LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

At Sydney on Tuesday 16 February 2016

The discussion commenced at 2.15 p.m.

PRESENT

Mr David Blunt
Dr David Clune
Ms Ann Symonds

Dr CLUNE: Can you tell us how you became a member of the Legislative Council?

Ms SYMONDS: I had not planned to enter parliament. My involvement in the Labor Party started in 1967 and I had been involved in the Bronte branch of the Labor Party and in the Labor Women's Committee which became a really powerful organisation within the Party. It was concentrating on policy development in all areas affecting women; it was a really outstanding group. I had been elected to Waverley Council and was there for one term. I had no thought of ever going into Parliament, but the top people said, "Ann, you've got to put yourself forward." They could not decide on anyone else! So that is how I was nominated—or allowed myself to be nominated. At that time the process within the Labor Party was very democratic—and it has mostly disappeared, of course. You were nominated from a particular group with their approval, which for me was the Left. Then you had to go and present yourself to the ALP State Council—about 200 members—and make a speech about why you wanted to do be in Parliament, what you were going to do, and then you landed on the ticket. But, at that time, the Right decided to disregard power-sharing with Left-wingers so I was number nine on the ticket.

That was 1981. It was an extraordinary year: our dear friend Bryan Vaughan was number eight on the Labor ticket and I was number nine. Counting went on and on and on. Anyway, I was not elected but Lis Kirkby from the Australian Democrats was. Subsequently, I was confidently walking around doing nothing, still being active in the Labor Women's Committee, then Peter Baldwin, who wanted to get into the Federal Parliament, resigned, so there was a vacancy. I understand that there were lots of discussions about whether or not they should allow me to take the vacancy, being the next one on the ticket, because obviously I was suspect in some way. But eventually, I think, they said, "Look, we'll let her in. It's only about 18 months to go until the election and then we'll choose somebody that we really want." But what happened was that Neville Wran called an early election in 1984 and said, "All the people who are in here at the moment have to be on the ticket and then head office will choose the remainder of the ticket". So that is when I got an elected position and, of course, I ended up being there until 1998.

Dr CLUNE: How did you find the Council when you commenced your term in 1982?

Ms SYMONDS: Terrifying, because I had not been used to making speeches. The most significant thing for me was that no-one actually told me what to do: I did not know where the dining room was, I did not know when you stood up and when you sat down in the House. My dear friend Delcia Kite, who would have taken me around and helped me to understand, was in hospital at the time. It was all the formalities of bowing your head and all that stuff, I knew nothing about it and, as I said, I had no-one to talk to in there, except in the lower house I had Ernie Page. I was that female person from the Left, and I was basically isolated. So I made my first speech in September with nobody telling me what the convention was, so I offended everyone. The thing I remember most was when I collapsed back on the bench, an old Right-winger, Barney French, just looked at me and said—because I had been talking about workers' rights—"What would you know about the workers? You come from Double Bay". I wasn’t from Double Bay and I grew up working class.

Dr CLUNE: What was it like being one of the few women MLCs at the time?

Ms SYMONDS: It was interesting. It was a big responsibility I thought. We were constantly faced with attempts to ban abortion and we managed with several kinds of stratagems to actually prevent those bills coming up. There were not many women at the time. Virginia Chadwick was a Liberal MLC; she came up to me at a party the first Christmas I was there and said, "How did you come to make that speech? Why did you make it your first speech?" I replied that nobody had told me you were supposed to keep to a conventional statement about "this is where I come from; thank you everybody".

Virginia and I had an interesting relationship. I think the women were able to cross party lines much more easily than the men. Eventually when there were more women in Parliament we sometimes did work together. There were a couple of occasions where all the women walked out when something repugnant was happening. Meredith Burgmann always understood the value of publicity. She went down to the press gallery and said, "Do you know that all the women walked out of Parliament today because of this?" It worked and we all had to walk out again so there could be a photograph taken of us.

Of course, later on there were people like Helen Sham-Ho of the Liberal Party and Jenny Gardiner from the Nationals. I always got on well with Jenny. She is a good person. We campaigned for the Liberal Party to keep Beryl Evans on the ticket. Meredith and I used to go in and hold up big signs, "Keep Beryl". We had good fun when we were in Opposition.

Dr CLUNE: How effective was the Council as a house of review, particularly when Labor controlled both houses?

Ms SYMONDS: When I first got in there, the Council only sat from 4.00 in the afternoon and usually for a couple of hours. The Labor people were trade unionists who spent their time at work and were free to come in at 4.00, and the lawyers on the Liberal side finished in court and came in at 4.00. There was a different rate of pay for the upper house, it was a small sum – smaller than the Assembly. Things changed rapidly with the election of the Council by the people. There was a different type of MLC coming in. There were more career-minded people who came in, so it changed the atmosphere of the place.

Mr BLUNT: What difference did it make in terms of the dynamics within your party that MLCs were popularly elected?

Ms SYMONDS: In 1979, there were incredible arguments and campaigns against admitting MLCs to caucus. I signed a letter to the national executive to keep the upper house members out of the caucus until they were all preselected by proportional representation. The outcome was that the right agreed to reintroduce power-sharing in preselecting MLCs and they were admitted to caucus in the mid-1980s when they were popularly elected and full-time.

What concerns me now about politics is the disappearance of democratic functioning, particularly as I knew it within the Labor Party, where members determined the policies. And the policies that were agreed to at conference became the platform of the party. The party was obliged to implement them in government. Look at all the things Whitlam did—he just got the party platform out and did everything we had all agreed to.

One example was my experience setting up the Children's Services policy on the Labor Women's Committee. There were no women delegates at the National Conference then and Jeannette McHugh, Anne Gorman and I, before entering parliament, attended to campaign for the men to vote in favour of putting the children's services policy in the social security program. They agreed and what happened was that it was implemented immediately, because the government was obliged to.

Dr CLUNE: After the House became elected, did it become more partisan?

Ms SYMONDS: I don't think so. We went into combat but it was not personally abusive or challenging in the way that I perceive it is now. For example, Bob Rowland Smith from the National Party and I debated the Australia-New Zealand-United States [ANZUS] Security Treaty once. Well, he was going on and on about it and I was saying what a danger it was to Australia. I kept interjecting all the time and at the end he came over and said to me, "You know, I asked Father so-and-so from St James to come over here and hear me speak on this matter today and he just said to me he agreed with everything you said." Then he said, "Let's go up to my office and have a drink" so we did.

Dr CLUNE: Was the government prepared to listen if someone made a case for an amendment?

Ms SYMONDS: The reform agenda of what Neville Wran wanted to do and what the lower house wanted to do meant that there was never any real chance of that. There have been examples of the upper house objecting to something that has been brought to it. It has gone back to the lower house and come back. There have been some amendments that way. Of course, if you were committed to a Labor set of ideals you were not likely to suddenly decide you could support something that the Liberals had put up.

Dr CLUNE: What do you think about the balance between the Government's right to legislate and the House's right to review the work of the executive?

Ms SYMONDS: One of the things that annoys me about some people in politics these days is that they do not understand that they are in government and can do things. They have the numbers. They have the authority of the people. There is all this hesitation, finding out what this or that group thinks, and then having a focus group. Instead of placating minor pressure groups, governments should say, "This is what we are going to do," and do it. I think it is important that the legislative program reflects the numbers as they exist in the House.

Dr CLUNE: What led to your long-time involvement with the Standing Committee on Social Issues?

Ms SYMONDS: Before I was on the Social Issues Committee there were other committees I was involved in, for example, I headed up a group where I was the only parliamentarian. It was an inquiry into women's homelessness. That was 1983. There were wonderful women on that committee. We worked on a Women's Housing Program. As they are today, women's refuges were full then. I can always remember a speech that I made in support of refuges where I said that, in June 1980, 44 women and their 91 children had been refused access to the Blacktown women's centre.

We had a terrific plan, which was to get women out of the refuges into what we called medium-term supported accommodation. We got all these places dedicated to that, which are mostly now gone. Maybe two of them are left. I know that the Bea Miles facility is still there. That was for women who had problems with alcohol. We also built one somewhere in the western suburbs called Charmian Clift Cottages. I got into trouble with the local MP for opening it. I used to make these mistakes of going places, into other people's electorates, and I was supposed to tell them I was there, and I did not know because nobody ever told me those things. That facility was purpose-built to allow women with psychiatric problems to have their children with them while they were being treated. The idea was that women would move out of that into permanent housing. We were almost there when we lost government in 1988. It is still a model for what can be done.

And before my involvement in the Social Issues Committee, I worked on the Women in Prison Task Force report in 1984. That, again, was an extraordinary group of people. There were lawyers, social activists, social workers, and people from the prisons department. You could not even imagine it today. A lifer from the women's jail was escorted every day to the meeting. If we were proposing something, we would say to her, "What do you think?" I think I helped her to get out in the end. That report led to more than a decade of work and a continuing theme of my work. The interesting thing was that when the report went up in 1985 I was on the implementation committee. That is when we had a plan for a new building at Mulawa and recommendations to improve conditions for women. We had things like the women's office in the corrective services department and a place for mothers with children. I wanted women to be allowed out into the community on leave with their children, particularly women with babies. We fought and fought for all of that. I fought with the Prison Officers Branch of the Public Service Association who were a tough lot. I finally said, "That is it; I cannot do it anymore." I thought, "I am in the wrong place," and I left.

When the Coalition came to office, I was not allowed to go anywhere near the prisons. No-one was allowed to. The place was in uproar. I was trying to get back in to see what was going on. There were so many people whom I really admired in the Council, like Sir Adrian Solomons from the Nationals. He came over to talk to me and said, "Ann, I know you want to go back in there. I can get you back in." They finally said I could go in if two commissioners went with me. One was Ross Nixon, Christine Nixon's father. The other one did not turn up, so Ross Nixon and I walked around to see the new building and changes that had been made.

In 1994 I was speaking at the State Library on prisons. I was asked to talk about what had happened in the 10 years since the Women in Prison Task Force report. So I went and had a big rant about what we had tried to do, what had happened and what did not happen. I did not know that sitting up the back was Major-General Neville Smethurst, who was the Commissioner at the time. He came up to me afterwards and said, "Ann, what do you think we should do?" Well, I got out the report and said, "We should have this women's office here and build that there." He did everything that the 1984 report recommended. He was just a remarkable person. He was wonderful. A friend of mine wrote a book when she came out of prison about the experience of women in prison. He bought multiple copies of that book and gave it to every one of the governors of prisons to read. He was exceptional.

Another thing I was involved with before the Social Issues Committee was the International Year of Peace in 1986. My extraordinary friend Mavis Robertson said, "One of the things we have to do is to run a public education campaign, and it would be good if we could have something like a bus to travel around the country with material and videos about being anti-nuclear and anti-war and pro-peace." Barrie Unsworth had just been made Minister for Transport. So I went and knocked on his door. I said, "Barrie, congratulations, I really hope that you will enjoy this job." He looked at me and he said, "Ann, what would you like: a bus or a train?" And I said, "A bus". I used to say later that I wish I had replied both. The peace bus was just wonderful. It was decorated and properly fitted out. We finally drove it down to the National Museum in Canberra and it is now somewhere there. It was a great thing. It went all around Australia.

I will always remember spending a day on a Parliamentary trip to California with a medical marijuana group. It was called Cannabis Helping to Alleviate Medical Problems. Victor Hernandez ran the group and it was so well organised, it was wonderful. I got all his documents, all his information: the legal protections, how

you actually got the doctor's certificate to be presented to the group, how they made sure they had good quality cannabis. They showed me the cards that they gave to the users to take with them if ever they were picked up by the police, so that they could say this is the authorisation, why you had the cannabis, this is the lawyer to contact if you needed one. They made me an honorary member and gave me a card. It was just wonderful. Anyway, I brought all that documentation home with me and when they started to talk about a trial of it here I gave it all to Cabinet Office. It will eventually happen.

Dr CLUNE: What do you think were your major achievements as a member from 1988 and chair from 1995 of the Standing Committee on Social Issues?

Ms SYMONDS: I always like to acknowledge Lloyd Lange when talking about committees because he was the one who proposed them in the first place. What actually happened later was that they had a committee to look at committees chaired by Ron Dyer. Ultimately, the Social Issues and State Development Committees were established in 1988. I remember being in favour of a joint committee system, which would have been a disaster and I am glad it was not brought in. It was much better just being an upper house committee system. Max Willis was the first chair of Social Issues and I was the deputy chair. There were lots of inquiries that I think were really important.

The first thing we did was the adoption information inquiry, which was about giving adoptees access to their origins or giving birth mothers access to information about the children who had been given up for adoption. It was an extraordinary inquiry. It might have been then that our dear friends starting calling us the "soggy tissues committee", because there was always someone crying. We still call it the "soggies" when I get together with the staff for a reunion. The adoption information inquiry was really important because there was so much opposition to it from people who were adopting parents, particularly when you think that one of the chief adopting parents in the upper house was the President, Johno Johnson.

We used to hear over and over again from women giving evidence, "I was only 15 or I was only 17 and my father threw me out. He sent me to Sydney or he sent me to Victoria." These women had no support from their families and they had no option of having any social security payments. They had very little control over their lives. They were young. It was absolutely tragic the way things happened. People say, "Oh, there are no babies put up for adoption now." What happened? Whitlam introduced the supporting parents benefit and he took the tax off the pill. So life became very different.

There were other stories. One of the women told us, "I knew I wasn't the same as everyone in the family. I knew I was different." She said, "When I went to meet my birth mother, she opened the door and said, 'Please excuse me, I'm a bit untidy'. It was exactly me. I just recognised her straightaway." There were all these incredible stories about people knowing that they were adopted. Of course, there were awful things. One woman said that her father had told her husband just before they were married that she was adopted and she did not know until then. People were told in the most awful circumstances.

I often feel very sad about those adopting parents who feel as though they were not valued in any way. Of course they were. People would come in and say, "I know that they are my mother and father because they are who I have been with; I just want to know who my birth parents are. I want to know if I have inherited any of this disease and so on."

Anyway, Max Willis and I took the arguments and the recommendations—he went to his party room and I went to Labor caucus—and we got it through both of those, which is how we got it enacted. It worked really well. The people who set up the post-adoption resource centre were really good people. Some of them had been involved in Catholic adoption in the 1970s. They tried to actually overcome the past and assist people. It just worked really well. There has been a remarkable change.

Next, we were asked to examine Drug Abuse Amongst Youth, which turned into a fascinating inquiry, with Max Willis again in the chair. At the time, there were stories in the media about young people dying of heroin overdoses at Kings Cross. Ted Pickering was the Minister for Police and people were saying to him, "You should do something." He said, "I will refer this matter to the Social Issues Committee." Ted was really relieved. We started off by examining smoking and alcohol. We issued those reports with some effect. Then we started on the illegal drugs and we started to take evidence from people like Alex Wodak. It made such an immediate impact on me. The one thing I can remember is that he told us that, of drug deaths, 16 per cent were alcohol-related, around 80 per cent from tobacco and 3 per cent were from illegal and prescription drugs.

As part of the inquiry, Max decided to organise a study tour for himself and me in 1990. It was a wonderful introduction to the problem. We saw what they were doing in the Netherlands, which was remarkable. They had a bus that used to go around and the user would come in and put their used needles in this container. As they are walking down to get their clean needles, someone would say, "Where did you sleep last night? What's that thing on your arm? There is a doctor here today. Would you like to see them?" It was just so sensible, humane and compassionate. In Sweden, Finland, the UK and Canada we saw some really interesting and innovative approaches. We ended up in Los Angeles, where we spent a day with the LAPD. Anyway, that is when I started looking into drug problems and it became a life-long issue with me, as well as prisons.

We went to New Zealand as part of the Juvenile Justice reference to see what they had done over there. I did a minority report about it as a preferable way to go. They had panels that a Maori judge – Mick Brown – had set up. You could still go to the youth court, but if you did not want to and claimed to be innocent, you would go into one of these community panels. The people who had to be present were the offender and the victim and there would be a legal adviser. It was really well set up. Because they had closed and sold all of the juvenile detention centres the panels had money so every outcome of the process was funded. Whether you threw a brick through a window or were responsible for the death of someone you always had this choice. One example I recall was a kid who had been given a car when he finished high school and had run into this young woman's car and just wrote her car off. They were before the panel—including his parents—and the victim said, "I don't think you realise what you've done to me. I needed that car because I am trying to go to TAFE to get a job. I've got to take one of the kids to school and the other one to childcare. I just can't do it anymore." The father said to the boy, "Give me your keys" and said to the woman, "Here is your car". No cost to government at all. But I have also heard that they paid to get one kid out of the company that he was in and put him in a boarding school. It was just extraordinary. We tried to set up similar panels here but the Premier at the time would not allow it to be open-ended. He said, "Only people who don't commit a violent offence can be included." It just did not work out.

When I got to be the Chair of the Social Issues Committee, I thought it was terrific because I could have another at go prisons. I have to say I would have loved to have been minister for corrective services. I'm sure I am the only person who has ever wanted the job. I could have done all these things and I would not have been frightened of the prison officers. Anyway, it did not work out that way.

I got the Minister to give me a reference to inquire into Children of Imprisoned Parents in 1996-97. It was a really good inquiry. Some of the Committee members had never been in a prison before and never spoken to people who had. We would go out and speak to the women in Mulawa and see little two-year-olds trying to get close to their mother through a glass panel. At one stage we got involved with the case of a young mother who had embezzled lots of money. She went into court after being told by her lawyer, "You've got a two-year-old child, they are not going to give you a custodial sentence." Apart from that, she had gone into an arrangement to pay back all the money. But what actually happened was that the judge said, "He is only two, he won't miss his mother." The next thing he said was, "This is a large sum of money" and she was sent to prison. We found out about it when this little boy was practically on life support in the Prince of Wales hospital because he was refusing to eat. By that stage we had the places that Neville Smethurst had set up, so we got her and the little boy into a transitional centre. There was a wonderful photo in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of this woman holding the boy.

The report on Children of Imprisoned Parents was unanimous. It was a terrific piece of work. The best speech in the House in support of the recommendations was made by Doug Moppett from the Nationals. He basically said that no child should be deprived of their parents no matter what the circumstances. We should actually be ensuring that women with children do not go into prison or alternatives are arranged. Unfortunately, I think it was one of those reports that went in the bin.

The other thing that we did was the Children's Advocacy Report in 1996. At the outset, I was told by a senior person in the Government that I was not under any circumstances to put up a proposal for a children's commission. We worked on a whole system of how you would have a children's version of what the women's unit used to be like. Once again, through the art of compromise, it was the unanimous position of the Committee. Then Justice James Wood's Royal Commission recommended that we have a children's commission. In no time we had one, which never operated in the way that I would have operated it. We recommended a universal system of health visitors. If they went into a home and saw that a woman had support, was comfortable and everything was well they didn't need to return; if they found a woman was struggling, unsure, the kids a bit of a problem, they could go back every week. Nobody feels the stigma of having a nurse visiting. I still think it is a good idea.

We did the Hepatitis C inquiry in 1998 which was terrific. I got one of my doctor friends to write the terms of reference up for that and gave it to the Health Minister to refer it to us. It was a great report, and they actually got money and recognition out of it. It was just amazing.

Mr BLUNT: Those staff who supported the Social Issues Committee were extraordinary people.

Ms SYMONDS: The women who worked there were brilliant—look at them all and the things they have gone on to do.

Mr BLUNT: Can you tell us about the Joint Select Committee into the Trial or Establishment of a Safe Injecting Room which you chaired?

Ms SYMONDS: It was the last report I did. Again, it was recommended by James Wood. Patricia Staunton was the first Chair but then she decided to become a magistrate. She actually organised the whole thing. She knew of my interest in drugs and she organised for me to go on a 10 day tour to see what everybody was doing. By then, things had moved on from my 1990 visit with Max—there were injecting rooms everywhere, there were smoking rooms, there were smoking and injecting rooms. There was a place in Frankfurt, a park in the middle of the town, where everybody used to go and inject, it was absolutely frightful. Nobody could go in there and use the park as an amenity. Frankfurt wanted to take the major banking position for the European Union. They had said to the Frankfurt Council, "Get these people out." The council said, "You give us the money and we will." They apparently got something like $1 million. They bought a place on the edge of town where people would have housing, health care, an injecting room, and a bus that took them into town if they wanted to buy heroin. They were able to do it because the management committee was in agreement—the progressive, the conservative, the judicial officer, the social worker and the police.

There were 10 members on the injecting room committee. John Jobling came everywhere with us—he was the Liberal—and Ian Cohen from the Greens. Ian Cohen kept trying to tell John Jobling how useful it would be if we actually agreed to do this but he wanted nothing to do with it. When it finally came to the crunch somebody, who will remain nameless, in the Cabinet—it was not the Premier—called me down and he said, "Ann, you know you can't vote in favour of this, don't you?" I said, "No. I have seen the evidence; I have to vote for it." The other people who had been called down from the Labor Party and told they could not vote for it of course didn't, even though I know that some of them wanted to. So there you go, that is what happened. Four of us voted in favour and six against and that was the end of it at the time. I always say to people, "You have to do the best report. Do not limit yourself in what you put in. You have to put forward what you really want, because you never know when someone will want to pick it up and do something with it." And that was what eventually happened when an injecting room was set up.

That was really when I decided that I did not want to be there anymore. I thought: This is just such a waste of time. I used to get so agitated about it. I had already had a stroke. I thought: I am going to have another stroke and die and I don't want to do that. That is when I decided to leave. That was the end of 1997. I left on 1 April 1998 and I have not regretted it. I have been able to continue doing the things that I am interested in but at a lower level than in the past. No-one could stop me being appointed as the chair of the Women's Advisory Council in the prisons. I resigned not so long ago. The committee to establish another centre to keep women out of jail meets in my home—Elizabeth Evatt, the Deputy Magistrate, and some really good people.

Mr BLUNT: You came back as a community representative at the drug summit at Parliament House in 1999.

Ms SYMONDS: I was a member of the drug summit because people like Ian Cohen demanded that the Premier let me be a delegate, otherwise I would not have been there. Too many people knew of my involvement. What actually happened was that during the election campaign there was this terrible photograph on the front of the *Daily Telegraph* of a white boy being injected by an Aboriginal boy in a lane at Redfern. Everyone said to Bob Carr, "What are you going to do about this?" His answer was, "If I am re-elected I will convene a drug summit to have a serious look at the policies that we should have." So he had said it publicly. He was elected and everyone said, "Where is the drug summit?" That is how it happened. A person who took a leading role in all that, because she had been a supporter for all that time, was Clover Moore. She was good, as were many others that were there.

Dr CLUNE: Who were the MLCs you most admired?

Ms SYMONDS: The person I most admired when I went into Parliament was Paul Landa. He was the only Minister in the Legislative Council because Wran was like Keating, he did not want to have anything to do with the upper house— "unrepresentative swill". So there was one Minister, and that was Paul. He was so good; he was so effective. In question time he handled every question well. The other person I had great admiration for was Jeff Shaw. He was really a bit like Paul. He could speak about anything and do anything. I saw him try to modify all the worst excesses of other people. I really think the pressure on him was dreadful and that contributed to his demise.

I just loved the National Party's Adrian Solomons. I was making a speech once about something to do with prisons and when I sat down he came over to me and I thought, "God, I'm in trouble." He just said to me, "Ann, I refuse to speak to anyone about prisons until I know they have read Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*". He was just a lovely man. We often had little chats about things. And of course Doug Moppet was terrific. Lloyd Lange was very impressive too; he always spoke well. And, you just have to admire my long-time friend Delcia Kite.

Mr BLUNT: What was your response to the judgements of both the High Court and NSW Court of Appeal in the Egan cases?

Ms SYMONDS: Well, the Opposition wanted to get their hands on government documents, clearly to cause embarrassment and to be critical of what was happening—or, as they would have said, to call the executive to account. It is a fine line, as far as I am concerned. I really object to the way in which governments say that everything these days is commercial-in-confidence. There is not as much openness as there should be or could be. I am in favour, generally speaking, of democratic rule and openness as far as is appropriate.

Mr BLUNT: Looking at the whole sweep of your career in the Legislative Council, from 1982 to 1998, what do you believe were your main achievements?

Ms SYMONDS: I think it is the policy work that I did, although it has not always had a tangible outcome. The work that led to the Women's Housing Program was terrific. The Women in Prison report led to changes that were good. I've already referred to other significant policy work I was involved with. Because I was an MLC I had this wonderful experience of being on the National Policy Committee of the Labor Party when we had a social justice committee. We wrote a whole set of proposals, recommendations and programs. Sadly, at the next conference it was eliminated.

Being an MLC gave me the confidence and ability to get involved and speak about things I cared about. When I first got up in the House, I thought, "Oh, my God," I have to read out this little speech, heavens above! By the time I left, I would sometimes get a message saying, "Can you speak for another 10 minutes because something or other has not come up from the lower house?" Well, it was no trouble for me. I could have spoken about anything, really. Another valuable thing that I learnt was how to write letters and speeches and things like that.

Mr BLUNT: What is your assessment of the Council today?

Ms SYMONDS: I just think it is tragic that people who aren't in the majority can actually influence decisions to the extent that they can. It sounds really good to have representatives from every section of society and for people to have a right to vote for a range of candidates, but it is just unbearable to me to think that policies that we were very concerned about, like the gun policy, can actually be modified by people who are in the minority in the House. I was there with John Tingle, the first of the Shooters Party to be elected, and I had actually been one of those who started up the Women Against Guns group. But he was a reasonable human being and I think he was interested in making sure there wasn't too extreme a view being put forward. You could have a laugh with John. I get the feeling today that there is not much humour, there aren't many people who can laugh at themselves or share a joke with somebody else. I am certainly glad that I'm not there anymore

Mr BLUNT: Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview, for the time you have given us this afternoon, for having us here in your apartment as guests, to be able to conduct this interview. Thank you for all the reflections that you have given us on the stories you have told us. It is a really fabulous contribution to the project so I thank you for that. Most importantly on my own behalf, on behalf of all the staff of the Department of the Legislative Council, past and present, and particularly those extraordinary women and men who worked in the Social Issues Committee secretariat, thank you.

Ms SYMONDS: It was a privilege for me.

Mr BLUNT: It was a privilege for all of us to support and serve you as well. Thank you for your contribution to the Legislative Council, to the Social Issues Committee and to the people of New South Wales.

Ms SYMONDS: Thank you, David. I don't know whether I deserve such an accolade but it has been a pleasure talking to you.

Discussion concluded.