

DON DUNSTAN'S LEGACY FOR A NEW CENTURY

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A year ago today our party and South Australia lost its greatest leader Don Dunstan.

Although our state is small in population terms Don would never see us settling for the 'national average'. He thought, he believed and he proved we could do better than that. He saw us as leaders here in Australia and, by example, even internationally.

If Labor wins office next year we will celebrate Don Dunstan's commitment to the betterment of our state. We will stage an International Film Festival and Film Week in alternate years to the Festival of Arts and are committed to reviving a dynamic South Australian film industry. We will launch the Dunstan Awards for Innovation in the arts, social policy, design and technology. We will also do the decent thing and name the Adelaide Festival Centre Playhouse after him. But more important than this we must chart a course of reform that will not only honour Don's memory, but embrace his legacy.

In the past year, at scores of community meetings, I have asked South Australians from all walks of life, from city and country, blue collar, white collar, prospering and struggling, what they expect from us in Opposition and what, if we make it, they want from Labor in government.

The answer is pretty clear. South Australians want to look forward, not back. They are tired of the politics of blame. They know we live in a community, not just an economy. People now talk in family analogies about the big public policy issues, like health and education.

South Australians tell me no family worthy of its name would neglect its weakest, most vulnerable children and only reward its brightest and strongest. They tell me no government, state or federal, should ignore our troubled regions, our vulnerable communities and help only the big, powerful and wealthy.

They are telling us as the century turns they want to be part of a bolder sense of community, with shared rights and responsibilities, shared benefits, shared burdens and, most of all, shared values.

Labor's challenge is to explain to our fellow citizens, that when we talk of 'opportunity' and 'security' we mean reaffirming those shared values and helping to advance the lives of individuals by strengthening communities.

South Australians are telling us that after six years they do not see the Olsen Government as being on their side, or sharing their hopes, their dreams. People see the Liberals as being interested in very little but privatization. They see a government that is abdicating key responsibilities, 'outsourcing' their future, and 'contracting out' their children's future. They see a Cabinet that has its priorities wrong and which prefers to sell off our state rather than build it. In our community meetings South Australians tell us over and over that no amount of spin, or PR stunts, or advertising campaigns or 'special events' can give this government the 'human face' the Premier's Christmas message hoped to achieve.

People fear overwhelmingly that we might be the first South Australian generation which cannot expect our children to do better than us. They have had that much hope frightened out of them, by the times, by the cuts and by the Olsen Government. And that is why Labor has no choice, no alternative, but to win the next election. We cannot allow this government to win a third term and damage any further the legacy Don Dunstan left us, and later Labor governments built upon. We cannot allow those who do not believe in public education to run our schools and those who despise public health to run, and run down, our hospitals.

Labor's aim in government will be, like Don's aim in government, not only to encourage those favoured with talent to go as far as they can, but also to assist those who are left out or left behind to have opportunities to make the most of their individual potential and to enjoy a decent life. That is the difference between Labor and Liberal. We are committed to attacking the causes of poverty. They prefer to declare war on the poor, by punching holes in the safety net and by pulling away the ladders to opportunity.

It has to be our aim to show through our policies that we are the party of the majority, and we share the values and aspirations of the majority. We have to demonstrate that unlike

the Liberals, our great party speaks for the many, not just the few. While the Liberals boast of 'non-core' promises we must speak of core values, the underlying system of belief that our party lives by and works for, and treasures in its heart.

At countless Labor Listens meetings good and decent people have stood up and said they will give their support to parties and candidates who listen, and listen carefully, who understand the concerns of ordinary people and who seek real solutions. They do not want us to adopt the policies of our opponents. They do not want us to be a pale imitation of the Liberals. They want us to define ourselves by what we stand for, not just what we stand against.

We stand for education first. Because we know, as Don knew, and always said, that South Australia's long term success as a state, as a community and, yes, as an economy, would depend on the strength of our schools. We used to lead Australia in education but now we do not. Today our kids are dropping out of school, giving up the ghost, abandoning the chase, as they never did before 1993 when we were in government, and over twenty years had given them the hope, the fire, the inspiration to advance and prevail. Since 1993 our schools have been under siege, and budget cuts and senseless closures and ugly wrangles over Partnership 21 have assaulted their traditions and eroded their morale. Since 1993 good, decent professional teachers have been daily belittled and daily dishonoured by a government which believes that education is something you buy, not something you have as a right. Never has the mood of those teachers been worse. Never have they been in more need of the hope, the fire, the vision that a Labor Government committed to education can bring.

At every meeting I have gone to in every part of the state I am told by ordinary people that they want education to be our biggest commitment, and they want moreover to have a say, a hands-on involvement, in the way it happens.

There is, I believe, nothing wrong with that. Don Dunstan wanted citizens to have an effective say in the decisions that shape their lives. I agree. But local school management should not be about fostering inequalities or entrenching them. It should not be about casualising teachers or transferring costs to parents through higher school fees. It should not be the ugly open secret that Partnership 21 has become; a trick that in the long term is designed to benefit the few while the many beg for equipment and resources and specialist teachers, things that would make a critical difference to children's future lives,

but do not get them. Under Labor equity and opportunity will never again be under attack, and under siege, as they are now.

Forty percent of our children do not now complete their secondary schooling, and this is unacceptable to us. All children should complete school, or undertake employment training, and this will be our greatest priority in government.

We will increase retention rates and levels of literacy and numeracy. We will focus on the transition of students from school to further education or training. We will ensure that senior students have a real 'getting ready for work' plan.

South Australia might not be the biggest or the richest state in the twenty-first century but I believe it can be the best. But I also believe that if we are to lead again and succeed again as a community then education must be our first investment, for it is what the future is built on. We must embrace what Kim Beazley calls 'the knowledge economy' and recognize like him that human capital is our chief resource, and developing it to its fullest potential should be our primary, most testing, and most exciting aim.

In health, too, it was not too hard for the people we met to tell the difference between Labor and Liberal. It is as plain as the difference between a patient being treated in a hospital ward or being left in a corridor. People, including some Liberals, are telling us they know the system is not as good as it was, and they are right. For every dollar Labor spent on health the Olsen Government is spending 78 cents. Our hospitals are not only stressed, but stressed out.

And the people from those meetings are not fooled. They know, and they know well, that Liberal governments, Federal and State, want them to lose their faith in public health and opt out of it and pay fees they cannot afford—for what they know should be theirs as a human right.

And they hate this deception, this double-dealing. They certainly dislike the GST, and who wouldn't, and the Emergency Service tax, and they are often concerned about police numbers, the economy, the environment and unemployment, but the number one local issue for them now, in the year 2000, is Health, and it is the one that most starkly shows up the difference between the parties, and our different priorities.

They see a government, a Liberal government, that can spend tens of millions of dollars on consultants, stunts and PR gimmicks yet cannot guarantee sick people a hospital bed when they need one. They see a real health care crisis that impacts not only on the morale of our health professionals and our people's faith in the system, but on patient care. They believe we are not as safe in hospitals as we used to be, and they are right. They want a real commitment to mental health and they will get one.

At Labor Listens meetings around our state I tell South Australians that Labor stands for fairness, and also for enterprise, and there is no contradiction in this. I tell them we believe, and we must demonstrate that economic competence and social justice can be allies. I tell them there is no alternative to this.

In October Labor will hold a special convention to decide our 'platform', the underpinning architecture of our election policies of what we believe, and passionately believe, will be possible in government.

We will not be driven by a hand-out mentality, but by innovative, creative and courageous ways of tackling problems old and new. I have been looking closely in the past months at the Blair Government and its bracing, welcome initiatives in regional development and the way it is fighting social and economic inequity with its New Deal, and its social exclusion initiative, in partnership with local authorities, the community and private sectors. In government we will embrace small business and forge a real partnership with industry, with a new Jobs Commission, enterprise zones and our Centre For Industry and with a regional development strategy I am working on with Kim Beazley. We will do as well as we can. But we will act with courage, and creative energy.

Shortly before he died I promised Don Dunstan that through the boldest reforms we would dedicate the first one hundred days of the next government, a reformist Labor Government, to his enduring legacy. But that legacy is not to look backwards to South Australia in the 1970s as some kind of shining Camelot to be slavishly emulated. In a new century, in a new epoch, there are now different challenges.

Don's legacy, I believe, is for Labor to govern a small state in a way that means we can once again set the agenda nationally, and internationally, as activists who want to act and leaders who want to lead.

For South Australia to win Labor must be the party of change and renewal, enterprise and tolerance. We must be prepared to embrace a policy agenda that is bold, robust and even, yes, radical. We must share the values of our people and be committed to their advancement. We must take up this millennial challenge, act boldly, deal wisely, do right and get on with the job.