

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

At Sydney on Tuesday 8 December 2015

The discussion commenced at 10.15 a.m.

PRESENT

Mr David Blunt
Dr David Clune
Mr Jack Hallam

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

Mr HALLAM: I think, in a sense, through enthusiasm, naive enthusiasm, combined with an inherent but unconscious ability to absorb information by osmosis. To explain that, let me say, I started my first day of school at eight years of age and on my last day at school I was 13½ years old. But the day I entered formal school I could read, write and do simple arithmetic because my mother had home-schooled me, so I went straight into fourth class. And I found that disciplined learning got me right through. I left school at 13½, worked generally, and then I became a share farmer, working for a farm owner. I started to read a lot and I read a biography of Mahatma Gandhi by B. R. Nanda. That set my political brain alive. I was fascinated by Gandhi and the way in which he led India to independence.

Then I was politicised by the Vietnam War and did not know what to do about it. Someone suggested that I join the Labor Party, which I did. At the same time I was working on my farm—and this is critical to my getting into the Legislative Council. The farmer that I was working for lent me the money to buy his farm. I raised a deposit and I found myself, at 23 years of age, owning a substantial farm, having worked for the farmer and having received his assistance. I was in a position of relative substance. I also was contemporaneously becoming very active in the Labor Party, as local branch president and the regional secretary.

In 1969, Gough Whitlam came to Griffith. And, as a very young man, I was given the job of welcoming him. Without design and without realising what I had done I summarised his whole program in introducing him. I then entertained Whitlam and a few people on my farm. Whitlam recommended that I put up for the Senate ticket, which duly happened. Preselection was 150 people in the Town Hall. I got down there rather late because I was involved with my farm, and I did not win in 1969. Then a Legislative Council vacancy became available and I thought, "Well, that looks like an interesting position" and decided to put myself forward. I came down to Sydney, to meet the party machine, as it were, and hopefully to receive its support, but I was told to go away because I did not do the job well enough in the Senate preselection.

However, I was given the name of the 150 delegates all over New South Wales. With my exuberance and enthusiasm, I drove around and met them all over a period of about two months before the preselection with a pamphlet putting my case. Apparently I stopped one preselector on a Kogarah golf course! There was a ticket - the Labor Party runs on tickets - and there were seven members of the Legislative Council to be elected. So I forced my way onto the ticket at number seven. On preselection day I turned up in my Sunday best. Because I had been all over the countryside to the 150 delegates—predominantly trade union people—I topped the poll. Because the house was then appointed by a joint sitting of both parties, with the preselection I was assured of coming into the house. So there I was, bumped into Parliament at 30 years of age, to the Legislative Council—about which I had some strong negative views, which are expressed in my pamphlet. So that is how I got there.

Dr CLUNE: How did you find the Council? Did it meet your expectations?

Mr HALLAM: My expectations were set out in my maiden speech. When I arrived, the atmosphere was amazing, to my eyes, a 30-year-old young man off a tractor. There was Sir John Fuller, Sir Edward Warren, Sir Harry Budd, the President, who wore a full wig and gown and gaiters. There was Clyde Packer. The house was part-time, it met at 4.30 p.m. Interestingly enough, the day I was sworn in - I remember it vividly - a member from the other side walked across and shook my hand and said, "Welcome to the Chamber, Jack. If you ever need a friend—political or personal—I will be that friend". It was Sir Asher Joel. And that proved to be the case.

On the Labor side, Neville Wran was the Leader of the Opposition. There were a lot of trade union leaders. There was the secretary of the Felt Hatters' Union, a man called Bill Peters. There was Joe Weir from the Timber Workers', who always wore a bowtie. A few days after I was here I bumped into the President, Sir Harry Budd, in the corridor and he stopped me. He insisted on calling me Mr Hallam. He said, "Now, Mr Hallam, how are you?" I said, "Very well, sir." He said, "Is everything all right?" I said yes. He asked, "Are you comfortable in the house and is everything satisfactory?" I said yes, that everything was fine. It was not a high tempo house and issues were dealt with in a fairly formal manner. Clearly, it was a part-time house. It certainly had that nineteenth century establishment feel. But they made me very comfortable and people were extremely cordial. I only have fond memories of it on a personal level.

Dr CLUNE: Did you see being a representative of rural New South Wales as an important part of your role as a Legislative Council member?

Mr HALLAM: Absolutely crucial from the beginning to the very end. I was an advocate for country issues across the full spectrum, for example, regional development, and agriculture in particular. I was brought into the house because of my agricultural expertise and I maintained that thrust and emphasis throughout my whole career. I was very much identified by all members of Parliament on both sides of the house as a country representative. I never really deviated from that area of specialism. I also did some extra work for the party, in addition to being a member here, by being an organiser in rural areas.

Dr CLUNE: It has been said by previous interviewees that the pre-reconstitution Council may have had its weaknesses, but it was a house of experts. Would you agree with that?

Mr HALLAM: Yes and no. There were people there with expertise, certainly. I think that is acknowledged. I remember Mac Falkiner. He was a true representative for the nineteenth century wool industry. The Boonoke stud is a famous Australian breeding icon, as is Haddon Rig. When I became Minister for Agriculture we had a good personal and political relationship, and he often reminded me that the shearers had burnt down Haddon Rig shed in 1890. But the experts, to my eyes, did not appear to be activists. I have no recollection of Sir Edward Warren, who ran Coal and Allied, ever speaking. Clyde Packer did not seem to participate enormously as a parliamentarian, for example, yet he was an interesting person. He was a libertarian. There was expertise on the Labor side too. There were powerful representatives of the party, for example, John Ducker who was an enormously powerful person, but they did not play a great role in the Chamber. I do not recall the experts vigorously participating in debate on issues.

Dr CLUNE: How effective was the Legislative Council as a house of review when you first came in?

Mr HALLAM: I have thought about that quite a bit. I do not recall it as an aggressive reviewer of legislation. My general impression is that, in the flow of legislation that was coming through, the debate was generally of a partisan nature rather than intrinsic review. The house was discouraged from being a house of review because it had evolved into a partisan house. When one of the major parties had a majority they were not inclined to review legislation unless there was a broad, popular uprising or concern about a particular issue. Amendment was discouraged by the powerbrokers, Askin and then Wran. If they had political control of the Legislative Council, it was legislation by instruction rather than review.

I do remember Virginia Chadwick, for whom I have the highest regard, as a minister allowing amendments through. Of course, it is not the leader in the Council who is making these decisions—well, certainly not in the Labor Party. They were made by the party executive and the Cabinet. Cabinet would give instructions that the legislation was to be put through in the house and there was no authorisation for the Leader of the Government to accept amendments—sometimes the opposite.

When Nick Greiner introduced the Independent Commission Against Corruption legislation, a fundamental change to parliamentary scrutiny, the bill was presented to the Legislative Council. There were sections within the Labor Party that were pushing for that legislation to be watered down. I am sure that they were led by Graham Richardson, who was the General Secretary. Bob Carr, the Leader of the Opposition, was in Hobart and the upper house was sitting. I received a phone call from Carr in Hobart instructing me to allow the legislation to go through substantially unamended. So that is what happened. I think it was a wise decision. There is a degree of responsibility, even where you have got the numbers, to accept the mandate and not to be obstructionist. Generally speaking, it is not conducive to being a respected Opposition.

Dr CLUNE: Are there any other observations you have about being Leader of the Opposition?

Mr HALLAM: I went from being Leader of the Government to Leader of the Opposition in 1988 and I still had the numbers with some crossbench support. So I was in a unique position and I was conscious of not abusing that. There was a new Government in power and there were plenty of areas where we opposed and thought it through rather than playing politics. That was the period of Greiner's rise and he was quite popular, he was a formidable Premier. We had come out of office after 10 years and there was a degree of tiredness. As the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, it was my attitude, and accepted by Opposition Leader Carr, not to be generally obstructive. I remember one occasion though when we did jack up. In office, we introduced a bill to levy land taxes which provided the Aboriginal Land Councils with \$900 million. The new Government wanted to amend that, to abolish it. I put a lot of work into my speech to justify our negative vote; we did not just use the numbers. A lot of work was put into stating our position.

By the time I became Leader of the Opposition, the house had acquired quite a lot of ability. I was fortunate that I had quite a few capable colleagues and I was able to delegate speeches to people and to allocate various responsibilities. There was a lot of high quality debate during that period on both sides of the house. I was Leader and managing business and dealing with John Brogden—he was a wonderful guy—who worked for the Government Leader Ted Pickering.

Dr CLUNE: Are there any observations you have about being Leader of the Government from 1986 to 1988? Any thoughts on how you carried out the role and the principles that guided you?

Mr HALLAM: As Leader of the Government, I did have principles that guided me. The first was cordiality. I believe that the English language is comprehensive enough to allow disagreement without being disagreeable. I tried to keep the tempo of the house low. As Leader of the Government, I always saved myself for ex tempore speeches - you save your up tempo for those occasions. You need to make one or two really good speeches a year, to keep you safe, to keep the troops happy. When I came in as Government Leader there were not a lot of speakers and I ran pretty much everything.

Dr CLUNE: Who were the MLCs that impressed you most during your term?

Mr HALLAM: I have Sir John Fuller as number one for stature, leadership and dignity - a great stand-out member of the house. I hold him in the highest esteem: dignity, expertise, representing his constituency, nephew of a former Premier. And he demonstrated that quite clearly during the Managers' conference in 1978, where he achieved significant gains. He gave the house a lot of stature as Leader of the Government. There was also Mac Hewitt, the Deputy Leader of the Government, who was very competent as a minister and in terms of management of the house. As Minister for Labour and Industry he always had very good relations with Fred Bowen. Fred was a Labor member of the Legislative Council of a different ilk: lightly spoken, hugely influential and obviously totally respected. People such as Ducker and Wran consulted him. His influence came from integrity, I think, rather than brute power, but he seemed to have both. You would see in this room, just outside the chamber, Fred and Mac having a chat. They had interesting personalities. People would just walk around here quietly. I think a lot of common-sense solutions to difficulties might have resulted from informal discussion. There was cordiality between the members.

Joe Thompson was another influential and impressive figure from the union movement. Although he rarely mentioned it, Joe had a very distinguished war record, piloting Lancasters over Europe. I would like to mention Wal Geraghty, a very elderly gentleman who became a Labor MLC in 1961. He wandered around and spoke very quietly. A member in these days was paid an allowance of about \$6,000 a year. He worked in what was called the fair rent court in the old days and represented a myriad of tenants for a mere pittance. He stood out to me for his humanity. I mention Fred Nile, because he has been here so long and obviously will retire only when he moves to a higher plane. I noticed him recently chairing a committee. He has been here a long time and has been a responsible member of the Legislative Council and deserves a mention. Virginia Chadwick, who should have been the Liberal leader in the Council, was an excellent Education Minister, a reforming President, and distinguished herself as President of the Barrier Reef Council. Bob Rowland Smith was a charming, all-round, good bloke of the old school. He was a wool topmaker and had contacts with the Italian wool industry. Mac Falkiner I have referred to; I enjoyed his company. I remember Adrian Solomons, for his intellect. I would like to note Max Willis. Notwithstanding his unfortunate demise as President—which was very sad—he and Adrian Solomons were fine parliamentarians with great intellects and they made great technical contribution to legislation within the house.

Jack Doohan, another Country Party MLC, was a former head of the Graziers' Association. Jack had a Western Lands lease, about 100,000 acres near Bourke. He lived at Turramurra. He had two children and one of them was a graduate in medicine. He was a quietly spoken gentleman. I said to him one day when I was Minister, "Jack, how come you are so successful? You only have that block out near Bourke". He said, "Oh Jack, I am a de-stocker". Now that is particularly interesting because drought was endemic in Bourke. If you are running 10,000 sheep and the dry comes, most people keep their sheep and get hay and grain and, in the end, the property gets run down and it is very hard - it takes two or three years - to recover. We know now the really smart ones take their stock off as soon as there is a dry spell, and when the rain comes they are back in business. Jack Doohan was undertaking these very advanced conservation grazing techniques and profited greatly from them. But I doubt very much that he could have advocated that within the grazing industry at the time. I found it very interesting, professionally.

Paul Landa, the first-term leader in the Council under Wran, carried a lot of responsibilities, too many. That is how I became a minister. I was deputy to Barrie Unsworth, who served in the Council as a minister and Leader of the Government. He was enormously conscientious and treated me with the utmost respect and expanded my responsibilities. When he took the poisoned chalice for the Labor Party and became Premier in 1986 he supported me to become leader. He is a stand-out for me. I would have to mention Michael Egan, because he was the Treasurer of the State - and as we all know the Premier and the Treasurer run the State. Edna Roper was the Labor deputy leader in opposition and was not treated respectfully really by her own party; they would not give her a ministry when Labor came to office in 1976. But she was a great representative of female MPs, and there were not too many around then—a charming woman. Meredith Burgmann was a distinguished academic.

Dr CLUNE: Although you were active in the rural ALP, you seem to have been friendly with the Country Party members. Yet you must have had to take them on politically.

Mr HALLAM: Not so much. I was Minister for Agriculture for eight years. Wran gave me an instruction: "Keep the—profanity deleted—farmers out of my hair". The Minister for Agriculture's job is to champion and work for the agricultural sector, which is enormous, particularly with the Department of Agriculture, which had a \$40 million research program. So I dealt with farmers and I was their champion. There was conservation farming, the "Fresh is best" food promotion programme, and major drought prevention programs. I was holding the fort for the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Conservation, soil conservation in particular, which went back to the McKell era. All Ministers were under constant attack from the Treasury. Accrual accounting had been brought in, which meant the beginning of the cuts. It was my job to protect the Department of Agriculture as best I could and preserve a whole range of services. That necessitated me coming into contact with the National Party. So I never looked at them politically in that sense. By and large, I had a pretty good relationship with them. They still talked to me when I went into the house, unless they were attacking me politically—and there was not a lot of that because we were a service department—and I think that is accounted for by the fact that I dealt with them often. My office staff were instructed to deal with all MPs as VIPs, irrespective of party. I learnt that from Milton Morris who was the Minister for Transport under Askin. Soon after I came here as a young member I asked for some rail trucks for Leeton and Yanco. I was in Parliament house and I saw Milton Morris and he pulled me up and he said, "You want trucks, I'll get you trucks, son". And, lo and behold, 20 wheat trucks turned up at Yanco. It was really good governance.

I think my relationship with country areas reflected my commitments and I was left alone. I had a single job for a long period of time, and I was able to recruit very talented people to help me. When you are in government it is really about management. There are sometimes the bigger issues, of course, issues like the rainforests, where there is a broad political differentiation. But State politics, I think, is more about management than partisan politics.

Mr BLUNT: I was interested in your comment about the principles that guided you as Leader of the Government, in particular about the tenor of the house, about keeping the temperature down. How did you do that?

Mr HALLAM: For some strange reason I feel comfortable in the theatre of Parliament; I do not know why. You keep the tempo low because there is always a risk the temperature is going to rise, and if you do not keep it low it is harder to maintain dignity. I believe that the lower the tempo, the higher the quality of the content. If you can combine that with respect it helps to enhance the stature of the institution. Fuller and Wran were enormously skilled at it—I noticed that just by observing their styles. That was my purpose: to maintain dignity as much as I could and enhance the influence of the house. Of course, when you have something really happening, you can up the tempo and that gives you more impact. If you are yelling and screaming every day, nobody is going to listen to you. Actually, I cannot remember making a yelling and screaming speech.

Dr CLUNE: Can you tell us what you think your main achievements were in your career in the upper house?

Mr HALLAM: I think my first duty was to leave a legacy of having properly managed country areas, the agriculture portfolio, soil conservation, lands, forestry. I upheld those areas and was their champion. That is my legacy.

I believe my main achievement was holding the fort for the Department of Agriculture, given that accrual accounting was coming in. It was a very large department, with university medallist scientists providing

technical advice right across the board to the farmers of New South Wales. So we were under constant attack. In our first eight years I was able to maintain the department and, particularly the soil conservation service, which really is the scientific basis for Landcare and conservation farming. While it might not sound much to maintain a department at its full size and effect over a 10 year period, I believe that it is quite an achievement. If you are in a job a long time and you do not annoy the Government and the Premier too much, the Treasury will put up with you because the Premier might protect you, but they are relentless. Notwithstanding the relentless campaigning of the Treasury, I left with the upmost respect for them.

In decentralisation I closed down the Bathurst-Orange Development Corporation. Instead, I made all local government bodies development corporations and encouraged all those bodies across New South Wales to develop industrial parks rather than concentrating them in one area. That was a great change in policy because we came after the Bathurst-Orange, Albury-Wodonga experiment, but it was not working. So it was one of my first administrative acts.

In my last period as Minister, as Crown Trustee, I put together a team of people and under the Aboriginal Land Council legislation we identified a lot of parcels of land that could be handed back to the Aborigines. We put through 20 or 30 such and I signed the proclamations on the Friday before we left office. Among them were icons like Nimbin Rocks and Goanna Headland. One of the Aborigines was 100 years old and apparently from Goanna Headland and made a speech in her own language. I said, "What did she say?" and a guy said, "She spoke to her father and everything is going to be all right now". I found that quite satisfying in a symbolic way. But the new Premier did criticise me, and justly so, because I had signed proclamations in the caretaker period. I apologised to Nick Greiner for that and he did not take it any further.

I came out of that period with the mindset of a member of the executive rather than the mindset of a member of the Legislative Council and the Leader of the Government there. My mind has been trained indelibly and forever by the responsibilities of government.

Dr CLUNE: When you became an MLC in 1973, the Coalition had a majority. When the Government changed in 1976, they still had the numbers. What is your recollection of how the Opposition behaved in that early period of the Wran Government?

Mr HALLAM: I think they behaved reasonably well—I cannot remember them being overly belligerent or arrogant. We had one Council Minister, Paul Landa, and the Government set the agenda of business. They took business out of the Government's hands I think mainly over the reconstitution of the Council. Wran was rising fast in the polls. Polls dictate a lot of the political attitude. Sure, there was general disagreement and that sort of thing but this is a Parliament, they were the Opposition and it is supposed to be the house of review. On the whole, I think they acquitted their responsibilities with dignity.

Dr CLUNE: What was your attitude to the reform of the Council? Did you think it was necessary?

Mr HALLAM: I thought it was a positive step forward in the evolution of democracy for this unique, original house, the Legislative Council. It was an absolutely necessary reform really.

Dr CLUNE: What are your recollections about the process of reform?

Mr HALLAM: You will notice that the two major Assembly managers were Wran and Hills. They were not on very good terms but Hills was a hard, wily old bird and Wran was elegant and smart, a QC. But they were matched by Sir John Fuller, who was representing the conservative legacy. There was ultimately a compromise that went Fuller's way. I cannot speak with authority but I would say that the ALP wanted the list system of voting the way they designed it to maintain central party control of the selection of members. The attitude of the Labor Party in the Legislative Council was very different to the Liberal and National Parties. I think personally I would say it was about management and control. It was all about numbers.

Dr CLUNE: The compromise was optional preferential. Do you think that was a good arrangement?

Mr HALLAM: Yes, I do, absolutely. It is a good thing to give voters options and the ability to distribute preferences. To give them more authority over those whom we were giving all this power to was perfectly reasonable.

Dr CLUNE: One thing I think the Labor Party was influenced by was the very high informal vote in 1974 and 1975 in the Senate, where all squares had to be numbered, which damaged Labor. I am just wondering if that would have been a factor in Wran's calculations.

Mr HALLAM: Absolutely. They would not have left a stone unturned in avoiding that. There might be a basic assumption that the less articulate in society might be inclined to vote for Labor rather than vote for the Liberal or the National Parties and there might be a resultant informal vote, but the list system would minimise that. That makes perfect sense.

Dr CLUNE: I think you said earlier that Fuller more or less carried the day.

Mr HALLAM: His major compromise was to accept reform, because the conservative position in the Council was to leave it as was. If they thought they could have obstructed the change I am sure they would have. But I think Fuller recognised that there was a change within the electorate at large, so they were going to have to accept an elected upper house. Then it became a question of what form of voting system, a list or preferential. But this was not a vote to abolish the upper house like 1961 when 57 per cent of the people voted against it. It was a vote for reformation. It was 1976 and it was a reasonable proposal. I think Fuller intelligently realised that they had to make some adjustments, but they were not prepared to go to the full extent the ALP wanted.

So they came to a compromise. The Labor Party reform, led by Wran, was massively important and a major step; however, Fuller acquitted himself with distinction in negotiations, and I believe he stayed on for that purpose only. He was the most capable person on the Opposition side in the Council to have managed that on their behalf. There does not seem to be anybody else who stood out. He handled himself very well.

Dr CLUNE: Particularly against someone as formidable as Neville Wran.

Mr HALLAM: And Hills. I think Fuller knew what he was dealing with and they soon knew what they were dealing with.

Dr CLUNE: The other big compromise was the timing of the first Legislative Council election. Fuller insisted from the start that it had to be at the same time as the next Legislative Assembly election. The scenario that the Coalition feared was that Labor would have the referendum, then have a Legislative Council election, get control of the Legislative Council, and have a redistribution before the next election to get rid of the Askin boundaries. It has been said that, in fact, Wran never intended to do that, calculating it was not logistically possible. What is your opinion?

Mr HALLAM: No, I do not think Wran would have gone down the road you have described but I can understand why Fuller and the Liberals would think he might. Remember at that period the Labor Party had governed here in New South Wales for 24 years from 1941. They were dealing with strong ALP electoral support at that particular period, and they would have been nervous about allowing any opportunity for Neville: well, maybe he will and maybe he won't. The key point from their point of view is he would have had the option, so why would you trust him? That was their perspective and it makes perfect sense.

Dr CLUNE: What are your recollections of the referendum on Legislative Council reform?

Mr HALLAM: The referendum is terribly interesting and I was heavily involved in it because I became an advance man for the Premier. It was one of my voluntary jobs. There were many aspects to it. The Premier would go to meetings all over the State. I would go there a week before and meet everybody, organise everything, travel with him on the plane and brief him about things. I became quite close to him. I did a lot of those referendum meetings. The referendum turned out to be a low-key event. I can remember on one occasion sitting next to Neville, I had organised the meeting, we had had the speeches and we sat down. He did not often talk much, but on this occasion he said, "I didn't think it was going to be this easy". The National Party reneged and campaigned against it and Wran travelled a lot in the country. I noticed sometimes that people would turn up at his meetings just to see what this guy was about. They were trying to work out what he was doing. I think the referendum was not a big political issue; it was won easily.

Mr BLUNT: What do you recall then as the main changes after the reform?

Mr HALLAM: That is fascinating. You have to realise that the Legislative Council was a part-time house. The Labor Party Assembly members said that members of the Legislative Council were not real

politicians, they were part-time, and they were not to be taken seriously. They did not vote in the Labor caucus. So the Legislative Council was reformed. Ultimately the Labor Party gained control.

One interesting aspect in respect of the reform is that elected MLCs came in and the Labor Party machine said, "Well, these people must become members of the caucus. They are now elected members of a reformed house". There was uproar. One group of the party, led by Deputy Premier Jack Ferguson, said "the galloping horde are coming down to our caucus and involving themselves in votes and being given the status of real members of Parliament". Wran was somewhat nonplussed and there was a lot of division. It's set out very clearly in Graham Richardson's book *Whatever It Takes*. I think there was a similar thing going on in the Liberal-National Parties too in that sense.

The MLCs eventually did become members of the caucus and we got a second Council minister, myself. The Legislative Assembly caucus selected the members of the ministry, including in our house—we were not in the caucus. The caucus would not have wanted me and they did not want a second Council minister because they still had this attitude towards the upper house as not being a very serious house. In 1978, after the Wranslide, the caucus met and selected the ministry. At the end of the meeting, at the moment when all the ministers had been elected in the euphoria of Wranslide, Neville said to the assembled caucus, being aware of their prejudice, "Paul Landa has got too much work; he is overwhelmed with work"—which he was in the upper house with the legislative program—"I propose to put young Jacky Hallam in as his deputy. Are there any objections?" They were not going to object then, but if they had had time to campaign they would have.

So there has been an evolution of authority and now, of course, there are several ministers in the upper house. There has been a change in the dynamic between the two Houses and the general attitude of members. And the danger to the Council is that it is only going to be able to maintain this if they keep the standard of the members high. That is very important.

The general debate in the house still remained partisan and of varying standards, usually quite a high standard for major reforming legislation. I think there was a change of stature and the Legislative Council became much more a part of the Parliament as a whole, rather than an august supervising body. I also think more comprehensively experienced, qualified people started coming in.

Mr BLUNT: That leads me to a follow-up question, which is what change, if any, did you notice in the sorts of people who were coming into the house after 1978?

Mr HALLAM: From the Liberal Party, I recall Virginia Chadwick—obviously a very talented performer—and qualified people like Lloyd Lange. Also John Hannaford and Helen Sham-Ho. These were not part of the conservative establishment. The Democrats came into the house with Elizabeth Kirkby. She was an outstanding member of Parliament. She worked hard on legislation and presented the case for the Democrats and had a profile in the State. A variety of parties came into the house with competent, articulate people. Fred Nile was interesting. So that was a very big change. From the Nationals, Duncan Gay was more in the traditional grazing fraternity mould. He came in and was an active politician and participated greatly in all areas of debate. The Labor Council played a big role in the Legislative Council; a lot of trade union power resided in this house. Although he was not a minister John Ducker was the second most powerful man in the party.

There are people in the executive who, I have to say, are still unicameralist. The fact that you have got an upper house means that you can bring very high-quality people into the Legislative Council and the State can then have the benefit of them working in the executive. Now that is a real argument, a positive argument, for the Legislative Council—a slight Americanisation of the system, but I think it is a very important and good point.

Mr BLUNT: Since 1988 no parties have had a majority in the Council, no government has had control of the Council. Do you think such an outcome was envisaged at the time of the reconstitution in 1978?

Mr HALLAM: No, I do not. Of course, there were the 1991 amendments where the quota was lowered. I do not think it has enhanced the ability of the Government to efficiently discharge its commissioned duties. Having been a Cabinet Minister for 10 years and having studied this particular aspect, when governments have not got the numbers in the upper house you get frustrated legislators. Members will get elected on very small quotas with singular issues—minority groups. A big game hunter can influence executive decisions. Government is very, very hard and I do not think it is in the interests of efficient government. The States are under a lot of pressure. You do not need sectional interests muddying the waters.

Mr BLUNT: How did you find dealing with the crossbenches?

Mr HALLAM: I dealt with them extensively as Leader of the Government. I got on very well with them. It was a good professional relationship, one based on mutual respect carried through from Leader of the Government to Leader of the Opposition. There were issues that we disagreed on but, as I said earlier, you can disagree without being disagreeable; disagree but be cordial; disagree and understand the other person's point of view. That is not hard to do.

Mr BLUNT: Can I ask you to reflect on the Council as it has developed since the time you left? What is your assessment as an interested expert on the Council and its role today?

Mr HALLAM: I do not believe that an obstructive upper house enhances the government's ability to administer the State efficiently. On the other hand, I can see that by bringing talented people into the Legislative Council the government can be enhanced. It is an enormously distinguished body. But I do not think it is helped by minority frustration. The cycle of government is, to me, disrupted. While I say that, I know that if you held a referendum now this house would not be abolished because you could run a fantastic argument, "Let's keep them honest". I know that committees can do great work, absolutely. They can be of assistance in certain areas and that is another issue altogether in terms of the evolution or the historical development of the Legislative Council.

Mr BLUNT: What are your views on the balance between the Government's right to legislate and the house's right to review the work of the Executive?

Mr HALLAM: Well, it is a constitutional right, is it not? That is the whole purpose: the claimed objective of and the reason for the existence of the upper house is to review government legislation. Obviously all legislation could be reviewed and improved upon: "Review" is a beautiful word. But I would like to see more demonstration of objective review of legislation.

Mr BLUNT: What are your thoughts on possible future reforms to make the Legislative Council more effective?

Mr HALLAM: I think the Legislative Council could be made more effective by the major parties taking great care to select members with skills which could be used by the house and the executive. I think there should be consideration of looking at regions to give the members some sort of geographical responsibility. I think the Legislative Council would enhance its status greatly by recruiting very bright staff with specialist interests and ensuring the appropriate technical backup.

If committees were less partisan it would improve the Legislative Council's stature. Not that its stature is not high now; it is obviously doing excellent work and has good people in it. I think it is damaged by the single interest minority groups—I do not think that is helping. How that is sorted out has to do with the electoral system. It has to be democratic; it has got to be fair and universal.

Mr BLUNT: Mr Hallam, I thank you so much for the reflections and observations that you have shared with us today. This will be a valuable record of the period 1973 to 1991, that critical period for the Legislative Council in terms of what happened here and the reforms that took place. I thank you for what you have said today and for your contribution to this project. More importantly, as the current Clerk, and on behalf of the staff, I thank you for your contribution to the Legislative Council in that period and also to the State of New South Wales as a Minister for 10 years and in all the other high offices that you held as Leader of the Government and Leader of the Opposition. Those final comments you have made about resources are, of course, music to my ears. I trust that those who read this transcript will take note of the very wise comments you have made about the importance of resources. I can assure you that the staff we have in place at the moment working in support of the parliamentary committees are absolutely first class—they are the best in New South Wales.

Mr HALLAM: I am sure that is so. It has been an absolute pleasure. I have thoroughly enjoyed coming back here 25 years later. I appreciate it very, very much and wish the Legislative Council all the best.

The discussion concluded.
