

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

LC Members Ante-Room, Sydney, Monday 23 April 2018

The discussion commenced at 11:00

PRESENT

Mr David Blunt
Dr David Clune
Mr John Tingle

Dr CLUNE: How did you become a member of the Legislative Council?

Mr TINGLE: By accident. By mistake, actually. I was in my early sixties, I had been a political journalist since 1952 and the very last thing I wanted to do was to go into Parliament. As a background, I had been in the Canberra press gallery in 1953 and 1954 during the Petrov affair and so on and I was pretty sceptical about it. But what happened was I was having lunch with former Police Minister Ted Pickering and he was going to bring in some gun laws which I did not like. I said to Ted, "If you bring these in, shooters will go political." His exact comment was, "No way, they're too lazy to get off their backsides and they're too disorganised to do it." It was a very good lunch, so after lunch I went and registered the name of the Shooters' Party, just intending as a joke to ring him up the next day and say, "I told you so."

I was at that stage doing a column for the *Daily Telegraph*, which picked up the story and ran it on the front page the next day. At the end of the week we had 1,000 members and I was stuck with it. I nominated somebody else to go into Parliament and at the last minute he withdrew. At the age of 63 I suddenly found I was starting a career in the New South Wales Parliament quite without any expectation.

What Ted was proposing to do, after the Strathfield massacre, was to put a ban on semiautomatic rifles. I thought it was the thin edge of the wedge. I have been a shooter since I was 10 on the family farm at Taree and I just told him I thought it was unnecessary and punishing the wrong people. They brought them in anyway, I think in May, and we had the party registered in June 1992. We ran our first election test, a tilt at a Senate seat in 1993 and failed. Then in March 1995 in the NSW general election I was elected—to my surprise, I have to say. I did not think it would happen.

Dr CLUNE: When you arrived how did you find the Legislative Council and how effective was it as a house of review?

Mr TINGLE: Not only effective but I think essential. I think that I arrived at a very interesting time, when it was really getting to the stage where it could have a definite effect. Bearing in mind that the Council had been a purely appointed body until 1978, the fact that it was now elected made a very great change. I felt that the injection of a small group of crossbenchers into the Legislative Council actually provided the hinge on which the two major parties should be able to work. That was 1995 when the crossbench went from four to seven, because the Niles and the Democrats had been there before. But the higgledy-piggledy little bunch of us who got in scattered the normal outlines of the way the crossbench parties go.

Dr CLUNE: Do you think the rise to prominence of the crossbenchers since 1988 has been a good thing?

Mr TINGLE: It has to a degree. I was quite surprised that the crossbench was able to have the effect that it had. But because there were seven of us when I came in—later 13—and, because of the make-up of the parties, inevitably one or two of us were always in the middle with the deciding vote in the House. Without that, you would have had an absolute logjam of government, nothing would be happening.

Dr CLUNE: What was your approach to your role as a crossbench member?

Mr TINGLE: I think that being a political journalist taught me something about the political scene, the balance of power between parties and things like that. It was quite interesting. I had served some time in the press gallery here in years before so I was fairly familiar, I thought, with the layout of the House and I thought I was very familiar with the way it functioned. I discovered I knew absolutely nothing about it. It was not a learning curve; it was a straight up vertical learning lift. It took me a little while to figure out exactly where I fitted in. I also had come in representing shooters. That was before the Port Arthur massacre, thank goodness. There were some very rude comments made after my inaugural speech by some members of the House, but that was all right. It took me a while to realise that, although I had come in with a single—you might say—political agenda, that could not be maintained because unless you voted on everything you made yourself irrelevant. I think that is one of the dangers that crossbenchers can fall into, when they take a particular stance or a particular political position and impose that rigorously in the House, sometimes with no effect at all, because the numbers are not there. When they only do what they are interested in I think they make the House a great deal weaker and also very much limit its capacity to provide balanced government.

Dr CLUNE: As a minor party representative you had a particular cause that you represented but you also had a duty to the people of the State as a whole. Was it ever a problem balancing those two roles?

Mr TINGLE: No, because it is amazing how they fitted together. Because the Legislative Council is elected by the whole State, I had to cover the State in my electioneering. The party fought its first election on \$27,000, \$20,000 of which was lent to us by a friend. It was a very, very tiny electoral effort, but I was in the

fortunate position that my work allowed me to travel anywhere I wanted to go and I met people. One of the interesting things was that my first legislative achievement had nothing to do with gun laws. It was put upon me by a family from Moree in western New South Wales whose son had been murdered on the farm by a trusted member of the family, a brought-in member. I moved successfully an amendment that gave the families of homicide victims the right at the time of passing of sentence to hand a statement up to the judge to be read as a family impact statement. To me, that is actually the best thing I ever did. And that had nothing to do with guns. It was purely because people had approached me and because I sometimes had that balance of power factor on the crossbench that I was able to push it through.

The final answer is that even if I had not thought I had to represent as many people as I could in the State I would not have had any choice. I was continually lobbied about things that had nothing to do with what I was there for and I continually got reproached for things I had done which people who had nothing to do with guns disapproved of. For instance, because I did not believe in prohibition, I supported a bill to allow nude sunbathing on Lady Jane Beach. I got about 300 letters from people saying that I would be to blame if there was an outburst of skin cancer in New South Wales as a result of that. I wore that. That, I believe, is how anybody who is in a parliament has got to be. You have got to be able to try to take it all in.

Dr CLUNE: There was never a situation where your party wanted to go one way on an issue and you were not quite comfortable with that?

Mr TINGLE: No, there was not because, actually, most of them had not even the faintest idea of what Parliament was. Even after I had been in it for a year people would say to me, "How do you get up and down from Canberra every day?" But the people who were in it were not all shooters. I mean, we had a couple of plastic surgeons, a lot of police, Army people, teachers: It was a really polyglot group. The membership as a whole did not have much input into it. The committee did, but the committee was happy to leave it to me because I had political experience as a journalist.

I guess that was very lucky for me because if I had had to fight them—in fact, at one stage, one man, who had wanted to actually be elected himself but was not, at a committee meeting on a Saturday said that I should approach the committee of the party with every piece of legislation I had to vote on. So at a committee meeting, on the following Saturday I produced four big boxes of bills that had been introduced and said, "If I had gone through all of those with you, even if you understood them, I would not have voted on anything." That was the end of that. They left me to it. I was lucky.

Dr CLUNE: How did you cope with that workload?

Mr TINGLE: With some great difficulty, I have to admit, and I had a very, very good researcher and a very efficient secretary, both of whom had worked previously for members of the outgoing Government. I was a bit hesitant about taking them on but they both turned out to be absolute jewels and they were totally behind me. We had all the time when I was not in the House, and I did not spend a lot of time in the House for that reason. When I was not in the House we were in my office reading. My researcher would go through stuff ahead of time and say look, "You can vote for that without a problem"—it was something like the stockfeed bill, or something of that sort, which did not affect me or mine as far as I knew.

The things I concentrated on most were the ones that I got lobbied on. Maybe for that reason I might have missed some important things, but I do not think I did. I was not the world's greatest member of Parliament: I never pretended I was. But all I tried to do was look at it from the point of view that I would have had, if I had been simply a voter outside, looking at what was going on. What I am trying to say, I suppose, is that I tried to be the common man. I do not know that I succeeded, but my intention was to try to just strike a balance down the middle somewhere and do what I could for people who asked for my help.

Dr CLUNE: How did you communicate and negotiate with the Government?

Mr TINGLE: I was lucky because before this I had had 10 years at 2GB and three years at 2CH. In among all the interviews I did were inevitably people who were Ministers in the Carr Government, which is the one that got elected when I came in, and who I knew personally. Also a couple of them I think twigged that they had things that they wanted to get through and that they might need my support if they wanted to get that extra vote, and I did not have any trouble with anybody. I have to say that Bob Carr, who I had known for 30-odd years, when he became the Premier had an open door for me; but I also think that he was smart enough to know that it did not hurt to have crossbenchers onside.

The only time when I had a really major problem was when the Democrats introduced a bill to ban duck hunting. I have never been a duck hunter in my life. I could not shoot a duck if I tried. I would not want to. But I suddenly was landed with 11,000 signatures on a petition saying, "Don't ban it." Of course, I got up and read those, and they were ignored, as they always are. The next day the Government brought in Bob Carr's

conveyancing legislation which took the monopoly on conveyancing away from solicitors, and I had the casting vote. The vote was late at night and I played a bit of street theatre. I sat in the middle of the crossbench and the House divided evenly. It was my vote, and I voted with the Opposition. That led to a very comfortable agreement with Bob to change the duck bill. Then I approved his conveyancing bill, which I thought was quite correct. That is the only time I have ever consciously what you might call made a deal. I said, "You want that in. I want that in. You do it."

Dr CLUNE: Did you have formal meetings with the Government and the Opposition?

Mr TINGLE: No. I would just ring them up and say, "Are you busy? Can I come around and talk to you?" I suppose that, because I used to talk to them pretty well every day on the radio and we often went out and had dinner and so on—I knew their wives in most cases and they knew my wife—it was pretty loose, or pretty informal. I am not sure of how you are supposed to do it, but it seemed to work.

Mr BLUNT: What about together with the other crossbenchers? Did you meet regularly with the rest of the crossbench?

Mr TINGLE: Yes, we did that. But the meetings were not always very successful because sometimes, without naming names, there were certain types of crossbenchers who tried to take over those meetings to say to the Minister or to the advisors we were talking to, "Look, if you don't do this, we will do so-and-so." One of us had to usually pipe up and say, "Hang on, you are not speaking for me." I sometimes found that meetings of crossbenchers *en masse* with Ministers ended up in disaster. There were some members who really thought that they could speak for the lot of us and threaten the Government. Apart from that time when I had the duck legislation row with Bob Carr, I thought threats will get you absolutely nowhere.

Dr CLUNE: Were there times when there was crossbench solidarity? Were there issues when it was in all of your interests to put a combined position?

Mr TINGLE: Yes, there were several, but the one that stands out is the time when the Government decided to reduce the numbers in the lower House from 96 to 93 and they were also going to reduce our numbers. We told them quite flatly that they could not get their bill through if they did that to us. We thought the House was small enough as it was at 42

It was not even a self-preservation thing because we would not have been the ones most affected. To me, that Chamber is more important than the other Chamber; in other words, I believe the Legislative Council has more final effect because it can be a House of review and I did not want it weakened.

There were barely enough members to service all the committees as it was. That is the whole point. I was on Staysafe, I was on the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Shooting Clubs, and I was on some of the committees at budget time—not too many because I cannot do finance; I am a journalist. I felt that if people had to sit on two or three committees, sometimes meetings had to be rearranged to allow a particular person to attend two or three meetings. I think the House was quite small enough. In fact, probably a few more MLCs would not have hurt.

Dr CLUNE: You found the Government on the whole responsive to your views?

Mr TINGLE: Yes, I think they were because I tried to be reasonable. I have never actually had a Minister or an advisor say to me, "Look, that's totally unreasonable." For instance, I never insisted that they fight John Howard's gun laws. I knew they would not; they could not. There was no way that they could do it. I do not think we ever came to a stonewall like that. Mostly I found that where I achieved the most—and I do not mean where I succeeded the most—was when we managed to get to an understanding, even if it was one that I did not like much. It was mainly done with advisors.

For instance, Bob Carr arranged for the person with whom I dealt with most to be Jason Clare, who was one of his people and who now has been a Minister in a Federal Government. Jason and I got on like a house on fire. He quite often would say to me, "Well, Bob is not going to wear this." We would see if we could work out a way for him to wear it; or "Bob really wants you to do this", and I would say, "No, I'm not prepared to do it in its present form." We had these informal discussions. He would just stick his head in my office door and we would talk. To me, I think that is how it is supposed to be. It is supposed to be negotiation, not confrontation, I think.

Dr CLUNE: What are some examples of where you had a positive input that improved legislation?

Mr TINGLE: Well, if I did not think it needed improving I would not fiddle with it. But there was a proposal by the industrial relations Minister of the day, Jeff Shaw, in about 1998 to make really radical changes to trade union laws which, even though I had been in a trade union all my life as a working journalist, horrified

me. I talked to Jeff about it because he was a very approachable bloke and he said, "Oh no, this is what we have got to do." It was pretty draconian. Eventually, four or five of us got together, including Richard Jones and Lis Kirkby I think. We said to him, "Well, would you look at, rather than formal amendments, some changes we would like?" We sat down and wrote them out. Each of us wrote something and we combined it. Most of those went in.

When the 1996 firearms bill was going through I was a solo operator, an opposition of one, because both parties had subscribed to it. It was a very big lesson for me in the way one of the big parties will set reason aside and do silly things. I moved, I think, 115 amendments. For a bloke who had only been here a year, that was not a bad effort. Of course, they got knocked back. What came through to me—and I have never forgotten this and it did not impress me with what I would call the integrity of the political system—was that on one of those amendments four of the Coalition MLCs crossed the floor and voted with me. They did not do that again—they came back and said, "No, we cannot do that again or we are out."

Dr CLUNE: On the subject of negotiation, it interests me that the Federal Government has a lot of trouble with the Senate, but that does not seem to have happened in New South Wales so much. Do you have a view on that?

Mr TINGLE: Well, the Government does have terrible trouble with the Senate, because this particular Senate is an absolute mess. When I was in Canberra in 1953-54 in the Press Gallery, the Senate was just the Senate; there was nobody else in it except the two parties and they could always come to terms. But this Senate, after the double-dissolution election, is unmanageable. I would hate to be trying to be a prime minister or a leader of the Opposition, because you never know which way they are going to go. When the Senate is unstable then the Government is in trouble and the Government can be unstable.

In this House, though, being smaller and more localised, we seemed to overcome most of our really big problems. Of course, there were some stand-up fights. When the abolition of school caning bill was coming in, we sat all night. Fred Nile read, I think, about 600 letters from Christian schools.

Dr CLUNE: How successful were you in achieving your aims in Parliament?

Mr TINGLE: If my aim had been to repeal the firearms laws, not at all. But my aims were not necessarily to do that. Being unable to repeal the laws, I decided I would try to make conditions as good as they could be for the LAFOs—the law-abiding firearms owners—to follow their pastime without being unduly penalised. So we set up the Ministerial Advisory Council on Shooting Clubs. I asked for four Ministers on it: Police, Sport, Lands and Environment, I think. Carr added two more, one of whom was the Minister for Planning. I said, "Why did you put him on?" He said, "Because under the planning legislation, if a facility can be seen as being of more than local significance—that is, of regional significance—the planning Minister can step in and over-rule the council and approve it. You might find that handy." That was cooperation, I suppose.

I had a number of bills passed. I got tossed on a few of them, but I got I think seven of my own bills through by trying to make them reasonable, which I was told at the time was quite a lot for a crossbencher. I had the *Home Invasion (Occupants Protection) Act* and the *Workplace (Occupants Protection) Act* passed, which were later incorporated into the *Crimes Act*. In 2001, Carr called a press conference and invited me to it as well. He said, "Tingle started this; we should have done it, so we are now going to fix it." He put my two Acts into the Crimes Amendment (Self Defence) Bill, and then sneakily he did not explain to me that he was taking out one of the prime purposes of it, which was the reversal of the onus of proof. That did not matter; the provisions are still there.

There is no reason, to the limit of their personal capacity, why any member of the Legislative Council cannot listen to the electorate, if you want to call it that, and react to things that they see as needs, if they think they are justified. When I first moved to Port Macquarie, after I got in—because I was on the point of retirement when I got in—the National Party held the seat at the time. Because nothing could be done in the town and because I was able to use a bit of influence on Bob Carr, I managed to get the necessary highway repair work done and things like that. I was then accused of being a stooge of the Labor Party, which I was not. My attitude was that as a member of the upper House, I am as much a local member for any part of the State as the local Legislative Assembly member, in a sense. All I did was to get Carr up; we got money, we got work done, we got things done that a very fast-growing town needed.

I have to say that I do not believe that anybody could ever finish a parliamentary term and leave Parliament feeling very proud of it. You have done exactly what you are put there to do, and if you have managed to do that, that is fine. But you should not get a Victoria Cross for it. Yet I know a number of former politicians who genuinely believe they saved the country from God knows what. I think a little humility on the

part of politicians does not do any harm. Some of them are very good at it; some of them are not. It seems to me that you do the best you can, whoever you are, wherever you are. If other people do not like it, who cares?

Dr CLUNE: Do you think that better government overall has resulted from the crossbenchers having the balance of power?

Mr TINGLE: I think it must, because it makes the Government and the Opposition, to a large extent, answerable in the House. If they are only answerable to each other—and in the good old days it was a gentleman's club that met at four o'clock and adjourned for dinner at six—there was no point in it being there. But it is meant to be a proper House of review—and in that I think it is a lot more successful than the Senate has ever been in Canberra, having covered both as a journalist, admittedly a long time ago. If a government is unchecked, it can do anything it likes and it would be impossible for corruption not to occur. If the sort of corruption we saw in this House particularly, with members now in jail, can occur under the level of checking and the challenging that occurs, if you do not have any, it would just be ramped up. Human nature is like that.

Mr BLUNT: When you came in in 1995, you were one of seven crossbenchers. Four years later, the crossbench went from seven to 13. What are your recollections of that Parliamentary term, with 13?

Mr TINGLE: My recollection is that it was one of the worst things that ever happened to this Parliament. Can I say, I had a great deal of pleasure immediately after we returned in having a cup of tea with Bob Carr—he had a cup of hot water; he did not drink much tea—and I said to him, "With that tablecloth ballot paper, you went within a fortnight of stopping that from happening." He said, "What are you talking about?" I said that I had a bill which I had already tabled which would change the number of persons required to register a party from 250 to 1,500 and put a number of other provisions in there. If we had got to that bill before we rose, that tablecloth ballot paper would not have happened and we would not have all those extra people coming in from parties created for that purpose. Most went nowhere, but those micro parties that contested 1999 were all 250 member parties. I thought that the electoral legislation was so weak that it was making a nonsense of the whole electoral system and, to me, that is pretty unforgivable. It is a serious business.

While I was talking to Carr he said to me, "Where's the bill?" I said, "What do you mean where's the bill? I don't carry it with me". He said, "Have you got a copy of it in your office?" I said, "Yes". He said, "Send for it". He sent for John Della Bosca and he read it and he said, "Right, we'll have this", and that was it. So the electoral law as it is now started that way—I did not invent it; it was just, to me, logical. They made a lot of changes and fiddled with. I was away on a trip or sick or something when they put it through and they cut the number back from the 1,500 to, I think, 1,000. I went off my head when I heard about it; I said, "No, you should never reduce the number. If you have to, increase it" because in a population as big as New South Wales, if you cannot get 1,500 people to back your party, then the party has no *raison d'être*.

I had a couple of really good people advising me on that who are not politically minded and they were fabulous. I am not naming names because a couple of them might get into trouble. But, to me, the 1999 episode really was a very, very dark day in the history of this State. I was not happy.

Dr CLUNE: Moving on to the balance between the Council's right to scrutinise and the Government's right to govern, do you think the right balance has been achieved?

Mr TINGLE: No. I do not think you can absolutely achieve the right balance ever. The interesting thing about the Egan cases was that the High Court really cannot tell the Parliament what to do, but it can, in my opinion, interpret for the Parliament or the House what the House is allowed to do under its own laws. The court cannot order Parliament, I believe, to change the way it functions. Basically the House has got to have the right to ask for whatever it wants, but that right has in some way to be defined so that it cannot become simply an instrument of nuisance to the Government. Egan raised that point in the Parliament. He wanted to set some sort of way that you could control it because he said, "This is mischief", and, of course, the people he was attacking were people who, if you even mentioned you might bring a bill in, would pop up and call for papers to be tabled. Of course, it also applies to the Opposition—not that anybody ever wants to read their papers, the things they try to produce. I think we now know what it can do and what it cannot, and I hope that in the last few years the demand for papers has reduced a bit.

Mr BLUNT: It certainly has. This current term of Parliament has seen a significant reduction in the numbers of orders for papers. Just in the last couple of weeks though there have been some orders in relation to some very significant matters, but it is fewer in number than we have seen in the past.

Mr TINGLE: The other thing was, of course, that there was a big argument about commercial confidence exemptions. Egan threw them around like confetti at a wedding and they seemed to have the desired

effect. I suppose commercial in confidence is a valid argument—it is not unreasonable that such property should be protected—but basically it should work better now because everyone knows exactly what they can do and what they cannot—at least I hope they do.

Mr BLUNT: Do you have any recollections of those tumultuous times in the House when Michael Egan was marched out and suspended from the service of the House?

Mr TINGLE: He marched out arm in arm with Warren Cahill, if I remember correctly. I can remember as he went out Duncan Gay calling out, "And don't come back". But I expected that of Michael—he was a showman. It got a bit nasty. I have worked for a lot of years in the media world where there is a lot of jealousy and backbiting and nastiness goes on but I have never understood how a disparate bunch of people who are elected to a Parliament, whether it is the Legislative Council, the Legislative Assembly or the Parliament in Canberra, coming in as individuals, even though they are pushed by a party, can form personal hatreds for each other. Not many of them do; a lot of it is show on the floor, but there are people, when I was here—I am certainly not going to name them—who really would have cut the other's throat if they had had a chance. That, to me, is carrying politics to a point where it is meaningless—and they were all political hatreds; it was not just because they did not like the colour of their eyes, it was because of what they thought they stood for.

Mr BLUNT: What is your view on the growth of the Legislative Council committee system? I note that you served for a significant period on an important joint committee, the Staysafe Committee.

Mr TINGLE: I feel that the committee system here is a power that the Legislative Council ought to be exercising. The other House really cannot do it to the same extent, and should not, because a committee essentially is an exploratory committee looking at the way to do something or a review committee. It is better situated in a House of review.

I think the committee system is very important but I think it can be overdone. I have seen many times when I was in Parliament that a lot of committees were set up just to delay things. It is a favourite stunt, of course, in the Federal Parliament: if you do not want something to go ahead you set up a committee to investigate it in the best tradition of Sir Humphrey Appleby. I think the committee system is strong but I think it is sometimes used before it really needs to be, and that is what I am talking about: "We do not know what to do so we will send this to a committee". Given the small numbers in the House, as we were saying before, it will become very difficult to find enough people with whatever particular expertise they need to be on that committee to make it function properly because they are all busy on other committees. The committee system needs to be there. I think it is important but I do not think it is the centrepiece of administration, and it should not be. It should be something that is available if you need to get it out and dust it off.

The Staysafe committee had regular inquiries, regular hearings, did a lot of travelling, probably introduced more laws than any other committee the Parliament has ever seen over its period of life under its various chairs. I think, from memory, it initially was George Paciullo. And later there was Paul Gibson who I was on the committee under and I thought was brilliant. A committee can be a really useful thing if it has got a clear focus. And I do not know that a lot of committees did; they were just asked to look at something and come up with a result. The Staysafe committee, I think, was exemplary, because we looked at something, we had an inquiry and then, as quickly as possible, produced a report, which was tabled in the Parliament, from which laws sprang. A lot of our road safety laws came from that.

Mr BLUNT: How important were committees to you as a crossbench member?

Mr TINGLE: Not particularly to me because I did not have time to do them. Fred Nile likes being on committees. I do not think Elaine did very much. Alan Corbett said, after a couple of months, "I haven't got time to be on committees. I'm busy reviewing legislation." Ian Cohen only wanted to be on committees about the environment basically. For a crossbench member, a committee inquiring into something they are on about can be very useful. They can see what the others are thinking and maybe change their way of thinking, but I do not think that they should be the *sine qua non*. I think it has got to be something that is there if you want it, but relying on it all the time as a crutch to prop up the legislation is wrong.

As I say, I went on estimates committees and things like that but basically between the Ministerial Council on Shooting Clubs and Staysafe my time was pretty well taken up. I went on a couple of *ad hoc* committees, such as the inquiry into the Kariong youth detention centre. They are probably in many ways more effective than the long running ones. You are asked to answer a question about the Kariong centre: "Has abuse been going on there?" You hold four or five hearings, you go up and look at it, come back and say to the Parliament "Yes, there is" or "No there is not". To me that is just like a flying squad that you can put into use, but they are different from the other committees.

Dr CLUNE: Jenny Gardiner and Tony Kelly made a point about a committee on rural health they were on going around the State talking to communities which gave people an opportunity to tap into the political system.

Mr TINGLE: Most people in rural areas never see a politician except at election time—that is their story anyway. Therefore, to have a chance to have some input is great. In fact, I think before I got out of Parliament, Staysafe had a very big road safety summit in Port Macquarie. Everybody was there. It was a very big affair and it created an enormous impression because people felt that they were actually watching government happening in Port Macquarie. Now that may be a propaganda thing but it worked, and I do not think people have ever forgotten it because ordinary people got a chance to say what they wanted to say.

Mr BLUNT: Who were the party leaders in the Legislative Council who impressed you most? What was it that made their leadership effective?

Mr TINGLE: Without question the most spectacular was Michael Egan. He impressed me because he knew what he was talking about and he could rattle off these figures out of the budget. I am a journalist and my eyes glaze over after \$10 but he would whip out these figures in the millions of dollars. But also because he had this incredible capacity as the Leader of the Government, before we clamped down on him in question time, to go on endlessly with an answer to the Opposition. I remember one time he started talking about power cuts and finished up talking about the shortage of taxis at Spencer Street station in Melbourne. It was a complete *non sequitur!* He just went on and on and on. It was brilliant.

I thought John Hannaford was good because he was a quiet man who did not rant and rave and never yelled but he got his point across. He impressed me as somebody worth listening to. Not all of them always have. I always thought Tony Kelly was an inspiration. He was one of the Ministers I was most impressed by, because he carried several portfolios. He was a bloke who would come back to you. I liked Jeff Shaw. Inside was a very keen mind and I also found him very approachable. That makes a big difference to how you feel about a leader of a party or a senior party person. I also liked Brian Pezzutti. He was never a leader but he was cheeky, he was sharp and he had his points. Virginia Chadwick was to me somebody who—she was President for a while—could have led the party without any trouble at all if they would have accepted a lady leader at that time. I like Ted Pickering. I have known him for a long time. I liked George Paciullo. He was a man I respected because he did not want to be Police Minister. He said, "Neville Wran called me in and said, 'You have a new job. You're Police Minister.' When he said why he said, 'Because somebody has got to get them back on side with us. You can't govern without the police on your side. You go out and get them back.'" Duncan Gay and I had a lot of conversations. I actually think, apart from his very loud manner of speaking, he got a hell of a lot done. I have not had much to do with him lately but he was good value. If you cannot be yourself in Parliament you should not be in Parliament.

They were an interesting bunch. There was not anybody in that whole House that I actually disliked. In a group of 42 people that is pretty strange. I had a feeling that they all—even the ones who people used to describe as party hacks—had a reason for being there and they were doing their job the best way they could even if sometimes they did not seem to do it very well. Yes, I thought they were a pretty good bunch overall.

I think generally speaking the Legislative Council is a better chamber than the Legislative Assembly in terms of effectiveness, because the Assembly is so divided and there is so much of what Neville Wran called the applying of the blowtorch to the belly. I knew Wran very well. I knew him before he was in Parliament, I knew him before he was the leader and I knew him before he was the Premier. He had a very sharp mind but he was a very unforgiving man. It makes him interesting, I suppose, if you think about it.

Mr BLUNT: And your fellow crossbench members, any recollections or reflections on them?

Mr TINGLE: I have an enormous respect for Fred Nile. I do not necessarily agree with everything he says or does, but I had known him for many years because I was probably the only broadcaster in Sydney who gave him any air time without making fun of him because I thought, "The man has a point. I am not sure he is right but he should be heard." I felt the same way about him here. I used to feel sorry for him because at one stage he made the remark that he had bills that had been on the notice paper for 26 years. I do not think he had ever had one passed at that stage. The day I got my victims' rights amendment through he said to me, "That's a big victory for you. I wish I could have one of those." And Fred stuck to it. He is dogged and he kept going. I think he was good. I respected Ian Cohen enormously, even though we were apparently at odds, because he was the only true green environmentalist in Parliament.

Mr BLUNT: What do you see as the most significant changes in the Legislative Council during your term?

Mr TINGLE: I suppose the most significant change was the growth of the crossbench. One change, which I think got by without too much fuss, was the change in the question time rules. The crossbench got up and moved, and the Opposition supported, naturally, a limit of four minutes—a minute for a question and four minutes for an answer and I think another minute for a supplementary. To me, question time—instead of being a time to deduce information and get answers—had just become a sort of laughing game. Maybe two or three of the crossbenchers would get a question but the rest would not because so much time was taken up with long answers and long questions. We forced that through and it may not sound too significant, but I think in terms of conducting the business of the House, it was.

Mr BLUNT: How effective was the Legislative Council as a House of review when you left in 2006?

Mr TINGLE: I thought it was good. I thought it had sharpened up its act a lot. I think at that stage Meredith Burgmann was the President and she did a very good job. She was as tough as nails. About a year before I left, the House was in absolute uproar one day and she kept calling, "Order!", and they would not listen. She jumped to her feet and banged the desk and said, "Order!". Of course, some of them did not know that when the President stands up, you have to sit down and shut up. She told them that, and I think she actually re-established her control over it. I believe that any Chamber like that can only be effective as long as it is controlled. I do not mean in terms of what it can say, but how it behaves. I thought she was very, very good. I thought it was functioning well. I thought I could leave it quite safely to somebody else to run now.

Mr BLUNT: What is your assessment of the Legislative Council and its role today? Do you have any thoughts on how it could be made more effective?

Mr TINGLE: This might be absolute heresy but I think that it should have maybe another four members. I have been thinking that ever since I was in there. I am saying that for the reason that we have touched on already. With so few members, with one being excluded from committees, that being the President, I just feel that it is skating on very thin ice and stretching its resources very thin trying to maintain a committee system, which is integral to the House, when it has only got that many members. Any proposal to raise the numbers, I know, would have everyone in uproar, but to me I think it is limping a bit with the lack of members that it really needs to do its job. I would very much like to see it increased but I do not think it will be. But considering the limitations on it, I think it does very well. It has improved. When I first came in, I just thought it was not as focussed as it could be. I think it has tightened up under a succession of Presidents. Virginia Chadwick was good. I thought that Don Harwin was good. With a succession of presidents who knew what they were actually doing and knew the rules. I just thought it improved in style because it had sharpened itself up. I think that came from, certainly in the case of Burgmann, her very tight control over it and her dominating presence. Under the circumstances, I think it was working better when I left than when I came in.

Mr BLUNT: What do you believe were your main achievements during your career as a member of the Legislative Council?

Mr TINGLE: Well, I think my main achievement was surviving. It is not easy when you are on your own and you have got to cover everything. But that is only a minor thing. I still think my family impact statements were the most important thing that I have done because it helped the most number of people in need. It went back to a whole series of things: A man whose son was shot in a pizza parlour by three men, Ken Marslew, had to sit through three separate court trials with all the forensic details again of his son's injuries. He was one of the reasons I brought that in, along with the family from Moree. He said to me, "It broke me. It broke my marriage and I have just got to stop. Enough is enough." The point about it was that he had in those three trials tried to hand up statements to the presiding judge who refused to accept them. I think once word got out about it, people started telling me stories. As you know, when a crossbench member puts a bill up on the table, it does not get done the next day. So it had plenty of time to ferment, and it did. To me, the fact that from then on people could hand this statement up meant that they had a chance of saying, "This is what has been done to us." The requirement was that a judge had to accept it and could take it into account when determining sentence. It sounds funny to say that the first thing I ever got through is the one I am most proud of, but I was very proud of it at the time. It is also the one that was most worthwhile.

Mr BLUNT: Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Mr TINGLE: If I came away from Parliament with any new idea in my mind, and it was quite revolutionary for a journalist, it was that not all politicians are crooks and not all politicians are on the make; there are actually people in Parliament trying to do the right thing. What I am trying to say is that, having observed many people, journalists are naturally cynical and sceptical—you have to be, and I had been a political journalist since 1952, so I had a lot of opportunity to get that way. I came in here wondering whether it was going to be great, and in the end it was. I learned to respect the people who were really trying.

Mr BLUNT: Can I on behalf of my predecessors, with whom you worked—John Evans, Lynn Lovelock and all the staff of the Department of the Legislative Council—thank you for your service and contribution to the Legislative Council and, through the Legislative Council, to the people of New South Wales.

Mr TINGLE: That is very nice, David, thank you very much.

Discussion concluded.