, but that would have been difficult. That would have been difficult.

\textit{Well, in time Environment was going to be moved there too, I think.}

Oh, probably, probably, yes.

\textit{So, Don, what about in Cabinet, looking on other ministers and their portfolios, what were the critical things coming through, can you recall those?}

Well, it depends which period you’re talking about.

\textit{Take ’70–75.}

’70–75. I think I’ve more or less covered most of them. Environment was just getting under way. You see, this was interesting. The newspapers had me picked as the first Environment

\footnote{\textsuperscript{9} MATS – Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Study.}
Minister and I didn’t get the votes in Caucus – as I said earlier, I think it was very good that I didn’t; I don’t think I was ready for the front bench after only being in parliament for a couple of years and it enabled me to finish my doctorate and so on. But anyway, a quick change of portfolios had to occur. Glen Broomhill, who’d been Minister of Labour and Industry, he transferred to Environment, and Dave McKie[?], who got that tenth ministry – I think it was tenth – he took Labour and Industry, he’d been an AWU10 bloke. And of course then Glen got moving with the new portfolio, so that was important: it was all new and it was exciting. And then when Glen – Glen must have moved to something else; he eventually, of course, resigned from Parliament altogether because of his wife’s health and Don Simmons took over the portfolio, and that’s of course when the legislation for the beverage containers was passed, so that was all pretty new and exciting and so on. I suppose that was part of the issues there.

The whole of the environment thing was really picking up and I very much got involved with that: did a lot of study on it; I went to a couple of conferences in Melbourne, where various speakers spoke; did a lot of reading; made a lot of speeches, I was always making speeches, asking questions, et cetera; and eventually, of course – well, I didn’t actually get the portfolio till the ’80s but I think I was seen as very much one of the back-bench spokespeople for the environment.

Now, transport. Transport’s an interesting one. I don’t think transport becomes a real issue within the Cabinet until the very late ’70s, but Geoff Virgo came into office with a view to finding alternatives to the MATS Plan. The Government never actually completely ruled out the possibility of a couple of freeways but they certainly were opposed to the whole shebang, and this was particularly true for – – –.

**Well, is this the aftermath to what happened in the ’60s, was it?**

Well, you see, the MATS Plan died because the Liberals lost the ’70 election.

**Yes, correct.**

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10 AWU – Australian Workers’ Union.
If they’d won the ’70s election, it might have still been around the place. But, as I say, we won the election and Geoff was saying, ‘Well, none of that’. Mind you, the major north–south artery would have gone right through his electorate and that was not popular with his people so I suppose that was good for him electorally to oppose it. And he wanted things like more grade separations – which we’re only getting now, of course – at the major intersections. He had this what turned out to be rather ill-advised experiment with the Dial-A-Cab and things like that. But eventually things turned a bit sour for Geoff because he feels that Hudson and Hudson’s successor, Hopgood, in Education, both supported by the Premier, are getting all the money and none of it’s going to Transport or not enough’s going to Transport and so some of the things he’s got in mind can’t happen. So eventually he had a fair sort of falling-out with Hugh, fair sort of falling-out with Hugh, and by the time we get to ’79 things aren’t always very happy in Cabinet because you’ve got this sort of almost brawl between Hughie Hudson and Geoff Virgo.

And I think this was a factor in the calling of the early election in ’79, because Des suddenly had this idea that he wanted to have his own mandate, he wanted to have an early election, Hughie was opposed to it so, because Hughie was opposed to it, Geoff was all for it and very much pushed Des along those lines. So I think that was a factor. I don’t know how much a factor, I really don’t. I can recall an evening or so before they actually called the election I had to go to the Premier’s office for some reason down at Parliament House and there was a group of them in very solemn conclave. The State Secretary, who was Georgie Whitten at the time, was in there; I think Howard O’Neill was in there; Hudson was in there – not Dunstan, Don had gone, of course; Geoff Virgo; and of course Des himself. And I think they were thrashing it out then and there, and I could see something very important was happening and I wasn’t really required so I said what I had to say and went. I was acting as Whip at the time, that was the reason. Was I acting as Whip? No, of course I wasn’t acting as Whip, how could I have been?

**How did you get on with Des, Don?**

Oh, very well. Well, you had to know how to handle Des. Des had been an army bloke and he got the idea in the army what you do is you bang the table and you yell at people and all the rest of it until they do what you want them to do. But of course he was one of those people who
came in roaring like a lion and went out like a lamb. I can recall Kevin Crease ringing me one, because Creasie was on Dunstan’s staff: he said, ‘Don, I can’t get on with Des at all. He just shouts at me all the time’. I said, ‘Kevin, look, all you got to do is keep talking, keep talking and eventually he’ll open the fridge, he’ll pour you a beer, he’ll start calling you “mate”’ – (laughs) ‘– and everything will be okay and he’ll have forgotten all about it’. ‘Oh.’ He saw me two days later, he said, ‘You’re absolutely right’. It works every time, it works every time. And I can recall once when I was Assistant Whip to Gil Langley. Now, Gil and Des got on like a house on fire and for some reason or another – – –.

Did they really?
Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

That’s fascinating.
Corcoran and Langley.

Really!
Oh, yes. Great mates, great mates. Because what did – Gil used to call him ‘the Colonel’. I mean they’d laugh about the way in which Des used to bank the table, you know. But on one occasion Des came in the House, because the normal thing is once you get through question time there’s just the one minister who’s in charge of the House and the others are off doing things, receiving deputations, all the rest of it, and neither Gil nor I were in there at the time. ‘Oh!’ He went crook. ‘Can’t find a whip anywhere.’ Bang, bang, bang. But again what happened was that I just kept him talking for a few minutes and next thing it’s ‘mate, mate, mate this, mate that’. Not that he could give me a beer because I don’t drink but, you know, it was all okay. Oh, yes. Once you got through that first sort of barrier where Des felt that he was still the major in the army, then it was all okay.

So, Don, we were talking about an amazing period in politics in the 1970s.
Yes.
There was a critical overhaul in that period, too, of the relationship between ministers and public service – indeed, the whole of the public service there was a bit of a reorganisation.

Can’t remember much about it. I can remember more about what we did under Johnnie Bannon in the ’80s but not so much in the ’70s.

This is the coming of Bob Bakewell and the realignment of Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Well, I suppose, yes, I suppose what Bakewell really represented was the final victory of the Premier’s Department over others. You see, if you go back early enough there was no Premier’s Department.

Yes.

There was an under-secretary. Now, the Under-Secretary worked to the Chief Secretary and most of the administrative stuff that had to encompass the whole of government was actually covered by the Under-Secretary’s department. In fact, the Under-Secretary used to sit in Executive Council, he was also regarded as the clerk of Executive Council. (laughs) I’ll never forget this: my second meeting of the Executive Council, and I was late. And I walked in and they were already started and this under-secretary looks at me and shakes his head like that, and Tom Casey, Minister of Agriculture, looked at me and shook his head like that. And I said to Hughie Hudson, ‘What are those two clowns on about?’ And he said, ‘You’re not supposed to come in after the Governor!’ (laughter) Anyway, at the end of the Executive Council, when the Governor had left, Geoff Virgo and one of the other senior ministers obediently walked in. They’d stopped outside, knowing the rules. (laughs) I hadn’t realised, I just hadn’t realised. So yes, most of it was done by chief secretaries. And by the time I became Chief Secretary along with a number of other things in the ’80s there were only four Acts of Parliament left that were under the aegis of the Chief Secretary, but it had been Chief Secretary, Chief Secretary, with the Premier simply being primus inter pares of all of the ministers, you see; and I think that was very much Bakewell, who tended to centralise things in the Premier’s Department.

For example, my position as Minister of Development and Mines meant that I had a little division of the Premier’s Department called the Division of Development. Mines was a
Don, I’ll just set up a new session. Just bear with me.

Yes, sure. (break in recording)

**This is the second session of an interview with Don Hopgood for the Don Dunstan Foundation interviews on 20th November 2007. Don, we were talking, just prior to coming into this new session, about the restructuring of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the centralising of a lot of issues. Was that indicative of the progress of Dunstan’s leadership over this time?**

Oh, well, I don’t think there’s any doubt about the fact that Don was absolutely unchallenged, he dominated the Party completely. What Don wanted he got. But of course he was able to prepare the way very well. I mean he was a superb advocate, superb advocate, and so if there were a few concerns, *et cetera*, Don would just get up, make a speech, put it all together and people fell into line. I mean he did this out in the suburbs as well as in the inner echelons of government.

I can recall a speech he gave to my sub-branch one evening down here. Now, these are fellows working in the refinery and car plant and all this sort of thing, and Don didn’t – what’s the word? – make things easy for them. He, as it were, gave them the benefit that they understood all the stuff he was talking about. For example, I remember he talked about how for a social democrat the important thing wasn’t so much the ownership of industry as control. The words he actually used – and I can remember these to this very day – were, ‘The indicia of title is irrelevant.’ I thought, ‘Oh, you mean it doesn’t matter who owns it, mate!’ (laughter) But to a group of trade unionists, *et cetera*, they were the actual words he used, you know? He didn’t patronise them in any way; he just assumed that they’d understand all this sort of thing, and at
the end of the speech he had people saying, ‘Oh, yeah, he’s right, you know, he’s right, he’s right’. These are people who perhaps a few years before might have assumed that under a Labor Government everything was going to be government-owned, you know.

So, yes, he very much dominated the agenda. He was unchallenged. The Des Corcoran who had opposed him for the leadership in ’68 in what I’m told was a bit of a nasty campaign – that’s all I’ve ever heard, I don’t know anything more than that – wept when Don resigned. So he’d got himself into that position.

**Did Des really have those sort of feelings for him, of great affection in that sense?**

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. As time went along. ‘The little fella’ he used to call him, ‘the little fella’. (laughs) Don was slightly taller than Des but of course nowhere near as broad. Yes, ‘the little fella’. ‘What’s the little fella doing right now?’ (laughs) No, he did, he did. He broke down when he had to announce that Don was retiring because of ill health.

**Just thinking about Don addressing the sub-branch here –**

Yes.

– and what happened at Lonsdale under his tutelage – in fact, that industrial area there is a direct result, isn’t it, of the work he did?

Pretty well, pretty well. I suppose the zoning – yes, even the zoning would have come in under Don. See, the whole point was we didn’t have proper planning legislation in this State until the Walsh Government of the ’60s when Don, as Minister of Local Government as well as Attorney-General, introduced the *Planning and Development Act*, which was very much on the model of Stuart Hart’s Greater Adelaide or at least the Town Plan, *et cetera*. So, prior to that time, there wasn’t much underpinning local regulations for zoning and stuff like that, you see. So yes, yes. Although there’d been some sort of general notion of an industrial area down here from the beginning of the refinery, which’d be ’59, nonetheless the legislation didn’t have real teeth until the late ’60s.

I’m thinking, Don, of the encouragement of Sola Optical into its premises at Lonsdale.
Yes.

Of R.M. Williams out at Salisbury.

Yes. All those people, yes.

There are dual developments going on on each side of Adelaide.

That’s right, there were. And, of course, I had some of that legislation under my control as Minister of Development and Mines in that the State could make a grant to industry for setting up somewhere, could lend industry money or could even get a slice of the action, that is purchase equity, in the industry so that they’d have enough money to set themselves up. And, of course, there’d also been – I think this probably predates Don, actually – there’d also been a fairly long tradition of the Housing Trust actually building industrial buildings for industry.

Yes.

Yes, I’m sure that was the case. Alec Ramsay used to come down to the committee that I chaired, the IDC, Industry Development Committee, to give evidence in favour of the funds being available for them to go ahead and build a factory for someone or other.

Yes. I’m sure that’s correct, Don, that the Housing Trust were instrumental in building many of those smaller – they weren’t small factories; they were quite large, some of them.

Quite large, quite large, yes.

So, Don, it seems to me that the Governments from 1970 on until the end of that decade, the accent is always on reform. Would that be fair?

Oh, yes. Yes, very much so, very much so. Now, the other thing that’s never quite been revealed: I remember Don telling the Caucus, not too long before he got sick, that, ‘We’re really going into some radical stuff here now, some very radical stuff, and I’ll be putting this all before you in a very short period of time’. I think some of it was to do with the industrial democracy –

Oh, yes.
– ideas that he had and we’d been pushing. But never, ever discovered what they were (laughs) because of course he got sick and that was it, that was the end of it.

Oh, and the other thing, of course, he was very keen on improving our concepts of design and the quality of the stuff that we built. So it’s not just a matter of how many factories you’ve got but what you’re doing with them. The only time I recall Don being short with a public servant was on one occasion – of course, as Minister of Education I had what was then called the Department of Further Education, now called TAFE¹¹ –

TAFE, yes.

– as well as the Education Department – and there was, in the foyer of the Education Building, TAFE or Department of Further Education put on a display of some of the gear that had been produced in some of their schools, you see? And we got Don to open it, and I can recall being with Lou Kloden, the Director General of Further Education, when Don said to him, ‘Lou, look at this stuff. Kitsch, kitsch. When are we going to get decent design in this State?’ (laughter) Poor old Lou’s sort of shrivelling up on the spot, you know, because it was so unlike Don to tear strips of somebody in this way. But yes, very keen on design.

And of course the other thing was the – oh, it’s still around the place, is it not? – that government instrumentality, little government instrumentality, glassblowers, artists, all that sort of thing.

Oh, the Jam Factory?

The Jam Factory, yes, yes. Very much Don’s idea. I mean, you know, you’re not going to get a prosperous State just out of a jam factory; but what you will do is encourage excellence in design and if that moves through into industry generally then of course things can very much pick up.

So was this always a part of Don’s push, this interest in the arts?

¹¹ TAFE – Technical And Further Education.
Oh, yes. Very much so, very much so, going way back to the very beginning. In fact, I think probably that’s where it starts, because of enormous reading and, like Hughie Hudson, he had an enormous capacity to be able to absorb information. He does his reading and he eventually gets into social democratic theory. He could quote to you why the social credit people were wrong, you know. The rest of us would just say, ‘Oh, it’s funny money stuff and it’ll ruin us with inflation’, but no, he could give you chapter and verse why it’s wrong. So he gets into these other areas and, of course, as a lawyer, he was also very much involved in the civil rights and civil liberties side. But I think it all begins with his affection for the arts: the fact that he was a musician, as a piano player quite a good one, the fact that he’d been the Secretary of the Actors’ Equity and all that sort of stuff.

So did you ever get to know him well personally, Don, just thinking about those things?

Not really. Not really, no, no. We got on very well, never a cross word between Dunstan and Hopgood, and he helped me in a number of ways – although, as I said earlier, by and large he left you to your own devices. But Don was a very difficult guy to get to know and, as I say, you needed to know what levers to pull to get him to just relax and chat away at a table at a social function.

I can recall one night my wife and I were – now, I think probably his first wife was already having some of her problems, I’m not sure she was even there, she ma...
these things’, and somebody asked the right questions and they said afterwards, this fellow, ‘What are you talking about? We couldn’t shut him up!’ (laughter) He just talked all night.

Very good.

But you had to know what it was.

So did he have a team around him that sort of structured the way that his section of the Government ran and his affairs ran?

Certainly his personal staff were very, very loyal to Don and Don was very loyal to them, probably to a fault in a couple of cases, even right down to Jack Richards.

Oh, yes.

Now, Jack Richards of course was Mayor of Kensington and Norwood –

Kensington and Norwood, yes.

– and Jack Richards was, in effect, the local Member in some ways. Not that he sat in Don’s electorate office; but he was part of an inquiry unit in town.

He knew everybody.

Oh, yes! And the thing was, you see – I mean, obviously a Premier can’t respond to every request for information or help, et cetera – so people would ring up and say, ‘I need to talk to the Premier about this’. ‘Well, the Premier’s very busy but come in and talk to Mr Richards and he’ll be able to sort it out for you’, you see. So, yes, right down to the likes of Jack Richards and that fellow, Hansford – no, his son. That was all very interesting because they were both in the inquiry unit together and eventually they opposed each other for the position of Mayor of Kensington and Norwood. But that didn’t seem to ruffle Don’s feathers at all; everything moved on. But he had his own personal staff, he was able to attract to his banner people like Kevin Crease, who knew the media inside out; Tony – biggish bloke. I think he’s died. He used to have a regular article in The Advertiser.

Oh, Baker.
Tony Baker, that’s right. Tony Baker.

**News, wasn’t he, eventually?**

*News*, that’s right. That’s right, that’s right, so he was. People like that. Often they would leave what they’d been doing for perhaps an agreed term – three years, four years, six years – work for Don and then move on back. They’d be able to say, ‘I worked for Don Dunstan and I was able to achieve this and that and something else’.

**Did you ever see the rise of the media in government yourself, Don, looking on?**

Oh, well, certainly by midway through my twenty-three years every minister had a press secretary and the Premier would have had a couple of them, a press staff, as it were, and that of course had been unknown if you go right back to the ’60s. Gerry Crease, of course, was Don’s first press secretary and I think that was one of the reasons why Kevin went to work for Don when asked to do so because we all know Gerry had his problems and I think that the Crease family are forever grateful to Don for his loyalty to Gerry – giving him a job, giving him responsibility and all the rest of it. So, yes, it’s very much in the Dunstan Era that the idea of the government of the day having a press corps developed.

I presume that Playford had somebody that looked after the press in his day, but wouldn’t have had a big team.

**Yes. Probably Lloyd Dumas, actually.**

(laughter) You’re probably right.

**Maybe I shouldn’t have said that. I do understand that it did work like that.**

I’ve no doubt, I’ve no doubt.

**Yes. Telephone call, action.**

Yes, that’s right.

**Off we went. I think that’s probably typical of Tom Playford too, maybe.**

Yes.
Don, within the executive of the Party, did Don have paramount sway within that as well?

Pretty well, pretty well, because again people understood that we were where we were because of Don Dunstan. I mean the classic example would be when Don took on the trade unionists with the loud-hailer in front of Parliament House, I think it was.

Were you there?

No, I wasn’t, no, but heard all about it. ‘You blokes. You blokes. You’re the ones that are causing the trouble here.’ (laughs) And those blokes would have had a union secretary who would have quite possibly been on the Party executive, but there were never any rumblings about Party executive because, as I say, Don ruled not with an iron hand but because of the esteem in which he was held.

So was that general throughout the Party, do you think?

Oh, yes, yes, yes. I don’t think there’s any doubt about that. I don’t think even that what you might call ‘factionalism’ is really going much at all until Don leaves the scene.

I mean did he have his opposition within the Party, Don?

Very little. Very little. There would be particular issues from time to time that might bring opposition – and, as I say, going back to the very early ’70s, the classic, of course, was the issue of abortion and how we should approach the legislation which Millhouse had bequeathed to us. And of course, as I say, there was very strong Catholic opposition to Millhouse’s legislation. The interesting thing about the Millhouse legislation: it’s never been amended, as far as I’m aware, so probably if anything, in the other States, abortion is more small-L liberal than it is in South Australia where, for the most part, they left it to the courts. It wasn’t a statutory arrangement; it was case law. And of course the courts can change their interpretation from time to time in some ways much more easily than the Parliament can.

Yes. Don, I wonder if you could help me trying to understand how ministers worked within the public service set-up.

Yes.
You’ve described little instances on it, but how did that actually work out from your experience?

Well, remember – I suppose this is the genius of our system of responsible government – that you have a public service, a public service department, let’s say it’s Education, and that’s stocked with people who are experts in the field and they’re expected to sit down and work out both theoretically and practically what’s best for the people of this State so far as education is concerned. Sitting on top of them is somebody who may know nothing about education, and this is the person called the Minister. Now, of course, I’d been a schoolteacher but there’ve been any number of Ministers of Education never been schoolteachers, and what is the merit of this person sitting on top of them? The merit of the person sitting on top of them is that he and she can be removed. These experts down the bottom, they are expected to apply their expertise and advise the government of the day, through their Minister, without fear or favour, as to what should happen. This is why I’m very much opposed to what’s in this morning’s paper about having specific terms for people in the public service. I think there should be permanency because otherwise you get this whole question of political interference and all this sort of stuff. But, as I say, at the top of things you’ve got somebody who, if the people as a whole don’t like what’s going on, there are mechanisms for getting rid of him or her, either through the Premier of the day saying, ‘You’re going to have to shift to another portfolio, mate, or we’re going to get rid of you altogether’ or, alternatively, the Government may fall and somebody else comes along. So that’s the way the system works and I mean Don really didn’t interfere with that very much at all. He understood the genius of the system.

Some ministers work better than others and there are all sorts of reasons why a minister mightn’t do all that well. One, of course, may be the lack of ability to be able to absorb information. The public service love a minister who they can knock on the door, come in and say, ‘Minister, we’ve got this issue. Now, these are the issues: da-dah, da-dah, da-dah, da-dah, da-dah’. And the Minister’s got it. ‘Okay, what we’ll do is this.’ As opposed to a minister who then rings and says, ‘Will you come back in the room and just explain that again to me, please?’ And then the next day they have them back there again explaining it to him, et cetera. I mean,
no names, no pack drill, but I can think of one or two in the time that I’ve been around the place in this State where that sort of seems to have happened. So that’s number one.

Number two is once you’ve got it, once you’ve got your policy set, how do you sell it? How do you explain it? And here I probably erred on the conservative side. I wasn’t a media type of minister in the way that me mate Johnny Cornwall was, for example. And the problem with the media ministers is that eventually they tend to get themselves into trouble because the media is never on your side, and don’t imagine for one moment it ever will be on your side. So you get backbenchers and all that sort of thing who fancy they’ve got the media in their pocket because they go out and they drink with them and all this sort of stuff but no, no, the day of reckoning eventually will come. But, on the other hand, you can be a little too self-effacing. You can be a bit inclined to not want to get your face onto the TV, et cetera, et cetera; and, except for a brief period of time in the ’80s when I became Minister for Environment and there was a lot to do and one or two of my mates saying, ‘Hoppy, we see you in the paper every day’, sort of thing, apart from that I was a bit inclined to just go and do what I had to do, leave it to the press staff to put the stuff out, make myself available for interviews if they wanted, but not chase it. And probably I erred a bit too much on the conservative side in that respect.

But, Don, within a government you’ve got the different ministries working with the public service –

Yes.

– but how was government co-ordinated during that Dunstan decade?

Through Cabinet. Just through Cabinet, that’s all. Cabinet meets twice a week. It meets on Monday as Cabinet to determine its attitude to the various propositions that have been put forward, and these are put forward by individual ministers – tell you a funny story about that in a minute. Then, of course, once that’s agreed it then goes to Executive Council on the Thursday morning for the Governor’s signature and then of course it’s in the Gazette and it’s law at some level or another – statute law, regulation or whatever.

Bert Shard. Bert Shard was Chief Secretary and Minister of Health –
Correct, yes.

– when I went in there, and Bert would bring these propositions forward and he’d say, ‘Don, you’re going to have to approve this.’ Because how it actually works, although everybody votes, it’s finally the Premier’s stamp and signature on the docket that then goes off. ‘You’re going to have to approve this, Don. There is no alternative.’ Now, after a while, people would say, ‘Don, you’re going to have to approve this. This is a Bert Shard’. In other words, ‘There’s no alternative’. There’s no alternative. But it was all done through Cabinet. I suppose there was one matter, which from time to time used to irk a little bit in Caucus but not all that much. Because of Cabinet solidarity, Cabinet in Caucus would vote as a block. Now, that would mean if you’ve got a Caucus of say thirty members and you’ve got a Cabinet of say twelve members there is already twelve votes for any proposition, pretty well, that the Government is putting to the Caucus. So the ability of the Caucus to override Cabinet on any of these issues is very, very limited because those twelve votes are sort of locked in. But that’s how the system always worked, simply through the Cabinet system.

You described earlier the fact that the Premier’s Department began to get more powerful over that period.

Yes.

Did that start to impact on what other ministries could do?

I think probably there were times when you said to your public servants, ‘Whiz off and talk to’ – perhaps a top public servant – ‘Whiz off and talk to Bob Bakewell’ or somebody like that ‘and just let them know exactly what we’re doing, and that way you’re more likely to get the Premier’s support and that almost certainly will determine whether it gets through Cabinet and eventually Caucus or not’.

So, Don, the way you’re describing it there, there’s still a lot of the personal there.

Oh, yes.

Of the one-to-one.
Yes. Oh, yes, very much so.

The relational.

Very much so, very much so, yes. I mean, we’re not dealing with a big show. I remember when some of the problems of the Whitlam Government started to emerge, I remember saying, ‘Well, the problem Gough’s got is they’re coming from all over the country. If Don Dunstan wants a Caucus meeting or a Cabinet meeting, with twelve hours’ notice he can get it because we’re all in the State and, being in the Labor Party, for the most part we’re all metropolitan’ – later on, of course, Frank Blevins was from Whyalla and so on – but ‘we’re all metropolitan. Whereas if Gough wants a Caucus or a Cabinet meeting or something he’s probably got to give people two or three days’ notice to get on planes and get over there’. So it’s a small State, you’ve got a small number of people involved and it was, yes, a very much matter of personal relationships, it really was.

Don, I do know that Gough had trouble occasionally with some recalcitrant behaviour from certain of his ministers which got his goat; did Don ever have that from any of his ministers?

No. The only problem, as I say, was the deterioration in relationships between Geoff Virgo and Hugh Hudson towards the end of the ’70s where I think Geoff’s concern was – I mean, they worked very well together. Geoff’s concern was that all the money was going to Education and the things he wanted to do in Transport weren’t happening.

On the other hand, earlier on Geoff and Hugh had worked extremely effectively as our little sub-committee to put propositions to the group that changed the electoral boundaries. See, after ’73, when all of this went through, then it was agreed from time to time there have to be a change of boundaries to take account of the fact that at one stage I got forty thousand electors in the old Mawson electorate, you see? Now, how do you draw the boundaries? Now, there’s no doubt that Hudson and Virgo between them could run rings around the Liberals when it came to putting a proposition before the Electoral Boundaries Commission, no doubt about that at all. Geoff did a lot of the hard work; Hugh was the one who’d stand up before the Commission and
Don, you mentioned that issue of abortion coming up very early in your time in Parliament.

Yes, yes.

Were there ever any other issues in your time in that Dunstan Era of morality and politics having difficulty coming together because you come from a background of faith?

Yes, yes. Well, first of all – I’m just reading a book about this, by the way, Bob Wallace – Jim Wallace, sorry; (laughs) Bob Wallace was a lecturer at Flinders, I think –

He was.

– Jim Wallace, a minister, a mainstream minister in America, called God’s politics, in which he’s getting stuck into both the Democrats in America because he says they’ve largely lost the language of spirituality, and the Republicans because he says they distort the language of spirituality. And his point is that they use the word ‘moral’ far too narrowly. He says yes, there is a moral issue about abortion, there’s a moral issue about this and that, but starvation is a moral issue as well. Social justice is a moral issue as well, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So that’s the first thing I want to say. I guess when you ask the question about ‘moral issues’ you’re talking about some of these what I might call very narrowly-focused moral issues.

The first thing to be said is that some of the moral issues, in that sense, that might have disturbed me a little had been got out of the way. I mean I was a non-drinker, but the Royal Commission into the Liquor Industry occurred in the 1960s with, by the way, the lawyer assisting the liquor industry being Len King at the time. So that had all been fixed. Closing hours, all that sort of thing, had been got out of the way. To the extent that you might have regarded fluoridation of the water supplies as some sort of a moral issue, that had been got out of the way.

Well, it was a moral issue at the time.

Well, I guess it was, very much so.
It was, yes.

Yes. Some of the gambling stuff, some of the easing up on the controls on gambling, that had all been done, that had been got out of the way. So the only other thing I can think of was the first attempt to get a casino going in the State, where I voted against it as a conscience issue. They made it easy, they made it very easy. (laughs) They published this design of a casino down on the South Coast at Victor Harbor including the model of a whale with a harpoon stuck in it and blood emerging (laughs) from the wound! And people looked at that and said, ‘Oh, my glory. Save us from that’. Even people who might have been in favour of a casino. So I mean I voted against that at a time when certainly there was a majority of the government of the day who were in favour of it, but that’s the only one I can think of.

And of course this whole question of the non-party vote, what some people call the ‘conscience vote’ – and I don’t like that term because I think a lot of these other, more broad, political issues are conscience issues – but nonetheless, the idea of the non-party vote on some of these issues I think is a very, very good way of going. A very, very good way of going. Because otherwise, if it was a matter of party discipline on, say, abortion, how would you have Terry McCrae and Don Dunstan in the same party?

Yes.

You wouldn’t. And my attitude was, ‘Well, we know why the Labor Party was set up in the 1890s and abortion wasn’t an issue in those days and casinos weren’t an issue in those days, so why do we have to have a Party position on everything?’ And we don’t, and so people like me have always very much valued the [non-party vote]. And because, see, some of the feminists, when abortion became an issue, they wanted to push the Party into a very particular, hard-and-fast position and we were saying, ‘No, don’t do that, and you’ll get what you want without pushing us into this hard-and-fast position which could split the Party’.

I’m wondering, Don, you mentioned earlier that the Moratorium threatened to derail that first government you were a part of. Was that a bigger moral issue, if you like?
Looking back on it, I don’t know that it was as much of a political crisis as we thought at the time because, after all, it washed over very, very quickly. The media made much of the fact that Don got on a plane and went off to Sydney for some interstate parliamentary committee or something like that, ‘Left the streets of Adelaide open to ruin and riot and desolation’, et cetera. But it sort of washed over fairly quickly. It was just that it happened soon after the furore about shopping hours and the two together seemed to suggest that we were a bit on the nose politically, a bit on the nose.

Just thinking about the Moratorium and the role of the police and that and then the later issues that Don had with Salisbury –

Yes.

– was there ever any sense in which that became sort of a moral issue within the Government?

The Salisbury thing was simply that Salisbury had misled us. When a person asks a question in the House, you don’t know the answer and you go to your public service and you get an answer and you give it to the House, then you find out later that you’ve been misled, then you’ve misled the House. Now, of course, one of the conventions – which is largely ignored these days, I’ve got to say – but one of the conventions in parliamentary government, of course, is that a minister who willingly misleads the House should have to resign his or her portfolio when they’re found out. Now, in this case, of course, Don didn’t willingly mislead the House; he simply gave the information that Salisbury had given him.

The only other light I can shed on this is that Don brought that report into Cabinet and he said to us, he said, ‘I’m not sure what I’m going to do about this yet, but’, he said, ‘there’s enough information here for me to sack Salisbury’. Anyway, I went off to New Zealand on holiday (laughs) soon after and I was rung in New Zealand to be told that Don had sacked Salisbury and there was a bit of a furore going on about it.

But, look, I think there had been sections of the Police Department that disliked Don right from the very beginning because, after all, Don was basically a defence lawyer. So his job was
to represent these criminals or whatever they are that the police are trying to put in jail, so naturally police aren’t always enamoured of the legal profession.

Then there were a couple of incidents. Now, one involved Dawn Fraser. Dawn Fraser had an argument or something – I hope I’ve got this right – with police out there in Don’s electorate one night on Norwood Parade, and that ultimately led to the abolition of the clause in I suppose it was the Police Offences Act which enabled the police to shift people on. They could just do that, they could just do that, move you on. You know, ‘What are you doing here?’ I mean I can recall once (laughs) after church at Prossie [Prospect] North we used to have what was called a singsong, we’d go to somebody’s house and we’d in raucous voices sing the hymns and they’d give us supper and then you might walk one of the girls home and you’d go home yourself, you see. And two or three of us were standing at the corner of Prospect Road and Albert Street talking at about nine-thirty at night and a policeman came up to us and said, ‘What are you fellas doing here?’ Of course, we’re all dressed in our suits, you see. We said, ‘Oh, officer, we’re on our way home from church’. He said, ‘Right. Just shift over in the light so I can see you’, sort of thing, you see. But they could do that sort of thing. And I think it was as a result of the Dawn Fraser incident that Don got legislation before the House, which did away with the right automatically of police to move people on. Now, they saw that as a diminution of their powers and they didn’t like it very much at all. So, in a sense, the Salisbury sacking becomes the last straw. For some of them, for some of them.

Don, I’m wondering, in terms of overview of this period, too, do you have any views on the social reform successes of the era?

Well, certainly the department of the old Social Welfare Department became far more accountable, it became a professional body, and I think that was important. Now, for other reasons, of course, some of those reforms haven’t been as effective as they might have but for other reasons. For example, we did not have the sort of drugs epidemic we now have and so I guess the Department spends a good deal of its time running hither and yon in relation to problems which are caused by drugs. Now, that didn’t occur at the time; but nonetheless, for its time, I think the reforms in relation to interrelation to community welfare were important. I
think the early environmental reforms were very important, particularly the beverage container legislation, and of course no other State yet has adopted—. I know why, I know why: because the industry says, ‘Oh, no, don’t do that legislation. We’ll give you lots of money and you can run anti-litter campaigns and that sort of thing’. And so that’s what happens and they never move into it. So I think that was important. Some of the work that was done on getting more industrial development into the State, particularly after the bit of a slump in the ’60s, was very important, and of course the education reforms. I mean I followed on from Hugh but what I largely did was just continue the stuff that he’d got started. I think the education reforms in South Australia were enormous, really were.

So, just reflecting, you’ve said that the last part of the Dunstan Era there was that time of bickering between Virgo –

And Hudson, yes.

— and Hudson that tainted things and then Des Corcoran picked up a bit of a poison chalice, maybe, with that. Is there a very strong distinction between your time in the Bannon years and the Dunstan years?

Well, we had the three years in opposition, you see, to recharge ourselves and then, all of a sudden, I’m back in government as the Minister for Environment and Land, which I absolutely loved, and could leave all that other stuff behind me. One of the problems with being Minister of Health or Education is you live or die by your budget, whereas in Environment, which included Urban and Regional Planning and Lands, you can do all sorts of important things without money – using regulation, using policy changes, using stuff like that – and a good deal of what I did in Environment in the ’80s was done with very little money at all, very little money at all. So it was a complete change for me; but that was more a change of my portfolio.

Certainly, John Bannon – very, very competent Premier. Didn’t quite have the same reforming zeal as Don, was very concerned to legitimise the Party in the eyes of everybody. What do I mean by that? What I mean by that, for example, was there were always those of us who grumbled a bit about the fact that at some of the formal occasions we were supposed to put on a bow-tie, you know, dress up like that. And Dunstan was much for the fact, ‘Look, you
fellows, we’ve got to legitimise ourselves. We have got to participate in the great rituals of our community because it’s part of history’s progress, it’s part of – – –.’ Losing my train of thought here a bit. But anyway, ‘It’s most important that we’re seen as doing all these sort of things. Yes, by all means let’s be radical in our legislation, *et cetera*, but we do have to be part of these sort of great occasions, *et cetera*, and you’ve got to dress up properly, you blokes’. (laughter)

So there was that change. Bannon was certainly more radical than Des Corcoran. Des, I knew things weren’t going too well when Des said that there was going to be a new emphasis on management, ‘That’s what we’ve got to get into now, management, the proper management of the State’, more than reform. I thought, ‘Aha, aha, we’re running out of steam here’. Now, John certainly tried to pick things up a bit from there but not to the extent of the Dunstan decade.

**Was there ever a sense with Don Dunstan – you’ve talked about the illness in his latter days –**

Yes.

– **but was there ever a sense of him running out of ideas?**

Didn’t seem to, didn’t seem to, now. As I say, a few weeks before he actually became ill and had to resign he was talking about all these new ideas he had and new ways of being radical, new ways of being social democratic, *et cetera*, but he never got the opportunity to share them with us.

**And just looking at this as an overview now, Don, and hopefully tying it together, it seems as you’re talking that you’ve got a very clear recall of the achievements of government and the way things occurred and yet there’s not a lot about the person, is there? Do you know what I mean?**

No, no, that’s right, that’s right. Well, can I say a little bit more about Don? I think Don had a fairly strong self-image, a strong inner core and a strong idea not only of what he was but what he wanted to be. Now, this, for example, is illustrated in what I might call the transformation of the man’s own body image. I can recall when – there’s a rogues’ gallery in Parliament House, all these photographs, they try to get every Member that’s ever been in there since 1856, there’s a few blanks where they just can’t find photographs – – –. And I’m in the Strangers’ Lounge,
where most of these photographs are, and in walks Robin Millhouse and looks up there and says, ‘He’s changed his photograph! That’s unfair. If he’s going to do it the rest of us should be able to do it’. Now, what had happened was this photograph that had been there since 1956 of this weedy, bespectacled Dunstan had been – – –. (telephone rings, break in recording)

This is session three of an interview with Don Hopgood on 20th November 2003, interviewer Rob Linn. Don, you were saying that Robin Millhouse walked in and saw this ’50s photograph of Don.

No, he saw the ’70s photograph of Don –

Oh!

– and he went crook because, you see, what had been in that space before was this photograph of the 1956, weedy, intellectual-looking, horn-rimmed glasses Dunstan, and all of a sudden it had been replaced by Super Don of the ’70s, and Robin was saying, ‘Well, if he’s allowed to do it, any of us are allowed to do it’, sort of thing. But I mean Don deliberately set out to create a better body for himself. He would go down to the American Health Studio once a week – I’ve seen him down there with one of his staff busy throwing a medicine ball at each other and all that sort of thing – and he also, I think, at some stage set out to recreate himself in terms of his intellect and his interests and all the rest of it. So he had a very clear idea of what he wanted to look like and what he wanted to be, how he wanted to think; and by and large, of course, he achieved those things.

Don, I’d just really love to thank you for being willing to give up your time today.

My pleasure.

It’s been very interesting listening to somebody who was so intimately involved, so thank you very much.

Right, that’s quite okay.

END OF INTERVIEW.