

END OF THE 6 O'CLOCK SWILL

Len King

Published in the Dunstan Foundation Bulletin

Spring 1999

When Don Dunstan became Attorney General and as such Minister in Charge of Liquor Licensing laws, in the Walsh government in 1965, he inherited a licensing system which was in chaos. Six o'clock closing operated in this state since 1915, but it was in the process of breaking down under the weight of public ridicule and pressure. It had been abolished in New South Wales in the mid-50s and in Victoria in the mid-60s. The other states had never had it.

The tactic of the Playford government which had preceded the Walsh government was to maintain the system by official tolerance of widespread breach. The police were instructed to ignore breaches by restaurants and some clubs and the law was openly and flagrantly flouted by football clubs whose Sunday morning trade was notorious.

Don realised that the only way of clearing up the mess was a Royal Commission. He appointed me counsel assisting the Commission. Don's 1967 Licensing Act was a total revamp of the licensing laws based on the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Not only was early closing abolished but the system was given a new flexibility which enabled the conditions of trading of clubs, restaurants and bottle shops to meet the reasonable needs of everybody.

I became Attorney General in the Dunstan government in 1970 and we were able to further develop and improve the system. Other improvements have followed. The result is the enlightened and flexible system which we now have. Don Dunstan had a vision of a community lifestyle in which people could enjoy liquor as a social amenity and adjunct to good living without unnecessary and heavy handed

regulation. He was able to institute a licensing system during his public life which enable the lifestyle to occur, and in doing so laid the foundations for later improvements.

In this, as in so many other ways, our South Australian community owes a great debt to Don Dunstan.