



Government  
of South Australia

# **“Don’s Party” for 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Don Dunstan Foundation**

**Norwood Town Hall, The Parade**

**Friday, 6 February 2009**

**Hon Mike Rann MP**

Premier of South Australia

Minister for Economic Development

Minister for Social Inclusion

Minister for the Arts

Minister for Sustainability and Climate Change

I acknowledge that we meet on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people, and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

Good evening.

It's with a mixture of privilege and poignancy that I speak to you tonight, as we commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Don Dunstan's death.

It was indeed one of the great privileges of my life to work for Don in the late 1970s as his speechwriter and his press secretary.

For me, he was not only an inspiration as this nation's most reformist Premier, but - just as significantly – he was a most supportive mentor.

Don's visionary approach to social policy, the environment and law reform was the reason that I moved to South Australia from New Zealand in 1977.

Even today, more than three decades on, I still meet people who tell me they made a similar decision to come to South Australia.

They came here because of the reforms that Don Dunstan was undertaking in the areas of equal opportunities, the arts, multicultural and indigenous affairs.

Don showed us that the Labor Party must never flee its responsibilities for those left out, or left behind.

Indeed, I regard Don Dunstan and Gough Whitlam as the Washington and Jefferson of the Australian Labor Party.

Don taught us that we should never turn away from injustice, prejudice or pain, and pretend we do not see.

As the pioneer of indigenous land rights legislation Don would have delighted in last year's historic national apology to the Stolen Generations, the first anniversary of which will be celebrated next week.

Throughout his life, Don was prepared to put his reputation on the line when the principle of an issue was important enough.

True, he had his share of detractors.

To many, he was the most potent threat to the cold citadels of privilege and justice.

But their enduring hostility was a constant source of comfort to him.

I remember him one day, in his office in Victoria Square, looking out over an angry crowd of 15,000 demonstrators who were demanding his head on a platter over the Salisbury sacking.

He seemed agitated, and I asked him how he felt.

With great dramatic effect, and in that mellifluous voice he replied: "like Horatius on the bridge, fighting the forces of darkness".

Horatius in a safari suit.

I have previously described Don Dunstan as "the maestro of the possible".

He led South Australia out of a dull conservatism, he campaigned for an end to the most blatantly gerrymandered political system in Australia, and made this State a national pacesetter.

But if Don were here with us this evening, he would have a quiet chuckle about the clothes and emphatically urge us not to dwell on the past.

He would insist that we look forward rather than back, and he would not want us to embrace schemes borrowed from the 1970s, nor to romanticise his legacy.

Don was all about innovation, and breaking new ground.

As we can see from some of the fashions on display here tonight, times have changed markedly since Don's Premiership.

We celebrate and admire Don's example and philosophies, but we are not stubbornly manacled to his policy solutions of the late 1960s and the 1970s.

That would be a betrayal of Don's vision, which was to constantly question old assumptions.

Since coming to office in 2002, my Government has implemented its own reform program, at the core of which is *South Australia's Strategic Plan*.

The *Plan* has 98 clearly-defined and measurable targets that show it is possible to successfully combine economic growth with environmental responsibility, cultural ambition and social innovation.

For example, we have built on the Dunstan Government's strong environmental credentials by becoming a global exemplar in the fight against climate change.

We were among the first in the world to introduce dedicated climate change legislation, we lead the nation in the development and use of renewable energy and we now have 58 per cent of Australia's total wind power generation capacity.

We've also enhanced the Dunstan Government's container deposit scheme and become the first State in Australia to ban plastic shopping bags.

As an outspoken advocate of the power and opportunities afforded by knowledge, Don would be delighted with South Australia's role at the forefront of science learning.

He would have loved our Adelaide Thinkers in Residence program, the fact that University College London is establishing a presence here, and that we are home to the very first sister organisation of London's famous Royal Institution to be established outside Great Britain.

Don would applaud the fact that - under our Social Inclusion Initiative - we're restoring South Australia's standing as a leader in school retention rates.

In 2008, we recorded our highest retention level in 13 years.

Nowhere was Don's flair and vision more obvious than in the arts.

In my final conversation with Don shortly before his death, I gained his approval to honour his contribution by re-naming the Adelaide Festival Centre Playhouse the Dunstan Playhouse, and by including a Don Dunstan Award for outstanding contributions to our film industry as part of a soon-to-be-established Adelaide Film Festival.

That Festival has already gained significant international kudos.

Don would have been in his element at the opening of this year's Film Festival in a fortnight's time, just as he would have revelled in the fact that the Fringe Festival and WOMADelaide are now annual highlights of South Australia's cultural calendar.

Under Don's leadership, South Australia embraced a diversity of cultures and nationalities, and I believe that multiculturalism stands as our State's greatest post-War social achievement.

Of course, Don struck an emphatic blow for indigenous Australians when he appointed Sir Douglas Nicholls as Governor in 1976.

He would have celebrated our appointment, in 2007, of Hieu Van Le as Lieutenant Governor, making him the first person of Asian descent to hold Vice-Regal office anywhere in Australia.

Don's abhorrence of discrimination and his commitment to equality meant his Government was the first in Australia to set up a Women's Advisor's office, and the fact that it was established within the Premier's Department underscored its clout.

Don would approve of South Australia continuing to lead the way in social and legal reforms for women, with the most significant changes to our laws on rape and sexual assault in more than 30 years coming into effect last November.

Similarly, important changes to our domestic violence laws will be introduced into State Parliament in the very near future.

And Don would be delighted that we have re-established South Australia as a leader in social policy through our Social Inclusion initiative.

I'm pleased to see our Social Inclusion Commissioner, Monsignor David Cappo, here with us this evening.

Tonight, for the first time, we're also making available a booklet that outlines the details of our bold and visionary Social Inclusion Initiative.

Among its programs is Common Ground, which is helping us in the fight against homelessness.

Our leadership in this area has been recognised by the Rudd Federal Government, which has now established a national Social Inclusion Board and launched Common Ground at a national level with Therese Rein, wife of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, taking on the role of the organisation's patron.

In keeping with Don's vision, we are further strengthening our commitment to social policy by investing \$6 million to establish a new Australian Centre for Social Innovation.

The Centre has arisen from a recommendation by Geoff Mulgan, a world leader in social policy innovation, and one of our highly-successful Adelaide Thinkers in Residence.

This is not a research centre, but a centre that will focus on practical solutions.

It will act as an incubator in which to grow and develop unique, effective remedies to our nation's pressing social problems.

South Australia is the ideal test bed for ideas to be applied widely because, as Geoff Mulgan has noted and as Don Dunstan showed, this is the place "where the future happens first".

For that reason, I'm delighted to announce tonight that the inaugural Chair of the Australian Centre of Social Innovation is acclaimed writer, broadcaster, film-maker, National Living Treasure and Dunstan Foundation patron, Phillip Adams.

Phillip Adams, of course, was a great confidante and friend of Don's and it's fantastic to have him here with us this evening.

Between them, Don and Phillip drew up plans for the South Australian Film Corporation in the early 1970s, a concept that was so successful it was soon adopted by the envious eastern states.

Phillip Adams regarded Don as the "Pierre Trudeau of South Australia" and has described our former Premier as "by any measure, an extraordinary man and a great politician."

I congratulate Phillip on his appointment, and I wish him and his fellow Board members - deputy-chair Professor Anne Edwards, Reverend Tim Costello, Dr Helena Williams, South Australia's new Water Commissioner, Robyn McLeod, Tanya Hosch, Tim Zak from Carnegie Mellon University, and Monsignor David Cappo all the best for this important and influential project.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Don Dunstan was a reformer, he was an innovator, but above all, he was a leader.

Under his Premiership, South Australia became the talk of the nation, and he gave our State a national voice that far outweighed its size and lifted us from rock bottom to Australian pre-eminence.

He showed us what can be achieved if we maintain confidence in ourselves, and we invest in the talents of our people to lead, not follow.

As we confront the uncertain and unprecedented economic challenges that have been foisted upon us, the words from Don's 1998 Whitlam Oration resonate with an eerie clarity.

"We must retain our right to intervene by state action," he said less than 10 months before his death "to create undertakings to temper the market place, or to remedy its failures."

"For we know that we intervene, or we sink."

How prescient those words appear given current global events.

They sum up the need for the Federal Government's massive financial stimulus package that all State Premiers signed up to in Canberra yesterday.

And they encapsulate Don Dunstan's unerring view that the free market should never be granted unfettered power.

That typifies the legacy that Don would want us to reclaim, and it exemplifies the vision that we celebrate here this evening.

Thank you.