

# **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

## **ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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**At Sydney on Tuesday 1 December 2015**

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**The discussion commenced at 11.00 a.m.**

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### **PRESENT**

Mr David Blunt  
Dr David Clune  
Mr Les Jeckeln

**Dr CLUNE:** Would you like to talk about your personal background, leading up to how you became an officer of the Legislative Council?

**Mr JECKELN:** I was born in 1926. My mother and father were uneducated. My father's father died when my father was 13 so there was very little education. My mother had no education. They married in 1923. Three boys followed; I was the third. The Depression period was 1926 to the 1930s. Life was difficult. My father was simply a labourer. I started my education at Belmore South Public School. When I was about 10, another boy and I were chosen to go to the opportunity class at Erskineville School. That was 1937 and 1938 for fifth and sixth class.

In 1939, 1940 and 1941 I was at Sydney Technical High School on a State bursary because of my parents' financial situation. So I had three years at Sydney Technical High School which, as the name implies, produced a boy who could handle a few tools—woodworking, metalworking, tech drawing et cetera. I had no training for what I subsequently ended up doing. However, I got the Intermediate Certificate. And the important thing in my father's mind was to get a job. My two brothers had been employed: one in the post office, who subsequently went into the army as a telegraphist—he was very good on the Morse key—and the other one went into the railways as an apprentice and spent 40 years there.

I had passed the public service exam at the same time as the Intermediate, I think, and started in the Police Department in August 1942. You needed shorthand and typing or accountancy. I knew nothing about accounts, coming from a technical high school, so I did shorthand and typing—not with a great deal of success—but many of the officers in the Police Department went on to court reporting and Hansard. The Police Department was the door opener for many of us, some of whom entered the Public Service Board, the Premier's Department, the Department of Local Government and so on, and rose to high positions. I could name a number of Editors of Debates who were former Police Department officers—Bob McDonald, Neville Weightman and Kelvin Mierendorff. Other members of the Hansard staff were also former Police Department officers and they were quality people. I think you had to do 150 words per minute before you could be a Hansard reporter but I only reached about 130 so I was no candidate for that. The great beauty of court reporting vis-à-vis Parliament is that court reporting is orderly. Parliament is totally different and that is the skill of these reporters. We did have a Hansard reporter once who was the Australian shorthand champion and I think he subsequently went to the United Nations. These were top-flight people and to find such a gathering at Parliament House just vindicated the training of the Police Department and why they did not want you to leave.

I recall that the official secretary at Government House, Lindsay Rose, was a former Police Department officer. A chap of my vintage who died last year—I think he was probably about 12 months or so older than I was—Dick Wills, also became a Public Service Board Inspector, the Director of the Agent-General's Office in London and the Official Secretary at Government House. You can see the foundation which was given to the chaps in the Police Department.

So in 1951 when there was a vacancy for an assistant private secretary to Mr Joe Arthur—Joshua George Arthur, a Minister in the Legislative Assembly—I went for an interview with the Minister together with the former secretary to the Commissioner of Police. However, I came back from the Minister's office to be confronted by my clerk in charge. He said, "Have you been out of the building?" I told him I had been and I had permission to leave the room from a chap I was working under. Anyhow, the Minister wanted me promptly down at his office. It was a busy time personally for me. I had only just been married some months before. My wife had had TB. The attitude of the Police Department to officers being trained and then leaving was, frankly, that it damaged the department. However, I was appointed as the assistant private secretary. I think that was about August 1951. That introduced me to life at Parliament House. We used to come up here, naturally, to the Minister's room. And I grew to like what I saw. But that was in the Legislative Assembly.

Then there was a Minister appointed in the Legislative Council—an Assistant Minister to Robert Reginald Downing, the Leader of the Government, and his name was Francis Patrick Buckley. That was brought about by the former Minister, Mr Dickson, becoming President. So Downing was on his own to manage affairs for the Government and they appointed Pat Buckley as the Assistant Minister. He needed a private secretary. I applied, got the job and started with him in November 1952. That brought me to the Legislative Council. Then there was a vacancy arising in March 1954. I told Mr Buckley I was applying for it. He wished me well. About then he came back to the office from Cabinet one day with a long face. He would not tell me immediately what was wrong—although that is hardly the word to use—but he later said, "Joe wants me to go to London." The Premier, Joe Cahill, wanted him to take the Agent-General's job in London. So I realised that my application to the Legislative Council staff, which was undecided at that time, was very important. He did make a suggestion

about my going to London with him, but that was not a real possibility. On 19 May 1954 I put him on the boat—they went by boat in those days—to London, went back to the ministerial office, cleaned up and then started on the Legislative Council staff the following day, 20 May. So that is how I came to be at the bottom of the staff, as third Clerk—because there was no fourth Clerk.

**Dr CLUNE:** Leading on from that, we want to talk about the Legislative Council as it was when you started. Let's talk about the administration first. Who was the Clerk? How many staff were there? What were the conditions like?

**Mr JECKELN:** There were five officers: the Clerk, the Clerk-Assistant, the Usher of the Black Rod, and a second Clerk and a third Clerk. There were two women. One was a secretary, Miss Wilkinson—she was secretary to the Clerk and the President—and Mrs Luther, who is still alive, who was secretary to Sir Henry Manning, who, without the title of Leader of the Opposition, was in fact playing that role. And subsequently there was a title given to his successor, Colonel Clayton: "Principal representative of members who are not supporters of the Government." I do not think there was any typing assistance for members of the Legislative Council except for Sir Henry Manning and the President. In the Legislative Assembly they had amanuenses who did the typing for members.

It was a small staff, headed by Brigadier Stevenson—who had come back from the war a brigadier. He left the Legislative Council office in 1939 as a captain. He served in the Middle East and New Guinea. He took the Japanese surrender on Nauru, I think. There is a whole story to be written about General Stevenson, as he became. He was a fearsome character. I do recall the day I stood at the front of his desk—I think I was trembling because of his reputation. Everyone feared "The Brig"—perhaps not so much feared him but respected him - and he was a man to be respected. Anyhow, I started as the third Clerk at the bottom of the ladder and discovered that the place had been like a bit of a rest home not only for members but for some of the staff in those years. It was a very casual affair. Under Brigadier Stevenson, things had to change.

So that is an introduction to it. The hours of the staff were a bit of a shock to my system, coming from the public service. In recess it was 9.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. The work of the staff was quite limited when I first arrived. You worked until the House got up and, as a consequence, were given six weeks leave. I think that was the rule for Legislative Assembly staff too. We usually took our leave in two parts: three weeks in the winter recess and three weeks in the summer recess. I think the Hansard staff had one or two officers on duty each day out of session. But that is history. I know it has all changed – and for the better.

I think the senior officers—the Clerk and the Clerk Assistant—kept their own file of precedents. There was no general sharing of information and, as a consequence, the Clerk of the Parliaments became the authority: he was the adviser to everyone, and I do not think his advice was questioned. Ken Charlton, at an earlier than usual age, became Clerk in 1939. He was in office until 1954 and was regarded as the authority. He had a pretty long history in the Council and he had been acting as Clerk of the Parliaments when his predecessor, Cecil Calvert, who I think had some health problems, was away from the House.

Under Brigadier Stevenson, and no doubt because of his army training, we were not going to sit still. As a consequence, he initiated the *Consolidated Index*, which is virtually the foundation for the Council's procedural book. We all participated in the research that gave rise to the first volume, which was Volume Five, 1934 to 1954 - choosing the reconstitution of the Council in 1934 as the starting point. From that it is obvious that "Stevo"—as we shall call him—was training his staff; he introduced us to all the precedents and the background and the personalities. It was a tremendous foundation for the future staff, and so different to what had been the situation before Stevenson became Clerk. He was totally restless. He was on the board of the NRMA, he was a warden at St James Church in King Street, and he had his military interests. He lived on the premises and I suspect his work on the *Consolidated Index* and on the *Records of the Parliament* was done on Sundays. He would come over here to the silence of the office and work, work, work. That was a tremendous example for a young bloke and the rest of the staff. So I am grateful to John Stevenson—very grateful.

Sittings starting at 4.30 p.m. and often finishing at 6.30 p.m. did not do the reputation of the Council any good. That was also passed on to the staff, especially by certain other officers in the establishment: we were freeloaders, we were a waste of space, et cetera. But John Stevenson was the breath of fresh air who created change, and I think after that the Council staff might have gained respect. It was not uncommon then for the staff of both Houses to have outside activities, and the Hansard staff too had outside interests. But I must say that the Hansard staff, not just because many of them were ex-Police Department, were a fantastic group who worked under great pressure when the House was sitting. They were closely knit and highly respected.

Can I say a little bit about Reg Downing? To me, he was a master tactician, a terrific debater and I think, you might agree, David, he might have been the power behind Joe Cahill.

**Dr CLUNE:** I think not only Joe; I think he also propped up Jim McGirr. He certainly propped up Bob Heffron, because Bob was well and truly past it. Reg himself said to me, "That was at the time of my greatest power".

**Mr JECKELN:** I really liked him as a man and respected him as a debater. He had seen the legislation of the post-war period; he knew all of the legislation of the time. From 1941 he was a Minister in the Labor Government. He only came into Parliament a short time beforehand and soon was a Minister and Leader of the Government in the Council.

**Dr CLUNE:** In fact, his first speech as Leader of the Government was his maiden speech.

**Mr JECKELN:** Well, full marks to the man. He grew and grew in that job and he was the real power, as far as I am concerned anyhow.

**Dr CLUNE:** Who were the other MLCs that you remember who impressed you or were interesting?

**Mr JECKELN:** In debate, Reg Downing stood out but he was confronted by Sir Henry Manning—a pre-war Minister, former Attorney-General and KC, as it was at the time. A very ponderous speechmaker—his preliminary observations might last an hour; there was no time limit. If I am correct, his wife was the daughter of Sir James Martin, who was the Chief Justice and Premier in the nineteenth century, after whom Martin Place is named. Sir Henry was respected but he was very old when I came here

Sir Hector Joseph Richard Clayton was a colonel from the First World War and, again, a lawyer—Clayton Utz was his firm. Then there is Arthur Dalgety Bridges, a powerful speaker, a chartered accountant, with many company directorships, which I think ceased when he became a Minister. Anyhow, he was a tremendous debater and an absolute joy for shorthand writers. There were no "ums" and "ahs" with Mr Bridges. In debate on, say, the Appropriation Bill he would juggle millions in his head. Prepared speeches were not always required for him. He was a remarkable man.

Just as an aside, I think it was in 1969 we had a local government amendment bill going through late at night. Mr Bridges was the Minister in charge of the House and James Denis Kenny, the Secretary of the Labor Council, was speaking. A comment was made by Mr Bridges to the effect, "I wish you weren't here" or "I wish we weren't here"—it was late into the night—and Jim Kenny took umbrage: "You wish I wasn't here?" Now Mr Bridges and other people's tempers were running short at that time and he said something like, "Yes, I wish you weren't here." Jim Kenny died the following week.

Mr Bridges was a lay preacher I believe, a very upright man, and when I first came here he wore a winged collar and a bowler hat. He was a dynamo and as a speaker I could sit as Usher and listen to him and think, "Yes, that is the true situation" and then I would listen to Downing and I would think, "That's the true situation"—I certainly was not a politician. They were brilliant speakers. Later on came the likes of Serisier, Landa and Bernard Blomfield Riley, who later became a Federal judge—a beautiful speaker who was Oxford educated. You can see that I am touching on the legal members. That is what gave these members the power. Max Willis could make a speech for half an hour from just what was in his head, I thought. These were all legally trained people with very sharp minds.

Sir John Fuller also had a sharp mind and was a master politician. I felt that he had a political nose and could run rings around many others, and that is why in the matter of the reconstitution of the Council he carried the day. I had the feeling that country members—and Fuller was one—seemed to have a warmth about them which you did not always find in city members. In the city it was all "go, go, go" but, in my estimation, in the country it was cooperation, help and sensitivity towards your neighbour.

**Dr CLUNE:** Mac Falkiner of Haddon Rig fame was another Country Party MLC I remember of that kind.

**Mr JECKELN:** Absolutely, and an expert in his field. That is the point I wanted to make. You were faced with a House of experts. One member, Samuel Connell Williams from Newcastle—Con Williams—was

in the Boxer Rebellion in 1900! To me, this is beautiful history. Anyhow, we had some terrific members. Amongst the Labor Party members were trade union secretaries who had seen the hard pre-war years. I have one in mind who from his vehemence would never give an employer a break; he would fight the employers to the death. But that was a product of his upbringing. The expertise was there in industrial relations, in the wool industry, in the law, in many other ways. It was just a wonderful place, I thought. In those earlier years it was so pleasing to see that the Council had such a positive capacity in the legislative structure, and that really pleased me no end.

**Dr CLUNE:** How did the Council function as a house of review when the Government controlled both Houses?

**Mr JECKELN:** At the time that I started it was a Labor Government with the numbers. They were inclined to treat the Council as a bit of a joke, as a bit of a nuisance really. Legislation was pushed through generally without any acceptance, or much acceptance, of different opinions by members of the Council. It was a hard-headed attitude. I recall one Minister in the Wran years who it seemed just regretted being there—this was a waste of time. The tendency when the ALP had power in both Houses, as far as I am aware, was to ram the legislation through: "Push the bills through; tell them nothing; give them nothing." It was a very tough game.

**Dr CLUNE:** What was your attitude to the reconstitution? Was it necessary to reform the House? Do you think it was a good thing?

**Mr JECKELN:** Yes. I referred to the House's reputation. It was a rest home in those early years. It was in the gift of the parties to put members in the Legislative Council. But I had seen the change, from the easy-going, slack attitude, to the beginnings of a House which really meant something in the whole of the constitutional framework and that pleased me. Having come from the Police Department, what I saw here was a laid-back attitude to work; it was foreign to me. I started coming in at nine o'clock and going home at half past five. I was the junior; I was able to do that but that was my training. The easy life had gone, and rightly so. I think the reconstitution was a proper step—not that I feel the consequences were fully envisaged at the time.

**Dr CLUNE:** You had an influential role in all the events involving the reconstitution as the Clerk. Do you want to tell us about it?

**Mr JECKELN:** As you know, the reconstitution bill came to the Council in June 1977, when it was sent to a select committee. There is one point in the process which has always troubled me. The August 1977 meeting of the House when the chair of the committee, Derek Freeman, wanted to bring up the report of the select committee was a procedural mess. The Deputy-President was in the chair, Tom McKay—a former barrister and a gentleman. I do not know what was taking place on the Opposition side, but it seemed obvious that they wanted to get the report of the select committee onto the record so Dr Freeman read it out. The reading of the report onto the record was confusing to the Chair because he asked Dr Freeman what motion he wanted to move. It was a shemozzle. Eventually, Dr Freeman sought leave to table the report. One objection to leave being granted is enough to prevent tabling, but the Chair did not hear any objection and allowed the tabling to go ahead. After the House got up, I went back to my office and we tried to sort out what had taken place. Jock Cumming from the Hansard staff came to my room with his notebook and he had Mrs Roper, a member of the Government party, objecting to leave being granted. That was crucial to what transpired. A committee not having leave to report from time to time, if it does report, extinguishes itself according to *Erskine May*. As a consequence of that it was necessary to re-establish the committee. I might add that it was the first day that I sat at the Table as Clerk of the Parliaments and it was a baptism of fire.

What followed has been well-documented: the bill coming to the Legislative Council again, and again being sent to the committee. Another precedent was the Legislative Council sending a message to the Legislative Assembly after a compromise had been reached to return the Legislative Council's message rejecting the bill.

**Dr CLUNE:** How did you go about organising the free conference of managers in January 1978?

**Mr JECKELN:** The continuing deadlock led to the free conference, which presented its own problems because we had no real background in free conferences, especially on a matter of such importance as the reconstitution of the Legislative Council. There had not been one for over 50 years. We drew on *Erskine May*, the standing orders, common sense, and we were able to get things organised. We had set up the room with one long table, with the Legislative Assembly managers on one side and the Legislative Council managers on the

other side. Sir John Fuller said, "Not on." I will not use the words that he used but I got the distinct impression he did not want to be sitting opposite the Legislative Assembly managers. So we rearranged the room into two U-shaped groups. At the end, in the centre of each "U", sat Wran on the Legislative Assembly managers' side and Sir John Fuller on the Legislative Council managers' side. Then the cut and thrust started.

Both Wran and Fuller were both hard men, driven by their political backgrounds. Fuller was above the ordinary, I think. The negotiations were tortuous, as he had to consult his party people. In the end I think he was the stronger force and a good match for Wran. Wran was a tough operator but I think he met his match in John Fuller. I admired them both. They were supreme operators—absolutely supreme. And the end result seemed to show to me that Fuller was successful, otherwise the Legislative Council would have just been rolled over. There was great suspicion as to what would happen as a result of reconstitution, so the game had to be played in a hard way.

I think the end result was an admirable one. And I applaud what has happened since a propos the role of the Legislative Council. There are occasions when the minor interests might have a bit too much sway, but how you achieve a correct balance I do not know. It was inevitable that the Legislative Council would change. Reconstitution was an obvious step. The old days were gone and everyone seemed to recognise that.

**Mr BLUNT:** What do you recall of the transition period? It was spread over three elections. At the beginning the majority of the House were appointed members, pre-1978. Gradually that dropped off until following the 1984 election it was fully elected. Can you reflect on that period from 1978 to 1984, the transition, and what the House was like?

**Mr JECKELN:** That is when things started, in a small way, to change. The Committee on Subordinate Legislation became more active, as an example. To have that type of scrutiny would previously have been laughed at by the Government. It was a step which would hardly have been contemplated. It was giving a role to the Council which it did not have previously. It grew— but it was a slow process.

**Mr BLUNT:** Did you notice in those early years after reconstitution a change in the nature of the members who were now being elected compared with the members who had been appointed prior to reconstitution?

**Mr JECKELN:** The membership did change. I think that there was more talent coming into the Legislative Council and it was a different kind of talent. I referred to trade union secretaries previously. A number of them had come up through the ranks and were able to address a crowd or a meeting. They were able to speak volubly, and in some cases they would speak at the drop of a hat and go on for 20 minutes or a half hour for whatever reason. But it was totally different to examining legislation or the higher requirements of being a Member of Parliament. In general, the new membership took a far greater interest in legislation than in the early years of my time on the staff. But they were different types of members; they seemed to have a purpose different to some members in the fifties and sixties.

**Mr BLUNT:** The other thing about that transitional period in the early 1980s that I want to ask you about was the members of the Legislative Council being granted a salary equivalent to that of the members of the Legislative Assembly. Do you have any reflections on that process?

**Mr JECKELN:** I think the payment of members of the Legislative Council began in 1948 with an allowance. Some of the Labor members really needed that money. They were giving their time and it was an unpaid occupation. This enabled the parties, or perhaps the Government party, to give something to its supporters. The Serjeant-at-Arms at one time was Fred Mahony. His father, Bob, was a member of the Legislative Council. But he was on a pension—he had very slender means. He was the Government Whip under the Labor Party. To get an allowance was a great boost to him. And I am sure there were other members who needed and appreciated that allowance. I do not know whether it was a progressive move, but eventually with the direct election of members came equal salary. That is a political matter with which we had nothing to do.

**Mr BLUNT:** Since 1988 no party has had a majority in the Council. Do you think that such an outcome was envisaged at the time of the reconstitution?

**Mr JECKELN:** No. The consequences now would probably have Neville Wran spinning in his grave. I doubt whether Sir John Fuller could have envisaged it either. I cannot believe that hard-headed politicians would have entertained the idea of the House passing out of their control, irrespective of the government of the

day. They needed the Council, it is part of the constitution, but they naturally wanted to control it. What has happened since the reconstitution I do not think would have entered their minds.

**Mr BLUNT:** And then, of course, we saw further reforms to the Council voting system in 1991 that, in part, had the effect of lowering the quota and we have had up to 13 crossbench members at times. We currently have 10 crossbench members representing the Greens, Shooters and Fishers, Christian Democrats and Animal Justice Party. Do you think the rise of the crossbench and minor parties was contemplated? How do you see that development?

**Mr JECKELN:** I am firmly in favour of stable government. If that can be pushed aside by small groups because they hold the balance of power I do not think it is a good thing for the State. Strong governments of whatever persuasion are better for the State than allowing a number of individuals to have control. I do not think that is desirable in a democracy. Their voices have to be heard, of course, but to allow them control by political deals or the like is not, to my way of thinking, how the system should work. I know it is political reality, but those smaller groups can have a damaging effect, I think. Their voices need to be heard, but they should not be in control. However, that is just a personal view.

**Mr BLUNT:** What are your views on the balance between a government's right to legislate and the House's right to review the work of the executive?

**Mr JECKELN:** I am firmly of the opinion that the executive should be held responsible by the Parliament. However, it does not occur in the lower house—if the numbers are against an inquiry there, it does not happen. The Council, I feel strongly, should have the role of calling the executive to account. I think the Legislative Council should be strong. It should have a membership which will allow it to be strong, but at the same time it must take note of political reality. If a Government has been elected in the lower house it has to be acknowledged, and it would be very foolish of the Legislative Council to present a brick wall to such a government.

Let me go back to Joe Arthur, the Minister, whose assistant private secretary I was in 1951. I had left him in 1952 to go with Mr Buckley, but I was in the chamber the night he resigned as a consequence of his misdeeds—the Reginald Aubrey Doyle Royal Commission brought Joe Arthur undone. I remember the night in the Assembly when he threw down his resignation and stormed out of the House, and that was the end of him. That type of behaviour as a Minister had attracted an odour. What we have seen in recent years—and I hesitate to mention matters which are still before the courts—means that the executive has to be more accountable. The word "transparency", of course, is used a great deal. I am all in favour of bringing light onto executive functions. In years gone by, that type of scrutiny would have been precluded because there was no money or staff, there were no mechanisms. But governments have been moved away from that by force of circumstances, I think. I am really of the opinion that the executive has to be accountable, and that is the upper house's role—things can be brought out into the open, it is a safeguard.

**Mr BLUNT:** I have some questions now about the Egan cases, matters that came about after your time here but I would nevertheless be very interested in your reflections on them as an observer—as an authoritative observer.

**Mr JECKELN:** I was detached from those events and it was a long time ago, but there was one thing that I thought was wrong, and that was the removal of a member to Macquarie Street under the standing orders for the orderly conduct of business. It was a bluff on the Assembly's part, I think. They thought they had the power to remove a member from the premises and we followed them. The removal of George Neilly, the MP for Cessnock, is a case in point. I recall the photograph of George Neilly sitting on the gutter in Macquarie Street. The power was not there and I think that has been vindicated.

**Mr BLUNT:** Yes. That was the one point upon which the President lost in the High Court—the footpath point.

To return to the Egan cases, is there anything you wish to say about your observations as you saw those proceedings unfold and the matter going to the High Court?

**Mr JECKELN:** I did feel those proceedings tested the Legislative Council officers—I pay full credit to John Evans and his staff. I think John did a tremendous job as Clerk, particularly in that period. The High Court result was wonderful news. From my own experience, these can be very testing times and you are on your

own, especially if the Chair is a bit short on parliamentary knowledge and heavily reliant on your advice. To sum up on the Egan matters, I am glad things turned out the way they did and I am also glad that I was not the Clerk.

**Mr BLUNT:** What is your assessment of the Legislative Council and its role today, and what are your thoughts on possible future reforms to make the Legislative Council more effective?

**Mr JECKELN:** I think the Legislative Council should remain strong, should continue to exert its power on the executive. I am disturbed as an ordinary citizen by what I have seen in recent years, with Ministers being found to be of such bad odour and yet being able to be part of a Cabinet that has not restricted their activities. It troubles me as an ordinary citizen that the workings of the executive are not as transparent as they should be and the answer, I submit, rests with the Legislative Council.

I am hardly in a position to comment on the future. So much has changed in the past. Who knows what the next 10 years are going to reveal in the Legislative Council or in the Parliament itself? Such a lot has happened that I will not try and predict the future.

**Mr BLUNT:** I do feel it is important that I make two comments in response to what you have said today. The first is to reinforce something you said right earlier about the Hansard staff and their professionalism and service to the Parliament of New South Wales. The Hansard staff continue to serve the Parliament with distinction and their service is absolutely invaluable.

The second thing I wanted to respond to is what you just said a moment ago about the way that your successor, John Evans, handled the provision of procedural advice and so on during the Egan matters in the 1990s. I would like to link that with what you said about General Stevenson and his moves to professionalise the Department of the Legislative Council and the service it was providing. I want to acknowledge, place on record and pay tribute to you for your role in that professionalisation process. I am sure that John and all the other parliamentary staff who supported the Legislative Council through those Egan cases would not have been able to do so without the excellent training and example that you set during the time that you were Clerk and the very high professional standards that you set for this organisation.

**Mr JECKELN:** Thank you, David.

It has been a privilege to be the Clerk in the Legislative Council. I enjoyed being part of the institution from the very moment I came to the Parliament as an assistant private secretary. It was the centre of things. You were part of it. I met those who made decisions and eventually when I became Clerk I was helping those who made decisions, and that is a very satisfying part of one's career. My education finished at 15 with the Intermediate Certificate. In the job that I finally had I was surrounded by people of such high standing that I felt inadequate. I suppose the term "Lucky Les" comes to mind.

**Mr BLUNT:** A couple of years ago at a conference on committees I quoted Dr Laing, Clerk of the Senate, saying words to the effect that Clerks stand on the shoulders of those who came before them. I am very conscious of that in relation to all of my predecessors but particularly you, Les. So I really want to thank you for making yourself available, for the time that you have taken to prepare for today and for the insights you have given us in this interview - which have been absolutely outstanding - but most of all for your service to this great institution. Thank you very much, Les.

**The discussion concluded.**