Interview with Clyde Cameron recorded by Peter Donovan on the 24th November 2004 at West Lakes for the Don Dunstan Foundation. (Throughout the interview it is apparent that the interviewee frequently refers to, and reads from, written materials.)

TAPE 1 SIDE A

This is Peter Donovan speaking with Mr Clyde Cameron for the Dunstan Foundation, I’m speaking with Clyde at his home at West Lakes on 24th November 2004.

Now, Clyde, you’ve written an autobiography, so if people who want to listen to this tape want to find out about you they can go to that, so we’re primarily interested in Don Dunstan and his public life. But you were very important in that, particularly in the early days where you were directly involved with him, and certainly later you had perspectives on the rest of his career. Where were you in about 1950, and what was the perspective that you brought to the Don Dunstan period?

I think the perspective I would have brought to Don would have been before 1950. I became the State Secretary of the Australian Workers’ Union in 1941. I very quickly became a prominent figure in the Australian Labor Party to the point where I was elected to the Executive of the Party and remained on it for something like thirty years or more. I became President of the Party in South Australia in 1946, I remained as President for two years altogether, and no other person served for more than two years straight. I served as a State President for a year in 1953 and for another year later on, so altogether it was four years.

In 1946 I introduced – reintroduced, I should say – the card system of voting at Conferences. That meant that, instead of a large union having to send sixteen or eighteen delegates to represent them under the rules that dealt with the representation at that time, I introduced the card system limiting the maximum that a union could send to the Conference to six! But, if a card vote was called on a matter, the six votes – instead of just having six votes towards the determination of the result, each of the six would have one-sixth of the number of membership affiliates that belonged to the Party, that were financed by the union. The union – when I say ‘financed by the union’, the union was required to pay to the Party the same membership fee they would have to pay if they joined as individuals if they weren’t a member of a union.
and joined a sub-branch. So, it meant that that gave to the Trade Union Movement a far greater say than they’d had with the number of extra delegates. It still wouldn’t be equal to the extra importance that the unions would be able to demand under the card vote.

We wouldn’t allow the card vote to be used at the monthly Council meetings of the Party; it could only be used at the Conference and it could only be used if it was asked for by more than one affiliate. That played a very important part in Don Dunstan becoming a Member through being endorsed as a Labor candidate for Norwood; and that was only because I did not carry out the decision of the AWU Caucus in deciding they would support the Secretary of the Gas Workers’ Union for the endorsement. I stayed away from that Caucus meeting because then I could argue that I didn’t know what they did there, but I did know.

And so, when I was given the six books of voting coupons to take to the AWU office, I said to the ALP Secretary: ‘Well, before you do that I want to restaple two of them, I want to take the voting slip that gives me one more vote than the other five, and put that into one of the other five; and I’m going to take for my entitlement one of the five that are exactly the same as each other, so that their scrutineers will not be able to say how I voted and somebody else will get blamed for what I was supposed to have done.’ So, when the vote on the selection of the candidate for Norwood came up, I had 2204 and one of the other six delegates had 2205 votes. So when the votes were being counted, the scrutineer for Eric O’Connor, the Secretary of the AWU, was able to report that a delegate had used Cameron’s ballot paper and had voted for Dunstan; which meant that one of the other five delegates had ratted.

Dunstan won by 500-odd votes; but without the benefit of my 2,204 votes he would have been defeated by nearly 1,000 votes. I knew Dunstan well enough to know that he was so much better than the Secretary of the Gas Workers’ Union that I would not have been true to the Labor Party if I didn’t do something to prevent that from happening.

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1 ALP – Australian Labor Party.
2 O'Connor's scrutineer told him, 'Clyde voted for our man but one of our mob voted for bloody Dunstan' – CC.
When did you first meet Don Dunstan, and why did he impress you so much? Because he’s effectively a man from the other side of the tracks.

I first met Don while he was still at St Peter’s College, and when he went to the University I saw him more often. And he confessed to me that he had been a member of the Communist Party for only a few weeks and that he had then joined the Liberal Party and had impressed the Liberals to such an extent that they asked him to do the radio scatters during the election and paid him £70 for it. He told the Executive, ‘I’m telling you all this, because eventually the Liberals will reveal it and perhaps the Communists will also throw their story into the ring as well, and that will then have to be determined by the Executive of the Party. So instead of going to a sub-branch and joining as everybody else did, I want to make my application direct to the only body that would have the right to expel me for not being properly a member.’ So I said, ‘All right. In that case, you want to talk to the Executive itself. You don’t want to go to a sub-branch meeting and make your application, you make it to the Executive. And at that Executive meeting you will confess to being a member of the Communist Party for a few weeks, you’ll confess that you eventually became a member of the Liberal and Country League, and that you were the one that did their scatters for that election campaign, that you were paid £70 for it, you now regret that you ever joined the Communist Party, you regret that you ever joined the Liberal Party, and you regret doing the scatters for them against the Labor Party at the last election.’ I said, ‘You have to do that because otherwise there’s no point in going to the Executive. If you confess to all those mistakes, all of them are Christian enough to forgive you for your mistakes and to admit you as a member of the Party. And then, having admitted you as a member of the Party, no-one can ever succeed in having you expelled from the Labor Party, because the only body that can expel you is the body that admitted you.’ So he agreed to that and he came along to the Labor Party Executive – I was present – and he confessed to all of the things that he had told me. The Party unanimously decided to admit him as a member and he then became a member of the Party, and I think it was in 1953 that he became a candidate for Norwood. He still would not have won if I had not altered the voting slip inside the book of voting coupons I had and let somebody else have a book of voting coupons that gave one extra vote.
Why was there one book with one extra vote?

That was because the Union’s affiliation fee was divided – if you divided it by six, there would be five equal numbers and one had the same number plus one. That was a fact: whether it was something that Eric O’Connor deliberately worked out in order to make sure they knew where I voted – – –.

So I was quite impressed with Dunstan. I could tell that he was easily, from the point of view of brains, well above the Secretary of the Gas Workers’ Union, and that as well as having a brain he had a good personality; and, in my opinion, it would be criminal for us to reject his application just because, under the card vote, this other character was able to get more votes. And that explains what happened. And I was impressed with him. I believed that – in other words, he didn’t want to come in by simply going to the local sub-branch, as I have already explained. And that was the beginning of his promotion to the Premiership.

Again, why did you take such an interest in him? You say he had brains, but – very brainy?

I liked his personality.

He seemed very idealistic – was there any indication that he was there for the long haul, or was not just another academic that would blow out very quickly?

No, there was no doubt about that. And I was very impressed with the fact that, when he got his law degree, he told me that [when] he’d got the degree he found it difficult to get any brief. He said, ‘And if your union has got a case for me, if they have a court case they want me to handle, would you do it?’ And I said, ‘Well, that’s a bit difficult, Don, because we have an arrangement with Stanley, a lawyer, and he’s done a very good job for us and we couldn’t give it to anybody else without explaining to him why we had changed. But if I hear of anyone who is looking for a lawyer I’ll recommend to them that they take you.’ And within three weeks of that decision I had a call, because I was a member of the Parliament, from the group of migrants who were hostelled at Gepps Cross: three or four hundred came to me and said, ‘Mr Cameron, the government has decided to increase the charge for our accommodation and food, when we were told that would not be changed until such time as we got employment or some other accommodation, and now they have ratted on us.’ I said, ‘Oh, if what you say is fact, then there’s no chance of them winning if we take it to
Court. I’ve got a young lawyer who’s very brilliant in the law, and I think I can get him to do it for you.’ ‘Oh, well,’ they said, ‘thank you very much. And whatever we have to pay him we’ll gladly do.’ So I told Don about this and he took the case to the Court and won. And that not only increased his standing as a lawyer, because it got wide publicity at the time, but he got plenty of other work from people who said, ‘Well, we wanted to win this case, and this young bloke Dunstan won a very hard case against the Commonwealth Government. Let’s give him some work.’ And so he got quite a bit of work from people like that.

And so going into Parliament wasn’t something that increased his income very much, because he was already on a reasonable – probably more money than he could get in Parliament – as a lawyer. But anyhow, he still wanted to enter Parliament; because, to him, politics, Labor politics, were more important than money. So that’s why I supported him when the preselection ballot took place. And he didn’t disappoint me when he got into Parliament, and everybody else in Parliament who had a chance to listen to his points of view at Party meetings, that is Caucus meetings, were delighted that the Secretary of the Gas Workers’ Union wasn’t the one who got the endorsement for Norwood.

How did you sell him to, well, the people of Norwood?

Well, I didn’t do anything at all in that respect, he sold himself.

No, he didn’t take your advice about suits and – – –?

No, I’ll come to that in a minute. Before he actually commenced his campaign in Norwood, in which I had no say at all – I was too busy to be doing that – the day he got his endorsement, as a consequence of me changing the voting coupons that I was entitled to for one that was worth one vote less, I took him and Jack Jennings, who also became a Labor Member – he was young as well – took them down to the State Parliament, took them in, for a start, into the bar and we had drinks there and after that we had lunch.

But while we were in the bar I said to Don, ‘Don, now that you’re representing a solid Labor seat like Norwood, you ought to change the way you speak and take the plum out of your mouth and talk like the ordinary worker talks; so that when he talks to you he’ll know that you’re no different from what he is. But if you talk to an ordinary worker and say, “Look, I’m a Labor candidate and I’d like your vote,” and
he listens to that plum in your mouth, he’ll say, “Well, he’s the Labor candidate all right; but he’s not a fair dinkum bloody Labor man.” So,’ I said, ‘for God’s sake, try and change the tone of your voice.’ He said (with a ‘plummy’ accent) ‘My dear Clyde, I have no intention of changing my voice. My parents paid hundreds of pounds to teach me how to speak English correctly, so I have no intention of doing that. If that’s the only way Labor voters decide on who is best to represent them, then I would be disappointed I was ever a Labor candidate.’ I said, ‘All right, well, fair enough.

‘And another thing, Don,’ I said, ‘your slopey shoulders show that you’ve never done any hard work. You’re a barrister, a lawyer, and you can tell them you’re a lawyer – not that they’ll be very impressed, but they will be able to judge that you’ve never done any pick-and-shovel work, as they all have to do. Why don’t you let me give Hugh Pozza’ – a tailor in King William Street – ‘a ring, and I’ll explain to him that I’d like him to put padding on your shoulders, because I’ve got padding on my shoulders – not much, but there’s a bit there – and then when you go around with a suit made by Hugh Pozza, people who look at your shoulders will say, “By gee, he’s like me, he’s done hard work in his day.”’ He replied, ‘Clyde, I have no intention of asking Hugh Pozza to make shoulders for me. I have just joined the American Health Centre and there I will, through exercise, be able to get real shoulders, not padded ones.’ I said, ‘All right, well, if you won’t listen to any advice I’ve got to offer, I won’t bother you any more. Let’s go round and have lunch.’ So that was my introduction.

And he never changed his plum, the plum remained in his voice for the whole time he was in Parliament. He did, however, seem to build his shoulders by exercise, or something that I should have known, but didn’t. So you ask when did I first meet him and what was my impression of him, I suppose is what you wanted, and I’ve just told you.

Now, Don’s personal qualities and his achievements are the things that proved that my assessment of him was correct. My union, the AWU at that time, was the largest, by far the largest union in South Australia. It had a total of 13,225 members that were affiliated with the Labor Party by virtue of the union paying each member’s full affiliation fee for the Labor Party. That meant its six delegates would have the following voting strength: five of them would have voting coupons in their book of
coupons worth 2,204 votes, and the other delegate would have a voting coupon giving him 2,205 votes, one more than the other five had. So it was quite easy to be able to find out the one who had the odd number of votes and who he voted for. And, of course, when the voting slips were being counted the Secretary of the AWU, like anyone else, would have the right to have scrutineers there to check to see who the delegate with the odd vote had voted for. So he said the delegate who voted with 2,205 votes would be easy to identify; but one couldn’t tell how the other five voted, because they were all the same.

That was meant to be you with the 2,205.

Yes, that’s right.

Moving on to this notion of when you persuaded Frank Walsh to step down – – –.

Yes. I played a major role in getting rid of Frank Walsh as Premier so that Don Dunstan could become the Premier. I played no role in the arrangements that led to Don Dunstan being chosen as Leader by the Caucus; but I did decide that Frank Walsh should resign. And I was the one who masterminded Frank Walsh’s final decision to resign as Premier. My plan was to move a motion at the Labor Party’s January 1967 monthly Council meeting, congratulating Frank on his decision to resign. It was the catalyst that caused Frank to resign soon after my motion was carried by acclamation.

When the Council broke up that night, Frank came to me demanding, ‘Why the bloody hell did you say I had decided to resign? That was bloody bullshit, Clyde: I’ve got no intention of resigning.’ And I said, ‘Well, Frank, you saw how pleased the delegates were to hear me move my motion.’ And Frank glared at me and replied, ‘There’s no way I will ever resign as Premier.’ However, a few weeks later, he did resign as Premier and Don Dunstan beat Des Corcoran by a small margin – some at the Caucus said it was by one vote, others said it was by two or three. Walsh backed Corcoran after he’d resigned and the Caucus was to choose another Premier in his place, he backed Des Corcoran, who [lost] by a small margin. He backed Corcoran because Corcoran was a Roman Catholic and he was able to point out to all the other Catholics in Caucus, and in those days there were always quite a few because the Catholic Church was well on the side of Labor, especially when Beovich became Archbishop. And so while I played no role in him being elected as Premier
by the Caucus, because I had no power to do that, I was able to use the 150-odd delegates who attended the monthly Council meeting to do it, and that resolution I moved was seconded by somebody who didn’t speak, and no-one else then moved an amendment or spoke against it, and it was carried unanimously. But, as I repeat, while I played no role in him being elected as Premier, I did play a major role in getting him the ALP endorsement for the seat of Norwood in the 1953 State election.

In 1946 I persuaded the Annual Conference – I’ve already dealt with that – to introduce the card system of voting, and unions would no longer, I explained when I moved that motion, have to meet the huge cost of paying the wage and travel cost of large delegations with each delegate having one vote on motions before the chair. Unions were limited to a maximum of only six delegates under my system of card voting, but in the event of the vote being called to determine the outcome of a debate, each delegate could register a vote equal to the number of affiliates he represented, i.e. the number of affiliated members whose fees had been paid for by his union.

A union paying ALP affiliation fees for, say, 2,400 members would be entitled to register a voting entitlement for each of its six delegates of 400 votes. My union, as I’ve already explained, paid affiliation fees for 13,225 members, giving each of its five delegates 2,204, and the sixth delegate would have 2,205.

So I think we’ve been through all that.

Yes.

How did Don survive that first Walsh Government?

He did very well, he did extremely well. He’d already been a Minister by that time, and – – –.

No, this was the Walsh Government, when he was Attorney-General in –

Yes, in the Walsh Government.

– yes.

He did very well as an Attorney-General. I can’t remember the various things he did, but I know one thing that he did – he may have been Premier by then but I’ll mention it now. When the Walsh Government was first elected, the old long-standing rule was that all pubs had to close their bar at six o’clock. That was altered. They were no longer required to close their bars at six o’clock, and that was masterminded by
Don Dunstan. And that was only one of the many things. One other thing that Dunstan did, that only somebody with Dunstan’s courage and brain power could have succeeded in doing, was to abolish the old system of electing a Legislative Council by having the State divided into four or five Districts, with each District electing two members of the Upper House. That was abolished, and the State was then required to elect the candidates to the Upper House in the same way as they elect Senators, i.e. by each vote being equal; whereas under the old system the District which covered Port Adelaide and all the adjoining Labor strongholds next to Port Adelaide, but whose total number of electors was three or four times more than the district up around Peterborough, meant that we could never, ever get any more than two Members elected to the Upper House.

And it came about by Steele Hall, who was then prominent in the Parliament for the Liberals, having seen the Labor Party’s Platform declaring that the Labor Party’s aim is to abolish the Upper House, the same as was done in Queensland. He knew that Dunstan couldn’t agree to introducing equal voting for the Upper House because we were bound by the Platform, which had been in operation for decades. We couldn’t agree to keeping the Legislative Council in operation when we were bound to abolish it. So Dunstan said, ‘Well, look, I’ll think about it.’ So he phoned me, because at that stage I was known as the kingmaker of the Labor Party – I had so many votes I could do it easily enough by the card system. But, leaving that aside, I did have a personal standing in the Labor Party that gave me clout that other people didn’t have. So Dunstan phoned me to tell me what was happening. He said, ‘I think we ought to agree to it, because if I agree to it he’s got to go ahead with it. But,’ he said, ‘he probably thinks that I can’t agree to it. How would you be if I did agree to it, which meant that I was doing something contrary to the Party’s platform?’ I said, ‘Go ahead, and if there’s any backlash I’ll support you.’ So that’s what he did. It was put through the House of Assembly, I think Steele Hall must have got the shock of his life when he learned we had agreed to his proposal, which was taking away from traditional Liberal voters the right to have four or five votes per person more than the Labor people in Port Adelaide had; but he had no option but to go ahead with it, and it was carried. And that is still the position in South Australia. But that was one of the most critical things the Labor Government was ever able to achieve.
Talking about the Party platform –

Yes?

– did Don Dunstan have much influence in changing that? Like presumably all the reforms that were brought into Parliament had to reflect, you know, (telephone rings) the Party platform, so presumably there had to be fights, discussions, negotiations in the various conventions and forming of the platforms before they ever went into Parliament?

Well, I was the one who had the most influence in the Party in those days. If Dunstan could persuade me to support it, it would always go through. And that’s why I was known as ‘the kingmaker’ in the Labor Party. It was not a fictitious title, it was correct. And if Don Dunstan could persuade me, I was, at that stage, able to persuade the rest to do it. Dunstan would never bother to contact me on anything if he had the numbers to get it through Caucus; it was only if he could get it through but in breach of some rule, or because Caucus would beat him; but that rarely happened. Dunstan was a very persuasive operator. He gave a lot of thought to every proposition that he had to put to Caucus before he put it. He had to succeed in calculating how everyone in Caucus would vote. He knew there was a large number whom he could get any time, just by saying, ‘I want you to do this.’ But he also knew when more than that was necessary to defeat something, and he would have to go around and coax them individually to support him. And he was always able to do so, because he was very clever, he knew their weaknesses, he knew their strengths, he praised them for previous decisions they took that were against their tradition, and said, ‘That’s why we are in Government, and if we want to stay in Government we need decent people like you to put aside your own personal view and support what is best for the Party.’ And those words were enough, normally, to coax them into doing what he wanted to do.

So, in effect, he was a consensus man.

He was, yes. And consensus on what he himself created.

Another side of Don Dunstan that I would like to mention here was revealed in 1957, when there was a Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and the Cypriots in Australia had told the Labor Party what was happening and suggested that they ought to send two delegates to Cyprus to discuss with the Greeks in Cyprus things that ought to be done ‘to prevent the Turks from shagging the hundreds of Cypriot virgins who’d fled
to the mountains to dodge the Turks.’ That was one thing they said: because the mostly men in the Labor Party in those days thought that that was a thing women would also agree with. So it was decided that I would be one of the two, and that Clive Evatt – Dr Evatt’s brother – who was a member of the New South Wales Government and a barrister, should also go.

I had to back out of it because of commitments in the Labor Party, and somebody else was chosen to take my place. Evatt also had to back out because he had a very important case in the Supreme Court that he couldn’t walk away from, and he got the Federal Executive to appoint Don Dunstan. Nobody else wanted it, anyhow. So Dunstan went and stayed there for quite a while; but before he went I met him in the bar of the Parliament House with Senator Theo Nicholls, who didn’t have many brains but a fairly good memory of the little bit he did know. I congratulated Don on the news that had just come through that the Party had selected him to take Evatt’s place, and I thought, ‘I wonder has he bothered to contact Archbishop Makarios in advance to say, “I’m coming over, I’d like to meet you when I get there, so you can you tell me what’s going on and I can tell you what I think you ought to do”?’ But as I was talking I couldn’t remember Makarios’ name, but I said to Dunstan – I thought of the trouble India was having with Hyderabad at the time – I said to him, ‘Can you get the Hydrant of Nicosia to help you?’ And Dunstan, who knew me well enough to know that that was typical of me to do that sort of thing, looked very seriously and he said, ‘No, I haven’t done that yet. But, Clyde, I’ll contact the Hydrant when I get there.’ And Senator Nicholls, instead of saying, ‘What do you mean by “Hydrant”?’ said, ‘Well, I think you’re silly, Don, to go over there if you haven’t contacted the Hydrant first.’ Don replied, ‘Never mind, Theo, I will see him when I get there.’ Yes, so we were talking in the bar about this Hydrant of Nicosia, and Nicholls said to Dunstan, ‘You’re only kidding yourself if you think you can walk into Cyprus and be sure of getting an appointment with the Hydrant, because he’s a very important person.’ Dunstan replied, ‘Well, it’ll be my bad luck if I can’t.’ I carried on a pretty earnest conversation with Dunstan about this thing, and I said, ‘Look, Don, what the hell’s the good of going there if you can’t see the Hydrant? You know he’s the main man.’ Well, Dunstan didn’t agree with that and nothing more was said about the Hydrant of Nicosia at that stage.
Dunstan came back from his trip to Cyprus and flew direct to Brisbane, where the 1957 Labor Party Commonwealth Conference was in progress. And I happened to be in the foyer of the hotel where most of the delegates were staying, talking with Kevin Power, one of the top pressmen of the day, when Don walked through the foyer with his bag, and I said to Kevin, ‘Can I introduce you to His Excellency the Hydrant of Nicosia?’ Kevin didn’t know Don, and Don actually looked something like a Hydrant – he had a swarthy complexion, spoke like a Hydrant – and he said, ‘How do you do?’ And Kevin said, ‘Oh, very well, thank you, Your Excellency. How long have you been in Australia?’ Dunstan couldn’t take any more of this and snarled, ‘Oh, come off the grass, who the bloody hell do you think I am?’ Poor Kevin Power didn’t know which way to look: he looked at me, he looked at the Hydrant, and was wondering what sort of a character this foreigner was. Anyhow, that’s an anecdote that I often like talking about.

Before you do that, Clyde, we’ll just stop it there for a moment.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

This is Peter Donovan speaking with Clyde Cameron for the Don Dunstan Foundation on the public life of Don Dunstan. The interview is taking place at Clyde’s home at West Beach on 24th November 2004. This is tape number two.

Now, Clyde, if I could ask you, changing the subject a little, I guess, some of the appointments that Don Dunstan made when he was Premier tended to create a certain amount of interest, and a couple of them came back to bite him. I guess we’ve got the one of Harold Salisbury as Police Commissioner, and we’ve got Pastor Doug Nicholls as Governor – even Mark Oliphant as Governor – and then Keith Seaman as Governor. Were you involved in any way in giving advice on some of these, or whom did he rely upon for advice, by this stage?

Well, I think Don Dunstan relied mainly on advice from a chap named Don Dunstan. He was not one who felt that he was so devoid of brains that he’d have to go around asking former shearers and people like that to help him, he did most of it himself. And because he did it himself, he was able to defend it easier because he, first of all, convinced himself with the logic that he was able to apply that what he intended to do was right. But when Stewart Cockburn published his book entitled The Salisbury Affair he sent me a copy, with compliments and praise for my brain, and I reviewed it and I wrote him a long letter, running into about eight pages, in fact. And in it I said,
‘I’ve always held the view that a Prime Minister or Premier has every right to appoint and to expect a person whom he appointed to be honest with him and to give him the details and facts as they were.’ I said I knew how Salisbury felt when he saw his dismissal as being a denial of natural justice.

‘Sir John Kerr,’ I told Cockburn, ‘dismissed me as Minister for Labour and Immigration without notice, without details of any offence and without a hearing, much less the right to defend myself. He, of course, had a firm assurance from the Prime Minister that he was acting in accordance with the Constitution. Five months and five days later, he used the Prime Minister’s own assurance as to his right to dismiss me without the benefit of natural justice, to dismiss the Prime Minister as well.

‘On page 201 of your book you have quite fairly made the concession that lawyers on both sides were agreed, quote: “that the government had the right to dismiss the Police Commissioner at any time without even giving reasons. In practice, though, to give no reasons would have been politically untenable.” I agree with Professor Castles that Dunstan’s complete embargo on revealing Cabinet discussions had a hollow ring. Discussions that take place in meetings of the Executive Council are quite clearly embargoed by statute, but Cabinet meetings are merely a debating exercise to determine what matters shall be referred to the Executive Council presided over by the Governor or the Governor-General.

‘When Jim Toohey attended a meeting of the Party’s National Executive in 1954, for the purpose of enquiring into the affairs of the Victorian Branch, Stan Keon MHR had been called for questioning, pointed a finger at Toohey and accused him of being an “undercover member of the Communist Party”. A shocked Toohey denied the false accusation and demanded an apology. Keon replied, “I won’t apologise, because I have positive proof that you are a member of the Fabian Society.”’

Well, of course, the Fabian Society wasn’t a Communist outfit. I was a member, my wife was, John Menadue was, you could go through the whole lot and none of them could be classed as a communist.

‘Actually, I saw a photographer employed by the Special Branch taking a photograph of Sir Mark Oliphant and myself as we marched to register our opposition to nuclear weapons of war. In fact, that had become its practice: whenever there was a public demonstration against such issues as conscription of young men to fight in Vietnam. That’s why I arranged for our photographers to photograph their photographers, that is, their photographer. Mark Posa of the National Civic Council put an opposite point of view when he criticised Attorney-General Lionel Murphy for his
visit to ASIO\(^3\) headquarters to determine why ASIO had got Liberal
Attorney-General Ivor Greenwood to lie to the Senate about a Croatian
terrorist ..... and set out to have Murphy repeat the lie. He eventually
discovered that Senator Ivor Greenwood’s lie had been based on a secret
report of an Inter-Departmental Committee consisting of representatives
of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Attorney-General’s
Department, the Commissioner of Commonwealth Police and ASIO.
Senator Greenwood had sympathised with ..... supporters because they
were anti-communist and he had given instructions for the removal of the
specialists employed to study the Croatian situation, resulting in a whole
stack of unevaluated material to build up, and as a consequence no-one
knew what it covered. It’s as well that Mark Posa didn’t discover that
Harold Salisbury and Sir Mark Oliphant had queried the existence of a
supreme God who “Must have had in his makeup a strong streak of
uncharitableness, even malevolence, towards his creations.” Or, as Sir
Mark put it: “The verbal and mental gymnastics indulged in by the
Church in order to explain how a God of Love permits disease, pestilence,
famine and all the untold miseries of want and war and the exploitation of
man by man, always amazes me.” Otherwise Mark may have branded
them as “dangerous enemies of the State”.

‘I like your chapter on Sir Mark Oliphant. For one thing, it confirmed my
belief that he was a stickler for conformity. I share his disgust for the
kind of pornography you describe, but I’ve always backed away from the
rule that one must attend an official dinner dressed in a lounge suit. Your
book explains that when Sir Mark was our Governor he expected invitees
attending state functions to follow his own example of struggling into
uncomfortable clothing, and that he would glare at offenders who failed
to don formal dress. On one occasion, you say, he told them that if he
himself was expected to wear a monkey suit, then he thought some
politicians might also try to lend a little dignity to such an occasion. In
fact, it was alleged that on one occasion he told his guests he was
dissatisfied with the role expected of him as Governor, and declared, I
quote: “I hereby resign.”

‘His letter was sent to me by my electoral secretary on the 28\(^{th}\) February.
He wrote to me on that date, while I was in New York representing the
Opposition at the 1976 United Nations General Assembly. I was still in
New York at the time of Don’s birthday. His letter of the 28\(^{th}\) September
’76 advised, “I am very sad and suffering a deep sense of guilt for not
coming to see you while I was our Governor. Had I realised your
invitation was a personal one I would certainly have made my very first
visit to Government House. You will be surprised to learn”” –

\(^3\) ASIO – Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation.
– that must have been my letter to him. Oh, yes, I received a letter from him, this was my reply.

“…You will be surprised to learn that in my twenty-seven years in the national parliament I’ve never once attended a function in Government House. I like to avoid formal invitations because I do not own a dinner suit. But I would have broken my rule for you, had I known your invitations were more than formal.

“…It’s funny because, just before leaving Australia, telepathy caused me to say to my wife, ‘I’ve got a good mind to ask the Governor and his wife for dinner one night.’ But she scoffed at the idea of you being willing to visit a private home, and I finished up agreeing with her and dropped the idea. That’s why I say there must have been some kind of telepathy going on, joining our thoughts at the time.”

‘The result of my two-page letter to Sir Mark – dealt with Sir Mark’s many virtues and ended with the hope, “I hope you’ll accept my sincere apology because, as Chif used to say, ‘To know all is to forgive all.’”

‘You are right when you state that Western security services draw the fine line between subversion and legitimate political dissent, because when that is done most of the work carried out by the Special Branch is directed against legitimate political dissent. Justice White, who studied the Hope report wrote, quote, “I am bound to record that I found ASIO files in such disorder that in the time that had been available to me I had been quite unable to establish the truth or otherwise of matters that were raised.”

‘On 12th November ’92 the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security, Roger Holditch, told me that an ASIO search, quote, “did not show any file existed on Mr Cameron”. I acknowledged Holditch’s report on the 16th November 1992, and in my five-page letter (see enclosure) I told him, (a) that ASIO did know of my close relationship with well-known communists, including Jim Healey, Dr Alan Finger, Ted Hill, Charlie McCaffrey, Jim Staples, Justice John B Sweeney, and knew that I’d spent weekends with Dr John Burton on his ACT4 farm. It also knew of my five-pound donation to the ARU5 strike fund, whose secretary was then a notorious communist named Dr Lloyd Ross. It must have known of my role in the Council for Membership Control of the AWU, which sought to wrest control of the AWU from its extreme right-wing anti-communist affiliation. Billy McMahon was able to read to the Parliament the text of my telegram to Pat Mackie during the 1964-65 Mount Isa lockout, even though Mackie had never received that intercepted telegram. Sir Eric Harrison was able to repeat in the

4 ACT – Australian Capital Territory.
5 ARU – Australian Railways Union.
Parliament a telephone conversation I had with an informant against his Department for the way it handled a particular matter, that I was the principal opponent in South Australia to the referendum to support the Communist Party Dissolution Bill, and that I constantly attacked Bill Wentworth in the Parliament on the way he allowed the Communist bogey to dominate his thinking and must have made a note of my condemnation of the way ASIO handled the Petrov, Skripov and Ivanov Affairs.

‘In the light of the above, no sane person would ever believe that ASIO had never had a file on Clyde Cameron. Perhaps it is true that when Labor won the 1972 election ASIO did, on the admission of one of its officers, issue an instruction that the personal files of leading members of the incoming Government should be destroyed (see enclosure B). If those files were in fact destroyed, why were they destroyed, and what proof is there that they were destroyed?

‘Then, in response to a letter I received from Mr Holditch dated the 17th December 1993, I reported, inter alia, “While I was living in Flat 46 at 10 Marion Road, Brooklyn Park, during the ’60s, I frequently noticed that my car was being followed, and even when I would change my intended course the car would follow me and do likewise.” In his letter, Mr Holditch went on to report, “You were right when you claimed that ASIO did have a file on you. At about the time of our correspondence and discussion, ASIO located eighty-one folios that referred to you and that fell within the open period under the Archives Act. Seventy-four of these folios have been transferred to the Australian Archives, and the other seven continue to be held by ASIO under a claim of total exemption.”

‘I had better end my letter or I’ll be writing another book. However, I must say that, for someone who honestly believed that the dismissal of Harold Salisbury was unjust, you have not hesitated to report statements in defence of Don Dunstan’s action, and for that you deserve admiration and respect.

‘Yours sincerely, Clyde Cameron.’

Now, I’ve got the letter that Oliphant wrote to me and I’d like to read that. It’s not long.

Is that relevant to Don?

Yes. (break in recording)

Perhaps we’ll move on, then. Just a quick one: Don Dunstan suffered a lot from migraine headaches. When did they start to become obvious?

I wasn’t aware of it.
So – it seemed to lay him out, you know, quite a lot. (pause) Would you regard Don as a social democrat?

What do you mean by ‘social democrat’?

(pause) I was hoping you could tell me that one. In terms of his philosophy of life, could you put a label on him, ‘this was his philosophy’? As distinct from ‘socialist’? Would you have regarded him as a socialist?

Oh yes, he was a socialist, there was no doubt about that. But if that’s all you want, that’s what I can say about him: he was that.

Did he go too far on occasions? One issue he had with Len King was over the question of censorship. Don was sort of – use another tag – perhaps been described as a ‘libertarian’, he was opposed to censorship, you know, helped put Maslin Beach on the map, he didn’t like formality. Did he perhaps misjudge the public on that? Can you remember one day he -

No.

– went into Parliament with pink shorts?

Yes. No, he didn’t misjudge the public on that. The people who opposed him on that were the ones that misjudged the public. He believed in freedom of information and he didn’t believe in anything being kept secret, so to speak; that’s why he didn’t like Salisbury. But no, I don’t believe that he was guilty of that sort of thing.

The uranium issue sort of put a bit of stress on his Government there in the late ’70s.

I have to admit that – I’m nearly ninety-two years of age, and my memory over the last three years has faded, and it’s faded – the fading grows greater, almost, with each day. If you’d asked me that four or five years ago I’d be able to answer, but I don’t remember it, have got no recollection of it at all now.

I think at that stage he had Peter Duncan as his Attorney-General.

Yes.

No comment to make?

No, except that Peter Duncan would be in favour of it, I suppose. Can’t remember.

So go on, tell me, what would you consider to be Don’s major achievements?
Well, I mentioned it earlier and I’ll mention it again: in 1915 a referendum was held in South Australia, and it endorsed the 6pm closure of hotels and liquor bars at hotels. More than fifty years later Don Dunstan repealed it. Don Dunstan gave Aboriginals better health, he established the SGIC, an Ombudsman, gave adult franchise for the Legislative Council, which wasn’t before, he gave adult franchise to eighteen-year-olds, hundred per cent compensation for workers injured at work, he declared that under the Westminster system it was essential that there be a head of state. At thirty-four years of age he was elected as President of the Party’s South Australian Branch, and that was unusual for a Parliamentarian to be headed for the Presidency, because the Trade Union Movement dominated the Party on who it would appoint as President, and the fact that he was elected as President showed that he was one of very few politicians that had the respect of the Trade Union Movement. He helped form the Young Labor Contingent, which was a left-wing organisation. He appointed Elliott Johnson, Communist candidate at one election, to the Supreme Court.

**Was there any fallout from that?**

No. None that I know of. No public fallout. I don’t know whether Len King agreed with it or not, but he may or may not have, it was never published. Don constantly opposed – and he did this very deliberately – Labor’s White Australia Policy, and played a very prominent role in getting it abolished.

Right up until almost the year before he died, he never never included in the *Who’s who in Australia* the date of his birth or where he was born. He did it eventually, but only after many, many, many years. Born in Suva. And because he had a slight touch of colour to his skin, there were plenty of people who used to – plenty of certainly Liberals who used to say that he was an Asian, had Asian blood in him. They didn’t know and nobody – he never told anybody, even, that he was born in Fiji. So far as I know, neither of his parents were Fijian people.

As I say, he was a member of – he made no secret of his homosexuality, never made any secret of it.

When I was dismissed by Kerr in June, 11th June 1975, I rang Dunstan and told him that I was prepared to resign my seat as Member for Hindmarsh, and that if he

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would run there was no doubt that he’d get endorsement, but also there was probably
a very good chance of him becoming Leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor
Party. He said, ‘No, our numbers in the House of Assembly are so tight that we have
to rely upon the independent Member for Port Pirie, Ted Connelly, and if the person
who ran for Norwood as a Labor candidate lost the seat, which they might very well
have done, we would lose Government. So,’ he said, ‘I can’t accept it.’

He was the one who supported tertiary education for children.

And those are just some of the things that he did that I can remember. There were
others.

Just possibly, developing one of the achievements you just mentioned there, or
perhaps others, what did he contribute to federal Labor? He must have attended
Conventions and Conferences.

He did State Conferences and Commonwealth Conferences. In fact, at the 1955
Commonwealth Conference in Tasmania, where we were fighting to defeat the DLP\(^7\)
to capture control of the Commonwealth Conference and to therefore have
control of the whole Party, I decided – because normally I was the one who led the
debate – I decided, and my colleagues, the five of them – there were six of us
altogether – the other five agreed, Don was one of them, that Don should be the one
to move the motions that would reject the whole of the Victorian delegation
representing the Branch we had abolished, that they would vote against Vince Gair
and his delegation from Queensland. We would vote against the New South Wales.
And there were George Cole and a couple of others in Tasmania who were voting
against the majority of their delegation. They would have captured control of the
Commonwealth Conference in 1955 and the rest of us would have been on the outer.
And I did it because Don Dunstan had the reputation of being a decent person who
had views of his own and couldn’t be dictated to by people. And if I had moved, as
normally I would have, the resolutions needed to do all those things, of keeping
Vince Gair and rejecting the Victorian Branch and rejecting the delegates from
Western Australia who were supporting the Victorian Branch, if I had moved it, it
would have carried a stigma, that ‘this is typical of bloody Cameron – he just hates
anybody who’s not a Left-Winger’. So it was good tactics on our part to get Dunstan

\(^7\) DLP – Democratic Labor Party.
to be the spokesman. Nobody else from South Australia would speak, Dunstan would represent the view that all of us held. But he had a certain respect held by everybody in the Labor Party, and nobody could throw any suggestion of being a Communist or a Liberal or anything like that to him. And he did that, and he did it very effectively. That indicated the attitude that the Party in South Australia had towards him, that the whole of the six delegates unanimously agreed that he should be the only one to speak on this question of why the Gair group and the Victorian Branch delegates, *i.e.* the six from the Victorian Branch, should be rejected.

You mentioned there he was largely responsible for talking the Party round on the White Australia Policy.

Yes.

That was pretty significant, because it ran pretty deep within the Labor Party.

It did, and he spoke at the Commonwealth Conference – I think it was held in Sydney – on that, and Gough was in favour of it as well and so was I. But he did speak very well, and there was a clout in his speech that people gave way to. Yes, he was very good on White Australia.

When was the last time you saw him? Did you maintain contact with him –

No.

– after he left the –

No, I didn’t, no.

– Parliament?

No. No. And he didn’t contact me, and so it was partly – – –.

Was there any particular reason for that, because you –

No.

– were a great mentor to him in the very, very early days?

I can’t think of any, excepting that I wasn’t one who could be coaxed to change my mind on matters that he might have wanted me to change my mind on.

You mentioned you gave him the opportunity to enter Federal Parliament and that he suggested at that stage it certainly wasn’t appropriate. Were there any other efforts to draft him into Federal Parliament?
Not that I know of, because if there had been, then, judging from his reaction to my proposal, he wouldn’t have done it then. He preferred to be in the State Parliament where he had clout. See, when Playford was there, he had a Leader of the Labor Party that he could handle, it was Mick O’Halloran, who had been a Senator and then became Leader of the South Australian Parliamentary Party. Playford knew how to handle him: for instance, when he wanted to bring in his Bill that had a pretty heavy clout against the Trades and Labour Council – I forget what it was now – but he had a meeting with Mick O’Halloran in the bar. Mick O’Halloran would be drinking Cooper’s ale, Playford would be drinking, forget the name of it now but he was always drinking something that was something like Coca-Cola, and he said to Mick, ‘Mick, look, I want to get legislation through dealing with the Trade Union Movement. I thought I’d put in five or six clauses that were pretty savage, and then you make an all-out attack on them, and then I would cave in and agree to delete them and then we would let the rest go through. So you could always say to the Trade Union Movement, when they didn’t like the rest, how it was you who prevented even worse ones going through, and they would then be fair enough to say, “Well, in that case, Mick, we forgive you,”’ and that sort of thing. Playford’s number of the people employed in the public service was never, ever increased to any great extent or at all; whereas under Dunstan, there were substantial increases in the public service, which was something that Playford never, ever would have agreed to. And he supported the ALP Industrial Groups: he thought they played a role in preventing the Party from going too far to the Left.

When we decided to support the Unity Ticket for the Trade Union Movement, which was our answer to the ALP Industrial Group Movement, I moved the motion and he opposed it, and it was carried by an overwhelming majority. When the result was announced he threw his arms in the air and said, ‘Well, that’s the end of the bloody Labor Party’ and walked out.

Who was this? This is Dunstan?

Dunstan. Dunstan said, ‘That’s the end of the bloody Labor Party,’ and he walked out of the room, he didn’t stay there for the rest of the business. That was at a monthly Council meeting. See, that was his style. He was a very courageous person.
And although I didn’t agree with him walking out, I did admire him for having that kind of courage.

A little while ago I said I received this letter from Governor Mark Oliphant on the 21st September. I didn’t get it immediately because I was in New York. But this is what it says:

‘Dear Mr Cameron

‘Before I reach the end of my term as Governor of South Australia, I feel I must ask you a number of questions in the hope that you will be kind enough to reply:

‘1. I understand that Don Dunstan owed his entry into politics to your encouragement and help, yet you were not present at the Party for his 50th birthday, though Whitlam and Hawke came across for it, and Tom Playford was there. Were you away at the time?

‘When I was appointed here, I went out of my way to invite you to be my guest whenever you felt inclined, and I have invited you specifically on a number of occasions without avail. We marched together against the Australian involvement in Vietnam, and I thought that you didn’t have a violent antipathy towards me. Have I done something specific that displeases you?

‘Yours sincerely, Mark Oliphant, Governor.’

I read that letter because, instead of explaining to him, as I did in the case of Roma Mitchell, that I haven’t owned a dinner suit or worn a black bow tie since I was a rouseabout in the shearing sheds – – –. I did that then because when we were shearing, say, up at Beltana and Wirrealpa Sheds, we’d always go into Blinman on Saturday because there was a dance there. Those that didn’t dance spent the time drinking. I used to go to the dance, I didn’t drink then at all – didn’t have a drink until well after I was married – and I would have a dance and I would be the only person with a dinner suit and a black bow tie, and the girls would fight one another to see who would get the next dance with me. They’d ask me, ‘Where do you come from?’ ‘Oh, I come from Adelaide.’ ‘Oh. How do you happen to be up here?’ ‘Well, I’m the wool-classer at the Wirrealpa shed.’ ‘Oh, a wool-classer.’ All of those people in Blinman knew the difference between a wool-classer and a rouseabout. And the girls would be fighting to get a dance with me – not fighting, but coming up to me and saying, ‘Hello, who are you? I’d love to have a dance with
you.’ And so out of the many who said ‘I’d love to have a dance,’ I would pick out the prettiest ones; and the ones that weren’t very pretty I would find no time left to dance with them. That was a failing that I confess to now, but that was what used to happen. (telephone rings) What was the question you asked me?

I didn’t ask one. But why did you not go to Don’s 50th birthday when all the other – – –?

I was in New York. I was in New York. And if I came home for that I’d have to stay home because I wouldn’t have had the fare to go back again. That’s the answer to that. But after he ceased to be Governor, I had a lot to do with Mark Oliphant. He went to live with his daughter in Canberra and he used to come and visit me and we’d have dinner together at Parliament House. He didn’t go immediately to Canberra after he retired; but I used to see him at North Adelaide in the home he had there, and we would talk about socialism and this kind of thing, and we’d agree on all those issues. So that’s all I can say about him.

Well, we’re coming to the end of another tape: is there anything you would like to finish up on? Just in terms of Don and his career?

Looks as though I’ve dealt with most of it.

I’m delighted with the preparation you’ve obviously gone to. So what will happen to all this documentation? Have you made provision for that?

This?

Yes.

Yes. I’ve done six hundred hours of oral history recording for the National Library, and I’ve had oral history recordings with Sir Garfield Barwick; with Dame Nancy Buttfield; with Sir John Gorton; with Sir Peter Lawler; with Sir Paul Hasluck; with Senator O’Byrne; with a chap named Corcoran, who was prominent in the Right-Wingers; with the former Secretary of the Department of Labour, when he became a judge – or when I made him a judge; Ian Sharp; the Governor of Tasmania, Sir Paul Plimsoll, he was another one; and that’s been transcribed and is now bound into transcriptions, and there’s a twenty-five year embargo on anyone reading that. Sir Barwick’s was done in 1981, so in the year 2006 the Barwick recording will be
available. And in that there’ll be quite a few surprises: surprises on Barwick’s talk with Kennedy over the ANZUS Treaty as to where it applies and where it won’t apply. And that kind of thing. So they’re all there. There’s about forty volumes altogether, and it represents six hundred hours of recording altogether.

The other thing I very strongly opposed, and Dunstan told me that he wouldn’t allow it, was to have public servants sitting in on meetings of the Cabinet, taking notes and telling all their mates in the public service what happened, and who did it. Dunstan would never allow a public servant to sit in on a Cabinet meeting taking notes. He’d take his own notes or get someone else at the meeting to take them. And that was some of the things that I liked about Don. He didn’t have to rely on anybody else to help him, he had the ability to help himself all the way through. Playford had a high regard for him, because until Don came onto the scene we didn’t have a determined and successful Labor Opposition at that period. And Dunstan refers to it, as he puts it, as ‘a comfortable lethargy’ on Labor’s part, and observes that older Labor Members in Parliament were themselves satisfied with most of Playford’s policies and were not interested enough to fight the others. Whether this is a fair assessment or not must be weighed against Don’s own ardour and ambitions.

What were his ambitions?

His ambition was for the Labor Party to win power in order to introduce measures that would help the working class, that would help the people who had no power. I don’t know whether you know of his Chifley Memorial Lecture, do you? His memorial lecture, in which he said, among other things, quote, ‘The forces of reaction have severely damaged the spirit of our democratic system. They have shown themselves to be totally unscrupulous, untruthful, unethical in their determination to impede the movement for reform in Australia.’ He said this: ‘The advice which Sir John Kerr sought from the Chief Justice should never have been tendered, because it was political in content and in purpose. It went completely against the judicial convention that the Australian High Court has no advisory role and certainly no single Justice of the Court should tender advice on a matter which may come before the Court. But Sir Garfield Barwick did, and his advice was contrary to that of the

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8 ANZUS – Australia, New Zealand, United States (of America).
principal law officers of the Crown, but Sir John accepted Sir Garfield’s version, which quite dogmatically asserted the proposition that a Government, in order to govern, must have the confidence and support of both Houses in the Westminster system. And again he draws the distinction from Westminster which is quite specious, in that the House of Lords is appointed and the Senate is elected.’ Dunstan concluded, ‘Presumably his advice would then apply to the South Australian Parliament, but not to that of the New South Wales Parliament.’

And that just about sums up everything I can tell you. Yes, I say here that ‘The public perception of the political situation, in one respect at least, is quite extraordinary, because in South Australia, where internal Labor Party elections, Parliamentary preselections and policy decisions were decided by the card vote of union delegates,’ – I can interrupt myself by saying it no longer operates – ‘the public see Don Dunstan as having more influence in the Labor Party than the unions themselves have. This reflects the excellent relationship that exists between the industrial and political wings of the Labor Movement in South Australia. It proves that when a sensible political wing meets a responsible industrial wing it is not power that counts but good, sound common sense.’

That’s probably a good place to conclude, I think.

Yes.

It makes a nice, rounded interview. So thank you very much.

Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW.