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verbatim transcript of an interview with

# RAYMOND JAMES O'CONNOR
b.1926

**MLA 1959 - 1984**
**POLITICAL AND MINISTERIAL CAREER**
**LIBERAL PARTY**
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## NOTE TO READER

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## Introduction

This is an interview with Ray O'Connor recorded for the West Australian Parliament and the J S Battye Library of West Australian History.

Raymond James O'Connor was born in Perth in 1926 and was educated in convent and government schools in Narrogin and York and St Patrick's Boys' School, Perth.

After service in New Britain and Bouganville in WWII Mr O'Connor worked as clerk, storeman and credit manager before becoming proprietor of the Beehive Tearooms in Perth. He was also proprietor of a car yard and a building society director.

He became a Liberal Member of the Legislative Assembly in 1959. He was appointed Hon. Minister assisting the Minister for Railways and Transport in 1965 and from 1965 to 1983 he held various Ministries including Transport and Railways; Transport, Traffic, Police and Safety (to 1977); Works, Water Supply and Housing (1977-78); Labour and Industry, Consumer Affairs and Immigration, Fisheries and Wildlife, Conservation and Environment (1977-80) and was Deputy Premier from 1980-92.

Ray O'Connor was State Premier from January 1982 - February 1983 and Leader of the Opposition from February 1983 - February 1984.

In the interview Mr O'Connor speaks of his upbringing, education and early business career. He describes his time in the Army, especially the period on active service in Bouganville.

The major political figures during his career are discussed, as are some of the major issues in the various ministerial portfolios he held.

While reticent about going over matters from the WA Inc Royal Commission which led to him being gaoled, Mr O'Connor does discuss the prison experience and how he was affected by it. An extract from the judge's summing up in that court case is appended at Mr O'Connor's request.

The interview was recorded by Stuart Reid in August 1996. There are 8 x 60 minute tapes.

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**VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT**

This is an interview with Ray O'Connor recorded by Stuart Reid for the Battye Library of Western Australian history and the Parliamentary History Project. Recorded at Mr O'Connor's home in Perth, Western Australia, on 1 August 1996.

SR Could we begin with your full name and date of birth?

**O'CONNOR** Raymond James O'Connor. I was born on 6th March 1926.

SR What about your family background? Where had the family come from?

**O'CONNOR** My grandparents came from the United Kingdom: my grandfather from Ireland, my grandmother from Devon in England in the mid-1880s. They landed at South Australia and later my father went to Millicent and my mother was from Ballarat.

SR What sort of work did they do? What area of employment were they in?

**O'CONNOR** My father left South Australia and came over here and met my mother in Kalgoorlie. He was....

SR I'm sorry, I was referring to your grandparents at that stage.

**O'CONNOR** He was a labourer.

SR This is on your father's side?

**O'CONNOR** On my father's side, yes.

SR And on your mother's side

**O'CONNOR** I haven't any idea of what they were. The background is fairly long with them. They were from a Fursdon family in Devon and there was some historical background with them, but it's fairly detailed.

SR So your mother, then, was born in Bendigo?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, yes.

SR What sort of life did she have prior to marrying your father? Do you know much about her background?

**O'CONNOR** She was a Moran from the Lodding family; her mother was a Lodding. They went to Kalgoorlie during the gold rush days, as did my father. My mother worked in a hotel in Kalgoorlie and my father did farm work and later on went into the police force.

SR Do you know much about their time in Kalgoorlie at all?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. My mother originally was on the Kurrawang wood line. Her parents were working out in that area and she lived in Kurrawang which is where they provided and cut down the timber for the mines in the early days. My father went there and he went to Quairading. In their early days they had a pretty.... it was a big family. They had a pretty happy sort of lifestyle but very countrified.

SR When you say a big family, what was the make-up of the family?

**O'CONNOR** There were three boys and three girls. There were six of them.

SR And their names?

**O'CONNOR** There was Katherine, my mother's name was Anne, and Nora were the three girls. Sorry, there was a fourth girl, Jane; there were four girls. The brothers were Tom, Bill and Dan, so she had three sisters. There were seven of them altogether. Three sisters plus my mother and three brothers.

SR And your father's family, was that also a large family?

**O'CONNOR** No. There were three boys and a girl on my father's side. My father was the only one that came to Western Australia. The others stayed in the Eastern States.

SR Do you know anything of your mother and father's meeting in Kalgoorlie?

**O'CONNOR** No, I don't know how they met, but Mum was 19 and Dad was 29 when they married, but how they met I don't really know.

SR Did they have any religious background at all?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, they were both Roman Catholics.

SR And their religious observance, was it strict? What can you tell us about their Roman Catholicism?

**O'CONNOR** Well, they were good Catholics is probably the best way to put it. As children we always attended church every Sunday and we went to Catholic schools, so we were brought up as fairly strict and severe Catholics in that regard.

SR What were the things that you learnt from your parents about the religious side of things? What were the kinds of messages that came through from them about that?

**O'CONNOR** They believed in following the practices of the church fairly strongly. I don't know how you would actually present it, but we always got dressed up on Sundays, in our Sunday best to go to church. We ensured that we practised by the commandments that you shall not steal and the various other ones in that way. Dad was a very strict man. While he was a policeman I suppose he saw that he had to set a pattern and his children had to comply, and we certainly had to. Mum was much more mild and gentle.

SR How did your father impose discipline on the family?

**O'CONNOR** With a strong hand if need be. If he said something we knew he meant it, and if you didn't do it you were looking for trouble. I don't think that was harmful to us, I think it brought us up in the right style of life. But to answer your question, yes, he was very strict, very firm and you had to comply.

SR What were the kinds of things that he would either punish you for or threaten to punish you for?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, you're going back about 65 years now. We had to set a standard that was above other children because if he was out there doing his job and someone broke the law it would be fairly hard on him, in those days certainly, if we broke the law in any way. I mean, if we threw a stone at someone and he found out, well, we were in a bit of trouble. So he was strict in almost every way but it was a good home life. We knew what the rules were. We were looked after well. We were fed well and we were cared for properly.

SR When you say with a heavy hand if necessary, what kind of physical punishment would there be?

**O'CONNOR** A hit on the bottom, fairly firm with a strap; not the hand, with a strap, and you didn't look forward to that. [Laughs]

SR Was it something that happened in your recollection often or occasionally or what?

**O'CONNOR** No, it didn't happen often because in those days you knew the rules and complied with them. If you didn't you knew what to expect. It was fairly rare but when you got it you remember it.

SR Any particular incidents you recall?

**O'CONNOR** No, none in particular but I do recollect having had the strap now and again, or some of the other members of the family and how they didn't look forward to getting it again.

SR What about your mother's role? You mentioned her being milder. What was her kind of style of dealing with the children? How did she bring you up?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, she was very protective of us. I can't remember Mum ever laying a hand on any of us. She was a very gentle and very kind person, very loving. She used to always watch us and guide us, but also protect us.

SR What about other people involved with the family? Were there any extended family living with you in your early childhood?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. When we were quite young - and this is back before I can remember it - my mother's mother and father had died and left two young girls, Nora and Kate who were Mum's sisters, and they came and lived with us. They were with us for many years.

SR So these would be your aunts.

**O'CONNOR** That's correct, yes.

SR But they were still young.

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes.

SR What age were they when you were under five, say?

**O'CONNOR** Oh well, when they came to us they were about 12 and 14, quite young girls, and they were members of the family right the way through, particularly Kate. She lived with us until she was over 50, lived with the family right through that time.

SR What about the family atmosphere in the home, the brothers and sisters and the whole family? Was it a happy environment?

**O'CONNOR** Very happy environment, a wonderful family atmosphere. There were eight of us. Some of the older ones used to look after the younger ones having a big family of that nature, but it was a friendship family where we cooperated together, we worked together, we played together, we did many things together and a friend of the other one's was a friend of the rest of ours. I think the atmosphere back in those days - and I'm going back into the late twenties, early thirties - was probably much better than you see it today.

SR Whereabouts was it that you were located first of all?

**O'CONNOR** My first recollections and where I spent my first seven years was Esperance, so that's the first recollections of my life down in that area.

SR As a way of getting an idea of the sorts of influences that were on you at the time, can you give us a brief word picture of Esperance at that time, what it was like, and also of the degree to which you had freedom of movement around Esperance as a child?

**O'CONNOR** Esperance was a very close-knit community and in those days you didn't have the communications you have today. Like radio, there was probably one in the town, so if something special was on you went round to McCarthy's to listen to the radio to listen to what was going on. I was about six before I ever saw my first aeroplane because they just weren't around in those particular days. My father was the local policeman. I think there's probably 30-odd policemen in the town today. There was one in those days and there was a fair bit of work because the Japanese wheat boats used to come in and they would load at the port there. Apart from being the policeman in the town my father also was clerk of courts. He registered the births, deaths and marriages and did all the statistics around for the farms that were outback, so he used to have to ride by horseback out to the farmers way out and he'd be gone days getting the various statistics. When you realise that so far away from anyone else, a single policeman in a town like that probably wouldn't be permitted today. But it's a beautiful town, Esperance, lovely seashores, lovely beaches, a lot of islands closely out from it, you can see them from the township itself. There was good fishing there and we had a wonderful life and a lot of time moving around in the bush because the bush was right in the town virtually in those days. I suppose that's where I first learnt to like and to handle the bush properly.

SR What did you learn about the bush then?

**O'CONNOR** Well, in that area there were lots of snakes and that and we used to hunt a bit in those days. So you learnt how to hunt and keep out of the way of snakes, or how to handle them if they came along, and also to find your way around in the bush. I think they were helpful things for later on in life.

SR When you say hunting, what sort of hunting did you do?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, rabbits and that type of thing. If you got a rabbit you were pretty lucky because they were good tucker in those days and they saved a bit of the expense for meat.

SR So how would you catch the rabbits?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, strangely enough, shanghai. I used not to get many in those days but in later years I used to get quite a lot that way. It helped to occupy me and earn my pocket money for me later on in life.

SR What about friends in those early childhood days? Do you have any recollections of friends outside the family?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I do. At Esperance, chap by the name of Daw was a friend of ours there and they still I think have the shop there. Gilbert Daw was a chap that went away; he got killed in the air force during World War II. He was a great friend of our family and I learnt to ride on his horse and eventually got a horse of my own and later on rode his a fair bit as well. They were friends, and Douglases and various other people there that were school friends. But having a large family you also had your friends within the family, and when you were playing anything or doing anything there was plenty of company in that regard as well.

SR What about school? Did you begin school in Esperance as well?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I did my first year at school at Esperance prior to coming to Perth.

SR Do you have any recollections of school in Esperance at all?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. It was right alongside a sandhill. It was just over the sandhill in Esperance. A chap by the name of Nadebaum was the principal there at the school. I see that a Nadebaum is the principal of the Education Department here at the moment, a woman. I don't know whether they're related or not.

SR Until fairly recently, anyway.

**O'CONNOR** Yes, yes. My first recollections were the first day of school I got into a fight and I can recollect rolling around in the dust with another guy there, and he and myself later became pretty good friends.

SR It's funny that about fights, isn't it?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Well, when you first get to school or in those days there was a bit of a challenge there for you, you know, and you either took it or you didn't. That was the way it used to be.

SR What about teachers? Any recollection of any of your teachers?

**O'CONNOR** No, I don't. Nadebaum was the only one that I remember from there.

SR I'd just like to go back to talking about your mother and father. We've discussed a little about their religious beliefs - did they also have strong political views at all?

**O'CONNOR** I didn't know at that time but later on I came to realise that my father was certainly a strong Labor man and was involved in the Labor Party in the State in various towns.

SR What sort of involvement did he have?

**O'CONNOR** He started the Quairading branch of the Labor Party and was involved in it for a number of years. Certainly he supported them right until the time of the Evatt regime. During that time he believed they were becoming a bit communistic and subsequently was the one who encouraged me to stand for Parliament.

SR What was the nature of his support for the Labor Party? What were the kind of reasons that he gave for being a Labor Party supporter in those days?

**O'CONNOR** He never gave me any reasons. I didn't know the reason but I guess he was one that if he had strong beliefs he would follow them through, and he obviously believed the Labor Party best suited his style of life and best supported him and the family. I guess, and I'm guessing that that's the reason that he supported and went out and worked for them.

SR And what about your mother? Did you have any inkling of her views on political or social issues?

**O'CONNOR** I think Mum had virtually none - I'm talking about political issues. Socially she was always very active in the Country Women's Association and things such as that, but politically she wasn't one that had very strong beliefs.

SR And what about her involvement in social issues through Country Women's or other organisations? What sorts of things did she get involved in?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, she got involved in helping farmers and helping various people. In those days they went out and if people were in trouble they tried to help and that sort of thing. The farming community had very torrid times in the thirties, in the early thirties, that's the Depression years as you recollect, and she followed this on at York and Narrogin and various other country centres, and went attended and participated and assisted where she could. Having a large family I suppose reduced the amount of time that she could have but, as I say, some of the elder children helped to look after the younger ones which relieved some of the burden.

SR What are your recollections of the Depression and the influence of the Depression on your family?

**O'CONNOR** We were always fed well through the Depression. Dad, while he was a firm fellow - and he was very firm as I've mentioned - was also very fair, and I can recollect during those days, what they call the tramps, these were the people who had nothing and wandered from place to place looking for things, he'd bring them in at Esperance and when he'd seen them on the road he'd bring them in and he'd give them a meal, but he'd make them cut a load of wood or something. He would see that they had sufficient to go on to where they had to go. Those sort of days we haven't seen since then, to my knowledge, but there was a regular band of tramps used to come along with the haversack on their back or they had a rug rolled up and tied with a strap usually on their back and wandered through. They are my early recollections in that particular area.

What he eventually did, he got a couple of horses also which he trained himself on the beach at Esperance, and he went up and won first up with both of them at Kalgoorlie. That put a few extra shekels in the pocket and let him look after the family a little better, because I think the wage in those days was about £2 a week. For a person with eight children that's not easy going, although you got a lot more for the pound then than you get for the dollar today. With schooling and all that sort of thing it was pretty hard. We were always fed properly. We never had a luxurious life but we had a good and happy life.

SR What about the influence of the Depression on other children that you knew?

**O'CONNOR** Oh well, of course, I was born in '26. I was only about seven when the Depression came on. In those days people were pretty kind and if they knew someone was in trouble they helped. There was a lot of that in those days and it was a wonderful atmosphere in the community generally. I can remember the day that we left Esperance and, as I say, I was only very young, but the big crowd of people that came to see us off on the train were singing songs as we left. I recollect the days we used to - my sisters played the piano and that - we'd get crowds around the piano and used to sing, and that's where your leisure hours were. You weren't out wandering the streets or something like that. You were round the piano and singing in groups and things such as that. They were very pleasant days. I don't know where I wandered from what you were saying, but....

SR No, that's good. You mentioned your father in Esperance being a policeman. Do you know much about his work as a policeman?

**O'CONNOR** Did I know much about it?

SR Yes.

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes, I saw quite a bit of it. Do you want me to relay a couple of things?

SR Yes please.

**O'CONNOR** I can recollect one day.... as I said, he was very stern; he was a very fair fellow but he was also a very strong man and he was the sort of fellow that if someone did something wrong he would let them know. If it was not too severe he'd warn them; if they did it again that was bad luck. I recollect one day I was at Hancock's pictures in Esperance. We were there to see a picture show. The theatre had been leased out to a strong man who broke chains on his chest and that sort of thing, and they cancelled him because they double booked the theatre. When we were about half way through the film this bloke came in, he was going to tear the place apart. I was sitting one from the aisle and Dad was next to me. He got up and told him he was the local policeman and to leave and this gentleman said, "I suppose you'll make me," so it was on. I saw them rolling down the aisle and Dad got up and fixed this fellow up and handcuffed him and took him away, and got someone else to take me home.

SR How did he manage that against the strong man?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, he was a pretty strong fellow too, but a very determined man. Another recollection was that one day he got notification through that a murderer had escaped from Perth and had gone to the Aboriginal settlement down there in Esperance. They were fairly nomadic the Aboriginals obviously, but they were also less civilised generally than they are today and it was a very remote area. He got a chap by the name of Bob Douglas and with Bob they went out and they took this fellow from the tribe (but not before he was attacked with a shovel) and they brought him back in. He was a very courageous sort of fellow. He never backpedalled at anything. Very strong-willed, very determined, but very fair. But if anyone stood up and challenged, well, he didn't backpedal away. He was that sort of person - and that's as I remember him.

SR Do you have recollections of going out with him when he went out in the bush around Esperance?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I do. I recollect going out once with him on statistics around to the farms. It must have been '31 or '32, around that time. He'd just purchased a 1926 Willys overland vehicle to go round to the farms instead riding out on horseback and he'd go away for a couple of days. I was with him and he blew three tyres on the car and finished up he stuffed them with grass and got back to Esperance with grass in the tyres. They're the sort of recollections I have there.

SR Did your father have any phrases or sayings that stand out in your mind as being "He always used to tell us" something or are there any of those sorts of things?

**O'CONNOR** [Laughing] He didn't even have to tell us; the look was enough! But, no, he didn't have any phrases that I recollect to any degree.

SR Or anything like that from your mother that springs to mind when you think back of your mother that you identify with her?

**O'CONNOR** There probably are but I can't think of them offhand.

SR Were there other people outside of the family who were influential on the family - perhaps figures from the church or from the community generally that you recall?

**O'CONNOR** No. The family was pretty firm and controlled internally. We used to often have visits from the priest, the father who later became Monsignor Langmead, and who was a padre later on. I remember him climbing a big pine tree at Esperance and getting my kite out of it for me, things such as that. But while we had a number of friends there, the influences came from within the family.

SR What about your.... I guess talking about Esperance it's perhaps a little young to be talking about it, but sporting interests? Did you begin to take an interest in sport at that stage?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, at Esperance mainly as a runner. I never played football or anything like that there, I was too young. I did that later on when I came to Perth and other sports, but the only event that I really participated in was running and I used to more than hold my own in that area.

SR Just before we move on from Esperance, were there any other things that you recall from those days? I mean this is very early childhood but are there any other things that you recall?

**O'CONNOR** Just the fishing boats used to come in and often friends of ours the Stewarts would bring us round fish. They used to knock around with our family - that's the elder ones - and I can remember some very pleasant fish meals in those days from down there.

SR Where was it the family moved when you moved from Esperance?

**O'CONNOR** When we moved from Esperance we moved to Perth. It was only for a very short period of time, about nine months. At that time we attended the Forrest High School, which was on the corner of Lord Street and Walcott Street in Mt Lawley. My father bought a house in Windsor Street, which is near where the old shunting sheds were and where now the new East Perth railway station is, we were just down that particular road there. We were only there for about nine months and we moved on to York and we had three years there.

SR Any recollections of the time in Perth - I mean coming from a small country town like Esperance to the city?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Well, I was a bit fortunate, I suppose, in going to the school the way I did there because my younger brother Brian was only eleven months younger than me so we both went to school together and were one class apart, so we always had company to start off at a new school. I can remember the dust from the shunting sheds down there used to come across if the wind was blowing the wrong way and would get in all the washing and things such as that. You wouldn't see those things today. All the trains that came to Perth from various country towns all came to there and that's where it was, only a few hundred yards from where we were - maybe 250 yards from where we were.

SR I should perhaps have asked you about the house in Esperance as well, but with eight in the family, what sort of house did you have in both those places?

**O'CONNOR** In Esperance was only a small house. I think it was three bedrooms and there was a verandah and some of us used to sleep on the verandah. The house is still there now. It's been retained and when I was last in Esperance it was still there.

SR Whereabouts is that?

**O'CONNOR** Just alongside the police station in.... I can't remember the name of the street.

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**O'CONNOR** I might have mentioned that at Esperance, while I spent the first seven years of my life.... my mother was sent to Perth when I was born and they brought me back on a ship called the *Kybra* which ran into a storm. It was missing for three days and it was thought that it had gone down at sea. Eventually, when we arrived into Esperance they noticed that there were arrangements being made to foster out the children and things such as that that were left there. Later on, when I was Minister for Transport, I was able to get the life belts off the *Kybra* and presented them to the museum at Esperance where I believe they still are.

SR And the house in Perth when you moved to Perth?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. That was only a three bedroom [house] with a large verandah. We used to sleep on the back verandah, myself and my brothers. The three girls were in one room and so we were fairly cramped but I do have recollections of one time when my auntie came from Kalgoorlie to have another child. She had thirteen altogether. A couple of them died. She brought ten of them down with her and six of us slept in the garage. [Laughs] You can imagine the sort of turmoil in a house like that with an extra ten or eleven in on top of our own - what was there? Eight, ten, eleven, so it was twenty-odd in the three bedroom house. But we certainly had a lot of fun in those days.

SR Any recollection of school in Perth or.... it was a fairly short time, wasn't it?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, it was only very short. I remember we used to walk to school, of course. It wasn't that far. It was about a mile away, I suppose. But, no, on that I haven't many recollections of there.

SR What about the move to York?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I have some very pleasant recollections of York. We lived in the old police house which was behind the prison. They are all now historical sites. We used to play in the cells there and I have very strong recollections. I first learnt to swim at York, won my first trophies at swimming there, and performed in running. But it was a very old prison. The horse yards and stables are still there and have been renovated and are in good shape. I went back there a couple of weeks back and had a look at them. It amazed me today - I didn't realise how small and cold the cells are in those prisons, and we used to have prisoners there on a regular basis. I suppose they're only about 4 foot 6 [inches] wide and about 7 foot long, and just the stark walls with the bars. I didn't have recollections of them being quite so small, but we used to play there, hide and seek and various things in the prison from time to time.

SR And what about the house there?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, that was quite a small one. It was just near the river, near the Avon River. There was also a good verandah on that and from there one of the girls went to Perth to work and that's when gradually, from there on, the family reduced in size.

SR How long was it that you were in York?

**O'CONNOR** Three years.

SR What about school there? Do you have recollections of the school?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, my teacher there was Sister Leo. She, I believe, is still alive, from the information I have at this stage. Also I used to love the bush. I used to wander up Mt Bakewell and Mt Brown and go round and learn things about the bush. I found springs out at the back of Mt Brown that whenever I was wandering around I could have a drink there whenever I wanted and things such as that. I also learnt to hunt a bit more and enjoyed that practice.

SR Did you make new friends there as well?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. My friends there included the McNamaras, who were the people who used to be the main honey producers here, Noel and Bill McNamara. The Screaighs[?]; they were related to Herbie Screaigh who was the footballer. He was a very good footballer for East Perth and I used to follow them at that stage of the game. Yes, there were a number of people that we had and we had quite good and close friends there. The people that owned the Castle Hotel, Craigs. John Craig and myself were very friendly and knocked around a lot together.

SR As you were getting to be a little bit older, you were still pre-teens, did your activities change as well? What sorts of things did you get involved there?

**O'CONNOR** Still bush walking and bush work was what I liked. I enjoyed the bush and learning more about it all the time, how to survive out there and how to find your way around. There was a state and Catholic school there - we had friends from both sides and I had very pleasant memories of my time at York.

SR What about organised youth activities? Were there any organisations that you joined?

**O'CONNOR** No, not at that stage. I don't know that they existed. Like Police Boys and that I don't think existed at that time. While I joined them later on, I don't recollect them having been around at that stage. The athletics were mainly at schools and I did participate in all of those.

SR Your father was in the police force obviously still in York.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR What was his role there. I mean, York would be, what, that wasn't still a one police officer town?

**O'CONNOR** No, no, there were several there. He was the sergeant in charge there at York. There was a fellow by the name of Leahy. I think there were three policemen there at York at that time. I stand to be corrected on that but that's as I remember them.

SR And your mother, did she retain her involvement with community organisations that you mentioned before?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, she did. Yes, she joined the Country Women's there and was quite involved with them.

SR What about school there? Are there any teachers or other influential people that you recall from that period?

**O'CONNOR** Oh well, see, I was only about nine when I left there, nine to ten in that category, but I remember Sister Leo was the teacher that taught us at that time.

SR Any recollection of her?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. She was a not very tall, fairly short, very pleasant sort of woman who I thought did a pretty good job there at that time.

SR Were you still regularly attending church at that time?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes. I was an altar boy then.

SR What was involved in that?

**O'CONNOR** This is attending the priest during ceremonies and taking part in the actual mass itself. Both my brother and myself were altar boys at that time.

SR Was that something you enjoyed doing?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Yes, we felt we were playing a part in the religious section of our life and we did it seriously and enjoyed doing it.

SR Looking back on it now, what do you think was the influence of that Church upbringing on your future life?

**O'CONNOR** It's very hard to say. I never really took time out to think about that. Being a Roman Catholic I don't think helped or hindered in any way when I stood for Parliament. At a later stage I'd been away in the army and back, and I don't think it played a great part in my life.

SR Is there anything else from York before we move on?

**O'CONNOR** No, I think that about covers York because as I say I was a pretty young age there.

SR Where was the next place that you went to?

**O'CONNOR** We went back to Perth for a further twelve months and I attended Christian Brothers College, which was then in Victoria Avenue. There's now a girls' school up there. That's where I spent twelve months from about ten to eleven. I became much more involved in sports in those days and participated for the first time in football and athletics and swimming. I represented the school there at that time and that's where I first became fairly heavily involved in sports.

SR Can you talk a bit about your involvement in sport as a child? What sorts of things were you in?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I won cycling events in Perth. I won interschool events in swimming. Later on I won events in tennis. I was champion athlete at the Narrogin school at a later stage. Then I played football for East Perth. I was selected in the State squad in the amateurs in football. I won the A grade award for the State. I won the Prendergast medal for East Perth when I was playing there. In one year, 1943, I won the State open discus, I won the hurdle event for the State, I was second in the shotput, discus - no, I won the discus - shotput, hammer throw and I was third in the high jump. That was to John Winter at that time. He went away and won the Olympics at the next games but he was a fair bit better than we were. So I had a fairly active participation in sports generally, mainly later on and after I came back from the army. Also, prior to going away in the army, I played a bit of football.

SR Where was it the family moved after York?

**O'CONNOR** They went back to Perth for twelve months and then we went to Narrogin, and spent the next three years at Narrogin. I finished my schooling at Narrogin. I was at Narrogin, I was at school when World War II was declared. I recollect that very vividly.

SR What are your recollections of that?

**O'CONNOR** It was a stunning shock to everyone at the time when they found that we were at war, and no-one really of my age group knew what it meant, but we knew that people were a little afraid of it and that sort of thing. That was in 1939. There was a feeling of fear generally I think gripped the people at that time. They didn't know what to expect.

SR Did you have members of your family going into the military forces then?

**O'CONNOR** My elder brother Maurice[?], he went in in about 1940 I think it was. He joined the services then and I went in about three years later.

SR Just coming back to Narrogin and school there, what recollections do you have of your education there?

**O'CONNOR** Sister Ildephonsus was the teacher there. I remember she was a very strict and very firm teacher. She'd get the best out of you that she could. I wasn't a great student. I liked sport better and I enjoyed hunting. I used to in those days go out on a Saturday morning with a shanghai and I'd shoot three or four rabbits, come back, clean them, skin them, sell them to the hotels and that's where I got my pocket money and put a few dollars away in the early days. I used to enjoy that. I left school at 14 but it was from there, from Narrogin, where I left.

SR What about the academic side of school? What kind of academic.... what kind of level did you achieve at school?

**O'CONNOR** Leaving, that was all. I didn't do any qualifications after. I went out and I started to work at 14. I came to Perth and my parents were still at Narrogin. I left and came to Perth and started working when I was 14. I did accountancy at night school after I came back out of the army.

SR So on leaving school, what were the things that led you to leave school at 14?

**O'CONNOR** Well, in those days not many people went on to the standard of education they do today. My family was a fairly large one as I mentioned and they weren't a wealthy family. I came to Perth and lived with my sister who was then married, and I went out to earn a living. I initially started off working for a cool drink factory and later on went to Southern Cross Windmill Company, which was the company that had previously employed my brother prior to him going into the army. I stayed with them then until I went into the army in the beginning of 1944.

SR Can we talk a bit about your first job, then, having come out of school at 14?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. It was in the summertime. I left school in 1940, it must have been. I was 14 - that's right, 1940, and came to Perth. It was fairly hot and so I went to a place called Mackay's in Money Street, East Perth, and I used to work there stacking crates and all that sort of thing initially. Then I applied for a job with Southern Cross Windmill Company in the office and I finished up in charge of the section there that handled supplying windmills and assessing what was needed for them to get the equipment properly operating and to notify them of the right size equipment they needed and all that. I was only about 16, 17 then. The reason why I got on so quickly was because a lot of the senior fellows had gone away to the war and us younger fellows had to take over those jobs.

SR Did that mean that you got more experience more quickly?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes. Well, you had to act quickly to.... Someone would write in from the north west and say they had a station up there and they wanted four windmills. They'd give you the depth of the water and you'd have to assess the size of the mill they wanted, where they wanted to pump it in, and supply all the equipment including the bends and nozzle, whatever. You couldn't afford to be wrong because if you sent it up there and there's one thing missing it stops the whole operation, and in those days it was pretty hard to get stuff to the outback. But it was very interesting. I enjoyed it.

SR Was it a big workplace?

**O'CONNOR** Southern Cross was a big company. It was the biggest windmill company in the State, and a subsidiary of the Toowoomba works. Southern Cross Windmills and Diesel Engine Company operated from Toowoomba and that's where they were first founded. While they did supply windmills they also supplied diesel engines and that, which were pretty new in those days and so we had to also assess and work out what was required with those.

SR I'd like to get a flavour of what a workplace was like for a young person of 14, 16, 17 in those days. Was it hard work?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes. Yes, you worked hard and you worked long hours. You didn't look at overtime and that sort of thing; if there was a job there to be done you hopped in and did it. Conditions were fairly firm but I enjoyed work. I always tried to work to my maximum and I never looked at work as a toil, I looked at it as a pleasure, and if you achieved what you were trying to do that's what I thought was worthwhile. So right through my life I've always worked the maximum hours I could and done the best I could in the jobs. I've never ever looked at a job much different than sport - hop in and do the best you can.

SR What about your social life during that time? Were you more financially independent having moved out of the family home, parents' home?

**O'CONNOR** When you say financially independent, at that time I was earning twenty-seven and six, one pound seven [shillings] and six [pence] a week. I used to pay a pound for my rent, that gave me seven and six a week. From that I got my sister to finance me into a pushbike so I could ride to work instead of going by tram each day and that would save me tuppence or threepence a day, so I had to pay my bike off and buy my clothes with the other seven and six a week. I was financially independent, but in those days you could also go to the pictures on a Sunday night for threepence, so you didn't need a lot of money and you made a lot of your own fun. I started playing football in those days and with sport I used to participate in the amateur athletics in the State so they kept me pretty well occupied. I had a number of friends and we would regularly go out together on a Saturday night. So, yes, my social life began then.

SR What sorts of things were there for young people to do on a Saturday night?

**O'CONNOR** Well, mainly we went to the dances at the old Leederville town hall in Leederville, or the Embassy Ballroom. Also there was one at the back of the RSL, where the RSL is in Pier Street. We used to go to those dances regularly and the same groups would meet up there all the time. It was pretty good and pretty clean fun, you know.

SR Can you tell us a bit about the dances. What sort of music was it?

**O'CONNOR** Mainly old-time like waltzing and Pride of Erin and dances such as that in those early stages. The jazz came in a bit later on, but it was mainly the old-time dancing.

SR Was this with live music?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, live music, yes. You didn't have taped music or that in those days. It was live music.

SR With a band or a single instrument or what?

**O'CONNOR** No, the ones that I am referring to would all be with a band. They'd all have a band, three or four involved in the band - your drummer, your saxophonist or whatever, pianist. Different music - you didn't have the guitars and that that you have today in the bands, mostly brass music and the piano.

SR What about girlfriends?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I had a number of them in those days. When I say a number, when you went out with a girl in those days, if you took her out more than twice you were considered sort of a bit locked in. Not so as today, but, yes, I had a few girlfriends in those days and I still see one or two of them now and again in the shopping centres or something of that nature.

SR What else in your recollections of that time characterise relations between boys and girls or teenage boys and girls compared to what you see today?

**O'CONNOR** The morals were much better in those days than they are today, there's no doubt about that at all. Also, everyone in the smaller towns like Esperance, Narrogin and York knew what you did all of the time, so if you went out with someone, someone knew it. I think the standards were a lot higher than they are today morally, and I think that was good in many ways.

SR So how would that influence the behaviour, then?

**O'CONNOR** It would make them behave better because if someone went out they never thought of whizzing home and jumping into bed with someone tonight and someone else the next night. Those sorts of things were strictly frowned upon in those days and, as I say, with the smaller population were easily known if it did occur. If a person got a pretty poor name it was pretty quickly spread around and did affect them in their general operations.

SR Is there anything else from those teenage years working in Perth before we move on to joining up?

**O'CONNOR** No. I think that covers it pretty well.

SR So what were the circumstances that led to you joining up?

**O'CONNOR** I had a feeling that it was up to us. I was actually manpowered because when you're supplying water supply equipment to the farming community and to the stations, they needed to keep some people around. I was manpowered and could have got out. I wanted to go away because at that time the Japanese were coming down through Singapore and places such as that, and my father wouldn't give me permission. In those days before you were eighteen you had to get your parents' permission to go away. He wouldn't give it, so I couldn't join the AIF. I just can't recall what they call the other group, but anyhow I did join up and I went to Northam initially where the camp was. We were transferred to Harvey and then later on to Bathurst in New South Wales, the Canungra training school, and then on to Bougainville.

SR Why was your father opposed to you going?

**O'CONNOR** Well, my brother was away and he knew the possibility of being killed and that. I think he was worried about us mainly, but he did object to us going.

SR But you were able to overcome that problem eventually and join up.

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I joined the militia I think you call the other group. I joined the militia and so went to Northam and then to Harvey. That's where I really started playing league football because the CO there, Dick Lovegrove, was a former Claremont footballer and the league footballers used to get leave on weekends to go to Perth to play. I thought I've got to be in that, so I got on to South Fremantle and got them to include me in their team and I went and played for them for the first few weeks. I played for South Fremantle till we met East Perth and they said I was in their district so then I changed to East Perth because I was a supporter of theirs anyhow, but I did play a few games with South Fremantle prior to playing with East Perth.

SR Right. What was it like playing league football, as someone who had been keen on sport.

**O'CONNOR** I had to learn a bit about it because when the talent scouts came down from South Fremantle to Harvey I had to borrow some boots from someone else to play because I didn't have footy boots in those days. When you played football in those days you didn't get paid. Even after the war you provided your own boots and socks, and when I finished playing in about '52, we got one pound ten a game for league football in those days, whereas they get over $1000 today for a game. But, of course, it's followed a lot more strongly in the AFL. There were very strong club ties in those days and people used to very strongly support their clubs. They'd be there on the weekends to see them play, they'd have their bets on Friday on the match and chiack each other on Monday at work as to how their teams went and that, but there was a wonderful club atmosphere in those days and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Initially I had to learn a bit about the game but having been involved in athletics a fair bit and being a fair ball handler it doesn't take you long to pick it up. So I then played league football for the next nine or ten years.

SR What were some of those things that you had to learn about it?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, well, I didn't have the skills that they had initially of tapping the ball on and tapping it over and the turning ability. I was a fairly big fellow in those days. If you have a look at a ruckman today he's what, six foot eight. I used to ruck in those days. Okay, I could jump and that, but you wouldn't have much chance today.

SR What height are you?

**O'CONNOR** I was 6 foot 2 [inches], but that was about the average ruckman in those days. There was one exceptional one, Merv McIntosh, who was 6 [foot] 6 [inches] and I recollect rucking against him on a number of occasions. He won a couple of Sandover medals here. But a big ruckman in those days was.... 6 foot 3 would be a big ruckman, and 6 foot 2 you could ruck but you couldn't do that today.

SR What about the training and your introduction to the military life? What are your recollections of the early stages of that?

**O'CONNOR** Well, the old sergeant major when you got up to Northam made you know very quickly that you were under his control and if you didn't comply the penalties were invoked very quickly there. You went in with a complete new group of people; you had to meet new people and find out who and what they were like and select your friends and carry on in that particular way. Some of those you found stayed with you forever. I've had friends that I met in those early days in Northam, and that was in early '44, who've been friends right through their life.

SR Who were some of those friends?

**O'CONNOR** Howard King was one. He was a butcher. We went away together. We were very close and always have been. Unfortunately he passed away just a little while back, but when we came back from the army we used to go together and keep in touch. A very good type of fellow. He was in New Britain with me as well; came back to Sydney when we came back and he was probably the closest of them.

END OF TAPE ONE SIDE B

SR Did your physical prowess and sporting background stand you in good stead for that training?

**O'CONNOR** Oh yes. When I went through - particularly when you did the jungle training course in Queensland at Canungra - I came out there the fittest I've ever been and it helped me later on in the work we were doing, to retain that fitness. I always did, even when I was in the islands and even after the war. I'd get up out of bed at six in the morning and run five mile around the beach and back and go hunting fish and things such as that. With the fish up there when they came to the surface you could shoot them, you would stun them with a bullet when they were up near the surface and you'd get a few fish like that and have a meal out of those. I just kept on hunting and exercising and I think that helped me to.... sporting activities and interests kept me going in that area. It also relieved your mind and took your mind.... A lot of people in the islands during and after the war got very depressed and in a bad state of mind; it never happened to me because I always kept occupied and I think that helps.

SR Just coming back to the training for a moment, were there any particular aspects of the training before Canungra that you recall as being - things you learnt, or things that you think were important?

**O'CONNOR** Yes I was put in the intelligence section of the infantry and that meant that you had to learn a lot of other things - a bit of Japanese for when you were interviewing Japanese prisoners and that type of thing. You had to learn much more about the use of compass in the jungle and bush work, which I think the fact that I had always been interested in the bush and handled it, was very helpful to me because in the intelligence section, if for instance a pilot was brought down behind the lines, you would have to go in with someone at times and bring them out. You would also have to be in a position where you could lead troops in; you would have to learn where the enemy was and find out the best way to get in, or what was happening, whether they were preparing to attack us, and all those sort of things. They were fairly interesting, but pretty dangerous and a bit frightening at times.

SR So these were things that you were taught at training?

**O'CONNOR** We were taught there, and we were taught this at Bathurst and then at Canungra. Yes, so they were things that were beneficial to me later on.

SR What about your first assignment to active duty?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I was sent to the Sixty-first Infantry Battalion in Bougainville. They'd run into troubles and needed some build up members there, some reserves. So we were sent in there and we landed at Torokina and I remember I thought this was pretty good you know, initially, until we got down the Buin(?) Road and I heard the guns going and I thought, gosh what am I doing here.

And so the first activity was in Bougainville. We went down the Purari, the Hari(?), the Mivo and the Mobai River and they were the areas in which I saw active duty.

SR So what was your first experience of active duty?

**O'CONNOR** Taking a patrol out from the Hari(?) River in the south of Bougainville, mainly on manoeuvres and everything to find out where the activities of the Japanese were.

SR So what's involved in going out on patrol? What are the preparations firstly?

**O'CONNOR** Well you get round with the captain and you discuss what the motive is, what you're at and where you think the enemy are, and you run a detail of that. Then you go off on a patrol to assess whether they are there and if not where they are, and if need be to take whatever action you've got to on the way through.

SR How many in a patrol?

**O'CONNOR** Oh that'd vary depending on where you were going and what you were doing. The first one I went out on there was about eight in it.

SR How long would you be out for?

**O'CONNOR** The first patrol we were only out for about eight to ten hours, but you can go out for days on them depending on what they were.

SR And did you find any of the Japanese that you were looking for on that first time out?

**O'CONNOR** No, not on the first time. We saw signs of where they had been. You see in the jungle.... if you realise if you go through the jungle you can be walking on a path and they could be two feet from you and you wouldn't know they were there, you couldn't see them, and that's why it's very easy to be caught out if you're not very, very careful. So on that particular one we saw signs of where they had been and that sort of thing, but we didn't strike any, there was no active contact on that day.

SR What about the tension involved in a situation like that, particularly on your first time going out?

**O'CONNOR** Oh it's very tense. As I say, you don't know what to expect. You know they're there to be shot at and, you know, it's a frightening experience. I is the best way you can put it, and certainly very tense.

SR How did you react to it? What was your personal response to that tension?

**O'CONNOR** I'm pretty fortunate, I've always been able to cope with tension or pressure, and if I couldn't, I don't think I'd be here today [laughs] with what I've had to go through. But at the time it's very tense, and when you get back later on you talk to your mates about the experiences of the day and you know it's always a lot easier if you haven't had any actual contact. But mates are so important to you there. See we were dug-in in trenches on the side of the Hari(?) River at that time; sure we had tents, but.... Around the outside of those tents and on the side of the river and on the Buin Road - it was on the edge of the Buin Road and the Hari(?) River - we were dug in around there but you'd also have your tents where you could sleep, depending on whether you were being attacked or not, but you always had to be aware. And in the jungle you'd be sitting in the trenches of a night - probably this is the most frightening thing, it was that black in there you'd put your hand in front of your face and you couldn't see it.

If the Japanese were around they might throw a bit of mud over or some stones or something like that if they knew you were there, and if you fired back they'd know where you were and then you'd get a hand grenade because they'd see the spark from the gun, and these were all things you had to learn. You couldn't fire willy nilly because you would collect something back fairly quickly. There were times though they got through our lines and into our areas. You had booby traps and that around in certain places, but it wasn't possible always to have them right around. But you know, in that jungle area it had all been strafed before by the Americans. When they came through - we took over from the Americans in Bougainville - it had all been strafed and there was a lot of dead timber at the top of the trees and that sort of thing and all of a sudden one might drop and smash in front and you'd think they were there and you'd be very tense thinking it was possibly a Japanese not realising what had happened with a bit of timber. So, yeah it was pretty tense and pretty scary.

SR Was there fighting going on around you at that stage?

**O'CONNOR** Oh gosh yes, yeah, and also the big gun attacks they'd erupt every hour, every night, they'd let go with mortars or guns or, you know, the big guns.

SR The Japanese would or the Australians?

**O'CONNOR** Both. Sometimes ours, sometimes theirs. But see that was done to keep you awake and make you more tense, and some people would pack up under pressure but most of them didn't fortunately. But you'd hear the gun going and you'd be waiting just to know what's happening and sometimes it would be close and sometimes not. So you didn't have a lot of peace there.

SR What about illness and problems as a result of the tropical nature of the place?

**O'CONNOR** Well hookworm was always one of the things you had to watch. I mean you had to have shoes on most of the time because the hookworms would get into your feet and that would go through the blood. Malaria was another thing that we had to watch for all the time and keep a net on. I did get malaria but not until I got home because up there we were on Atabrine tablets all the time which subdued it, kept it down, and some of the time we were on quinine so we were on Atabrine or quinine to hold the malaria down and mine never showed up on me until I went off the tablets back in Australia.

SR So can you describe the first occasion in which you actually had contact with the enemy?

**O'CONNOR** Yeah the first time was when they got into our lines and it was about one o'clock in the morning and er, someone heard a noise and they were in our lines and they started firing and they actually got some clothes off the line and [laughs] took some of our clothes, and that was the first action that I ever was involved in.

SR Can you talk a bit about that action and how many people were involved, how long did it go for, the detail of it?

**O'CONNOR** Oh it only went for about a half an hour. It was fairly short, fairly brief and not a lot of shots fired in that particular one.

SR Still I imagine in the heat of the moment half an hour would be quite a long time for that to be going on.

**O'CONNOR** Well the longest time I ever had was the night after the war finished.

SR Really? What happened there?

**O'CONNOR** Well, the Salvation Army had a tent on the Buin(?) Road and a fellow by the name of Ned Bedwell(?) who was a Salvation Army officer in Queensland and who I got a letter from just recently, was in charge. Anyhow on the day that war finished, the planes flew overhead to drop pamphlets in Australian and Japanese advising the war was over, and so we went and that night we had a game of cards in the tent on the Buin Road. There was a Japanese patrol there didn't know it was over and they opened on us and we took the back of the tent out as we went through it [laughs] back into the lines. That night they put a mine on the bridge where we were at and a chap drove over it next morning and was killed. This was the morning after the war was over and the mine went up and he was killed.

SR Were there any lives lost in that first incident?

**O'CONNOR** No, no.

SR What was your experience of losing comrades in fighting?

**O'CONNOR** Oh devastating when you found it happened. You know it would affect some people much more than others. If a friend of yours was gone under difficult circumstances well.... See there was some terrible atrocities occurred up there around those times and if they got a prisoner of yours, you could find him hung up and cut open and things such as that. There was one case where a fellow had his mate caught and when they got to him he'd been cut open and his boots stuffed in his stomach.

SR Sorry, he had what stuffed in his stomach?

**O'CONNOR** Boots, his boots, yeah, and this bloke went absolutely berserk.

SR What sort of effect did that have on the troops generally in terms of their attitude to the Japanese?

**O'CONNOR** It would affect different ones differently, but the attitude to them was very severe. They were very antagonistic and were very angry at what was happening and some of the atrocities that did occur there.

SR Did it lead to retribution?

**O'CONNOR** Not to my knowledge, but it certainly didn't ease the tension. I mean if there was a chance that could have been given maybe it wasn't given because of that, you know. When those sort of things happen, it does have an effect on you at the time; and probably when I say the time, some of it's everlasting with some people.

SR Was it generalised into a kind of racial thing at that time?

**O'CONNOR** I think it just.... as more of these things.... see there were a lot of atrocities did occur and the Japanese were supposedly on drugs when they came into a certain thing. You take on the Purari(?) River for instance, when one of our battalions was on the Purari, it was a place called Slater's Knoll, the Japanese came up in droves up through the area there, and the officer in charge wouldn't let our fellows fire until they got to the top of where the barbed wire was, and there were hundreds of them left over this barbed wire; they just came up in droves. Our chaps had run out of ammo there but fortunately they got a couple of tanks through, which got up there in the late part of the day and were able to replenish and to ease the burden on our fellows there. We had some very good officers there in those days and I think that particular one would've saved a lot of lives the way he restricted them from firing until they hit the wire.

SR Now Slater's Knoll, that would have been what just before you arrived was it?

**O'CONNOR** Yes it was, yeah. But we went through the Purari(?) River and we took over from there. That was one reason they wanted recruits; they lost a few up there, quite a few actually in those particular days.

SR What about the officers you met, you mentioned there being some good ones.

**O'CONNOR** Oh yes. There were some not so good, too, you know. For instance one night I was patrolling a bridge, watching the bridge, you know, and the officer told me that when it got just to sunset, when the sun was going down, to walk across the bridge, go about 50 yards past, and come back. The only thing, he didn't tell the bloke with the Bren gun up top that he'd told me to do it, and the bloke had me lined up and was just going to let go when I turned round and walked back. So, I mean you wouldn't put that down as a top class officer, in my book anyhow. When I got back this chap was shaking, the chap with the Bren gun, machine gun. I felt a bit that way myself [laughs] after he told me what was going on. But most of the officers were pretty well experienced and experienced in jungle warfare and they didn't take silly risks.

SR What about Charles Court? He was there as well. Did you have contact with him at all in that?

**O'CONNOR** Yes I first met Charles on the Hari(?) River in the south of Bougainville, and he was one that went down with General Savage to sign the peace agreement with the Japanese down in that area, so I saw him a couple of times at that particular time. He was, I suppose, my CO then and was again forty or fifty years later in Parliament.

SR Did you have any experience of him as a commanding officer? I mean did you...?

**O'CONNOR** Not really, no, no. He was back at administration mainly. We were in the front lines and he was one of the top fellows in administration.

SR I'd like to take you back to the - not phrased very well - I was just going to say "I would like to take you back to the front lines," but you know what I mean. I'd like to talk a little bit more about the contact with the enemy, about the circumstances of conflict, when it's actually you faced with the shooting conflict. Can you describe an example of that kind of situation where you were being shot at and you were shooting as well; what's going on then?

**O'CONNOR** Well you must realise that when you're in the jungle, generally speaking it's pretty difficult to see the opponent. They are sometimes in a tree or a sniper or something of that nature and most of the contacts that you had were of that sort of thing, or if you came across a group, you were out on a particular mission you might locate and get back or whatever, it depended on the circumstances involved.

But with the contact, usually you didn't see a lot of people, it wasn't as though you walked up and saw a group of twenty or fifty or something of that nature; either some of yours would spy a group coming forward and you would open on them, or it would be the reverse, one or the other. Jungle warfare is very closed, very closed.

SR And what about when it actually comes to the crunch; did you have any difficulty with -

**O'CONNOR** Pulling the trigger?

SR Pulling the trigger.

**O'CONNOR** No, it was you or them, wasn't it? There was no hesitation at all there. I don't know any of our fellows that do because you know that you're there to be shot at and if you don't take some action well you finish up staying there. [laughs]

SR So over that period of time that you were there, how often would you be involved in the shooting?

**O'CONNOR** On manoeuvres?

SR Yes, on manoeuvres.

**O'CONNOR** Well sometimes you might go out every day, it depends on what the activity of the others. Sometimes you might only go out twice a week, but they were fairly regular, and as I say a lot of what we were doing.... We took over from the Americans. We had to go and force the Japanese back and we were moving in down that way, but there were a lot more of them there than there were of us. Probably we were fortunate the war finished when it did because we had them down near the southern part of the island and with their numbers, I think it was about five to one, we would've had a pretty hard time of the thing. We had better air support than they did, they in the finish had run out of air support. Most of their planes had been shot down, so we had much greater air support, which was very good, because planes were coming very low across the top of the trees and drop their bombs because they couldn't see them till they were right on them, and they'd be gone before they could fire a shot then, you know, and if we could locate where they were and give a location, well the planes could come in, and they didn't have that advantage on us.

There was one case up there where a fuzzy wuzzy group, that's the black people from Bougainville, surrounded a group of Japanese and sent in for air support, and this chap had been pretty good so they sent it out to him, and they'd climb the trees and they had their lap-laps, which is a sort of a towel sort of thing which they wrap around themselves, in the trees around and all our blokes had to do was come and bomb in between the trees there. So there were a lot of things like this occurred from time to time. We worked very closely with what we called the fuzzy wuzzies, at that time.

SR In what way? What sorts of things would you do with them?

**O'CONNOR** Oh well, often they'd go out on patrols with us and they knew the jungle country better than anyone and also through their network they'd often have information to where the Japanese were and help us in that regard, so they were very good.

SR How much of the bigger picture does a front line soldier get to see, the bigger picture of the strategic manoeuvres that are going on around the area that they are actually fighting in?

**O'CONNOR** Very little at all, you were mainly concerned with your own area. You take newspapers [which] was something you didn't see. We always got fed very well down in the front lines, you always got the best of food. You'd get fruit and steak and things such as that which back you didn't always get. But the information was very, very general. It would come through one of the officers there if you had anything, but you were mainly interested only in your own area, what you had to do and you knew what that was.

SR Were there any particular occasions of conspicuous bravery that come to mind when you think about those days?

**O'CONNOR** None specifically. There were some blues made at times. I have a recollection one night of landing on the south of Bougainville in a barge - we come in a barge - and we had to run in a hundred yards and dig in, and when we got in we were in water up our thighs, you know; they'd landed at the wrong place. There were things such as that that did occur. I think you could say that bravery was happening every day, but I haven't got any specific one. I mean the fact that a fellow is going out there and being shot at and standing up to whatever came, I think indicates the calibre of fellow we had there. While there are times you can sort out someone, I don't have a specific case of one.

SR What about occasions of capture? Were there any occasions in which you were able to capture any of the enemy?

**O'CONNOR** There was a case there where one of the fuzzy wuzzies got a Japanese off the river. He was washing his clothes, and he hit him on the head with a rifle and brought him back; he was interrogated. That was the only one I can recollect.

SR And were you able to get information from him?

**O'CONNOR** Not a great deal, no. Not over and above what we knew.

SR How did you go about interrogating a prisoner.

**O'CONNOR** Well, when you go through the intelligence course in Bathurst, New South Wales, they teach you a bit of Japanese, so you had the basics and you would try to interrogate him in that particular way. Not easy but that's how it was done.

SR So by questioning him in Japanese?

**O'CONNOR** Yeah.

SR What about persuasion?

**O'CONNOR** No.

SR How did you influence whether you'd get answered or not - how did you put pressure on them?

**O'CONNOR** There was never to my knowledge any excessive persuasion put on people by our own people. I never saw that. Let me say they didn't like them much, but I never saw any of that ever occur.

SR Now were there any other incidents or topics that you'd like to mention while the war was still on in Bougainville?

**O'CONNOR** I don't think there was much more. You see I was only there for 12 months, 18 months altogether, it wasn't a long period of time and they were generally general manoeuvres we were out on, as I've explained to you there.

SR And following the war you remained in the army - what was it you were doing?

**O'CONNOR** I was initially in Bougainville, down the Buin(?) Road there. We brought the Japanese in there and started building compounds for them to put them in. I was then asked if I'd like to go to Japan. I said "No". So I was sent over to Rabaul in New Britain, and we brought the Japanese in and got them to build compounds and put them in it there. So that's where I spent the rest of my time until they were rehabilitated back to Japan.

SR Why was it that you said you didn't want to go to Japan?

**O'CONNOR** I wanted to get home. I'd missed my family and if I went to Japan it would mean a two year job I believe. I was only young, even then, and I didn't have very many points and as it was I didn't get back till June 1946.

SR The points?

**O'CONNOR** The point system. They had a point system. If you were married you got extra points, your age gave you extra points, the number of children you had gave you extra points, if you had a job to come back to, and those sort of things. But a young chap like myself, say I had seventy points which meant that I had to wait probably till last because some of the fellows married with four kids and had been in there for four or five years, which was rightfully so, they might have had two-hundred-and-fifty points and therefore they'd go home and we'd have to wait on. So that's how they worked the system.

SR So you stayed on dealing with Japanese prisoners. Were there any problems or difficulties in bringing in prisoners?

**O'CONNOR** No, we never had any problems. One of the things that I recollect most vividly was when we went to Rapopo, just out of Rabaul; that's a bit around the coast - R A P O P O. We went over a hill and there's a valley down below and we heard someone call out "Oh the Aussies are here, I can tell them by their hats". It was a group of nuns who'd been running a mission in that valley and they had a lot of the fuzzy wuzzies in there with them. They were tunnelled into the side of the hills, and this is where they lived and that, and they related to us then about the Japanese fleet leaving Rabual and Rapopo to land in Sydney. The Japanese said "We're going to Syd-oni" was what they said they said, and they headed off, and the Americans caught them in the Coral Sea. And around that coastline then, I don't know whether you can now, there were the debris of planes, you could see masts of boats sticking out of the water and that sort of thing. The nuns told us how they'd see these ships coming back and some might be eight or ten mile out at sea, and they'd be sinking, and you could see the Japanese trying to swim ashore and things such as that. They dug into the side of the hill and brought out some cigars [laughs] and banana whiskey, which we had to sit and have there with them as a celebration for their release.

END OF TAPE TWO SIDE A

A further interview with Ray O'Connor on 8 August 1996.

SR Could we begin today with the post-war period. After the war, as you mentioned last time, you remained in New Britain for some time, then you returned to Perth still in the army.

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I arrived back in Perth in I think it was June 1946, and I was stationed at the Bushmead camp, which is just near Midland Junction. There was an army camp out there and I was in charge of the canteen. From there I used to travel to Perth to pick up stores from time to time. Positions as far as jobs were concerned weren't very easy in those days because of the large number of people coming back, and a fellow by the name of Reg Wright, who was manager of Coca-Cola, approached me when I was picking up stores one day and asked me would I work for them, so I took on a job at Coca-Cola. So that was my first post-war job.

SR But you'd already had some experience in catering, being in charge of the canteen; that's interesting because we'll come in a moment to talking about the tearooms.

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Well I think the fact that I was handling the stores out there, including the coke and that, I had a bit of experience and had for some little time probably convinced him with my dealings with them that I was probably the right guy for the job.

SR What rank in the army did you have at that stage?

**O'CONNOR** **Corporal**.

SR What was involved in your job in charge of the canteen?

**O'CONNOR** That was to provide all the stores, to pick them up, to open the canteen for the troops up there and to supply them, and to tally up and do your balance sheets etc, all that type of thing.

SR And was that experience that did stand you in good stead later?

**O'CONNOR** I think it did because, as I say, I went into a shop at a later stage and the experience I'd had there certainly stood me in good stead.

SR And what was the job with Coca-Cola?

**O'CONNOR** Initially I was there I was tallying out goods going out, coming in, like empty bottles in, full was out and also actually making the coke; I was using their prescriptions and making the coke up. So it was a bit of a mixture. Later on I became secretary there and then later transferred to another company.

SR So what sort scale of operations did Coca-Cola have in Perth in those days?

**O'CONNOR** Coca-Cola were really just starting up at that stage so their scale wasn't tremendously large. I can't remember the quantities we put out, but it was certainly at the catching up stage of the other drinks and the taking over. We used to bottle there for two or three days a week initially, we'd bottle for six or seven hours straight. It was obviously a product that was picking up and it increased as we were there.

SR How many people were working there at the time?

**O'CONNOR** At that time, including drivers on the road, I'd say there'd be about six or eight drivers on the road and there'd be about six working in the plant - say about a dozen.

SR And you had that dual role you mentioned. What was involved in the storekeeping side of it, the tallying?

**O'CONNOR** Well you had to do your stocktakes all the time and to make sure that your inwards and outwards tallied up properly, that you weren't losing stock and that type of thing. So that was a regular thing; as each truck came in you checked it in and out and then on your processing days you made sure the right ingredients went into the coke. So it was a bit of a mixed bag.

SR Were there any Coca-Cola secrets that you discovered during that time?

**O'CONNOR** Oh no. Their main ingredient came in in bottles from overseas or from the Eastern States - I think it was from overseas, actually - and so we just knew how much ingredient, how much sugar and how much other products to put in the vat.

SR How did that job develop as you remained in it, before you moved onto the next job? Did your role there change?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I became secretary of the company there and then....

SR What was involved in that?

**O'CONNOR** Well that was in connection with the books. You made sure the books were written up each day and you were overseer of plant operations and that. There was a plant manager there but you were there to oversee the financial aspects of it and that.

SR And was it at this stage, or before or after this, that you took your accountancy studies?

**O'CONNOR** During. I was doing that of a night time.

SR Can you tell me a bit about that, about studying at night?

**O'CONNOR** Yeah, um, pretty hard in those days because I'd been away overseas for a couple of years, and just coming back I needed to try to boost myself along a bit, so I'd work during the day time - I'd knock off usually about six at night, and then go to study from six till about nine, when most young people that age like to be going out, and I used to do that three or four nights a week, then you'd be back at work early next morning. So I suppose it was one of the things you had to settle down and do, which a lot of other people did at the time if you wanted to get on.

SR And how long were you studying?

**O'CONNOR** Three years.

SR What qualification did you -

O'CONNOR I didn't finish the work. I took over a job as an accountant which took up more time, and I didn't finish the course. I finished the first two or three years of it and I didn't complete the rest of it then.

SR What were some of the most useful things that you learnt in those studies?

O'CONNOR Oh the issue of figures. When you're handling figures all the time - see I was credit manager of Nicholson's and 6PR at the time, and when you're handling figures all the time you become very adept at it; you can add, subtract and that, extremely quickly, without using a computer or anything of that nature - we did in those days and I found when I got into Parliament that was extremely good for me there, because I found that most people there weren't good at figures and often quoted without really knowing, and you could pick up straightaway where they were wrong and come back very quickly and in that vein they were very good to me - the figures and the accounting that I learnt during those years.

SR And some of the work at Coca-Cola also involved you moving into the role of credit officer I believe, is that right?

O'CONNOR No, that was at Nicholson's.

SR That was at Nicholson's, okay, fine. When was it that you moved to Nicholson's from Coca-Cola?

O'CONNOR If you turn that off for just a second I'll tell you.

SR Just before we move to Nicholson's, is there anything else about Coca-Cola?

O'CONNOR I remember once in the early days there - something you couldn't do today - we put through a small batch of rum and coke and bottled it for ourselves [laughs].

SR Yes, the move to Nicholson's, when was that?

O'CONNOR In 1952 I moved to Nicholson's. I took over in the accounts there and became credit manager for Nicholson's and 6PR; they were combined in those days.

SR What was involved in your role as credit manager?

O'CONNOR Well the company imported electrical, radios, Kelvinators, all those sort of things, and had the agencies here in the State for them and also had 6PR. My job was in charge of all accounts, making sure that those that went out went to creditable people, that we would ensure the returns from them, and allowing credit or disallowing it. Every credit account or everything that came through came to me and either approved or disapproved it as it went through.

SR How did you go about checking people's credit in those days?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, some of them had a rating from previous dealings with the company. See **Nicholsons** handled agencies right round the State. They supplied electrical goods. There weren't the large number of firms dealing with it in those days so many of them had credit ratings. If they didn't, well we would get some sort of bank indication of how they had been and back it up with other information that we were able to obtain.

SR And what sort of information?

**O'CONNOR** Well, who they dealt with previously, or any previous experience or dealings they'd had, and then if you had any doubts they'd probably get limited credit initially until you - they'd had some sort of back-up on it.

SR And what about people's payment? Did people generally keep up their payment? I mean, having assessed them first did they generally manage to meet their payments or were there people who had problems?

**O'CONNOR** No, we found they were generally pretty good. The ones that we found were probably the worst of them at that stage was say in the musical instruments section. Someone would buy it on time payment and then disappear, and you'd then have to find those people and either repossess or get the money from them, but they were probably the ones that caused us the most problems.

SR And how did you go about dealing with default?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you would find out where the people were. I'd get somebody to go out, call on them, and either pick up the money or the goods, bring it back. If it was a secondhand violin or something, you'd resell it. But that was probably the area most of concern, was the musical instrument. Of course those sort of people often move from place to place and you had to then relocate them.

SR And I guess have unstable income?

**O'CONNOR** Often, yes.

SR What about the radio station part of it? Were you also involved in dealing with their customers and the credit, people purchasing air time, and so on?

**O'CONNOR** No, generally speaking not, because they were in a different category. I handled all the goods and the movements of goods or people who purchased goods. The radio section was run by a different group - I just can't think of the name of the manager at that time - and they had their own section there.

SR Did you have staff that you were responsible for?

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR How many staff?

**O'CONNOR** Probably half a dozen at that stage.

SR And what sorts of things were they doing?

**O'CONNOR** They would check all the invoices and that type of thing; check the totals, the adding up and all the.... in those days you didn't have the computers or the equipment that you have today for it, and these were done mostly by head.

SR And how would you describe your.... Sorry, perhaps I should ask first, was this the first time that you had responsibility for staff?

**O'CONNOR** Really yes, yes.

SR How would you describe your management style, they way you dealt with staff in those days?

**O'CONNOR** I was pretty close to most of them. I felt that if you had cooperation from them you did better than trying to push them around, and you knew after a short while the capabilities of each of the staff, what they were able to handle, and you juggled them according to that. I got on very well with them. As a matter of fact, Nicholson's probably had I suppose eighty or ninety employees at that stage, which was a fairly big place. They were in Barrack Street in the centre of Perth and I set up a social club there. I was president of that for a while so I got to know the people and got on pretty well with them. Did it more by cooperation than any other way, I suppose.

SR And did you enjoy working there?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I did. Wherever I worked I did enjoy it or I wouldn't have stayed. I naturally looked towards getting on a bit myself and to moving from a place if I could get a better position with another, providing I was satisfied that the place would suit me.

SR We've been looking at your work career, but there were changes in your social situation too, through that period. Where were you living when you first came out of the army?

**O'CONNOR** Living in Windsor Street, East Perth. We went there and then....

SR When you say "we"?

**O'CONNOR** I lived with my family again - my mother, father, brothers and sisters. We lived there and then we moved to 19 Almondbury Road in Mt Lawley and that was when I worked in the latter years, probably at Nicholson's, and then when I took over as accountant for R.J. Sharpe, which was another electrical retail and wholesaler. We were living there at that address.

SR And it was during that period also that you met your first wife, was it, or was that earlier?

**O'CONNOR** I met her just after I came back from the war, that's in '46, and we married in 1950.

SR What would you like to record in relation to your first wife and your courtship and lead-up to marriage?

**O'CONNOR** We met at a dance at the Town Hall. The Town Hall used to have a dance every Saturday night, and we met at various dances around town and

started going out together. We married in '50, we had two children, born in 1952 and '54, I think it was - Craig's 44, yes - born in '54 and '56 it was. Craig was born in 1954, Lance in 1956.

At that time we'd purchased our own house. I then had a tearooms in Forrest Place and we were living at 232 Ninth Avenue, Inglewood, in the house that we were purchasing at that time. We had quite a good life. We used to get away on holidays often; did a lot of fishing and we'd camp up on the beach, myself, the wife and the two children, and we had a pretty good run in that particular regard.

SR Any particular spots you used to....

**O'CONNOR** Yes we used to fish about 25 mile north of Lancelin. There were no roads through in those days and we actually started putting the track through that's now the road up there through the tombstones. What we used to do, we'd take toilet rolls with us and you'd get through and you'd knock rocks down and break a way through and you'd put toilet rolls on the trees so you could find your way back again. Sometimes the last 13 mile would take us say two, two and a half hours to get through there in those early days. So it was very remote but very good fishing and I recollect one day catching eleven sharks off the beach on one day; we caught a dozen flathead weighing up to eight pound, which was very big for those, and we'd catch snapper off the beach up to thirty five pound there and also tailor to sixteen pound. So the fishing in those days - it was a remote area, people couldn't normally get in - fishing was extremely good. We walked up to our waist one day with a net and pulled in 500 sea mullet. You don't see that sort of thing happen much today.

SR What could you do with that many fish?

**O'CONNOR** We brought them back and gave them away. But they're beautiful eating when they're fresh like that, on the beach with a barbecue and the mullet just.... you cooked them up with their skin because they have a lot of oil in them and they were absolutely magnificent that way; the skin just peels off and you got the lovely meat.

SR The biographical register mentions two sons and one daughter.

**O'CONNOR** Yes we adopted a daughter when she was about five years of age. She was the same age as Lance, who was the youngest of the two boys. We used to take children home from the orphanage and keep them home over weekends and this one fitted in very well. The family had broken up so we made an approach and adopted her.

SR Could you tell me a little more about bringing children home? What led to your concern for those children?

**O'CONNOR** Oh well you know there was St Joseph's Orphanage in Subiaco. We struck some people who were taking a child home and we thought we'd do one ourselves to help them a bit and to give them a bit of home life. We used to do that with several of them from time to time; take them home on Fridays, drop them back on Sunday afternoon to the orphanage. And Jenny fitted in with the boys very well, obviously enjoyed being there, so we brought her home several times, tried her out over a period of time and then we thought she could fit in with the family and give her a better lifestyle, so we made the approach and eventually adopted her.

SR And how did that work out?

**O'CONNOR** Quite good, we had no problems with her. Jenny's just living up in Warwick, not far from here, and we see her from time to time.

SR What about the other children that you had home on the weekends? What sorts of backgrounds did they have and what kinds of problems arising out of being orphans or children who were in an institution?

**O'CONNOR** Most of them had unstable family backgrounds and I think that probably applies today. One of the other girls we took home was Jenny's sister and one of our friends finished up adopting her, so there's another one of the family. There were eight children in that family, and another one, Rose, was adopted by some people who were friends of ours, and that worked out quite well, too. But to answer your question, most of them were from unstable backgrounds or marriages that hadn't worked or from de factos, things such as that. But most of them, I think given the opportunity, would turn out all right, as Jenny did.

SR Was your interest in these children associated with the Church at all?

**O'CONNOR** Not really, no, it's just something that we thought we would do for the community at that stage and, as I say, it worked out all right.

SR I noticed that you were married in the Catholic Church. Had you maintained your faith and your involvement with the Church post-war?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, oh yes, we regularly went to church. We used to go every Sunday and that was something our family had learnt to do and taught us and we carried on with it.

SR What part did the Church play then in your life?

**O'CONNOR** In the early stages, quite a bit, because we stuck very strictly to the rules the Church taught. Later on in life I disagreed with a lot of the views they had politically and....

SR When you say "later on in life", at what stage are we seeing this change?

**O'CONNOR** Probably when I went into politics, around that time, and when the Uniting Churches started moving in and things such as that, I believe that they had lost the track of what they were there for and they were involving in other areas, a lot of which I didn't agree with and that's when I virtually abandoned the Church.

SR Did you abandon the Catholic Church?

**O'CONNOR** All churches.

SR All churches?

**O'CONNOR** From my point of view I thought most of them were pretty well tarred with the same brush, and the Uniting Churches, I think they were all involved with that, and a lot of the decisions they make seem to go through that area.

SR When you say "tarred with the same brush" what brush is that?

**O'CONNOR** Well they make decisions together, that's what I'm saying. You find that the decisions of the Uniting Church are often expressed as the view of the lot of them. Many of the things that they were doing I thought were not in track with what they were there for.

SR Were there particular clergy in Perth that were vocal whose views that you fell out with?

**O'CONNOR** I think most of them. [laughs] I don't think there was any particular one. But no, there wasn't any particular one, and it wasn't only the Catholic Church.

SR I'm wondering about this because there is an impression of the Catholic Church, through the fifties, of being very conservative and particularly strongly anti-Communist, we have the Santamarias and so on....

**O'CONNOR** That wasn't the stage, it was after that stage that I.... I've probably jumped ahead of you a bit. No, I supported them strongly in the anti-Communistic attitude, and you're talking about the times of the DLP and things such as that. Yes, I didn't abandon them at that stage, it was later than that that I became disenchanted with them, I suppose is the right way to put it.

SR So what were the other influences on your life? We talked a little bit about the Church, but other sorts of interests and influences were there?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I always took a great interest in sport and participated in a lot of sport - athletics, as you know.

SR Yes, could we talk a little about your sporting involvement post-war then.

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Well, just pre-war I think I mentioned to you the athletics I took part in and the events that I represented us here in. After the war, with my brother Brian, who was only eleven months younger than myself, we both went to East Perth and played for them. Brian, while I was away, was playing with Central Districts Football Club here and we were always very close together so we both went and we played for East Perth from when I got back in 1946 through until 1952. I initially played in the seconds and played some league games and some seconds. I was runner-up in the State award in the seconds one year, and won it the next. After I left league football - I left in 1952 because I went into a tearooms in Forrest Place - the following year I didn't train that year but I played A grade amateurs and won the State award for that. So football was something I loved and played really from 1943 through till about 1955 and then I started to get a bit old for it, I guess, and pulled out. Also, the tearooms I had in Forrest Place I was working there about eighty hours a week. I used to get there at six in the morning and work till eleven at night because they used to stay open until after the pictures were over.

SR We'll come to that a little more in a moment.

**O'CONNOR** Right.

SR What about social life? You mentioned during the period that you were studying accountancy that it was a little inhibited, at least three or four nights a week. What other forms of social life were you involved in in those days?

**O'CONNOR** Mostly dancing. We'd always have one or two nights - usually Thursday and Saturday nights we'd go dancing to the Embassy Ballroom or to the Town Hall, or there was also a dance at Leederville Town Hall we used to go to, and a further one at the RSL, which is down in St George's Terrace. So I suppose dancing was the main one apart from work and accountancy.

SR Well let's move on then to decision to go into business. Was this directly from Nicholson's, or was there one other position before that?

**O'CONNOR** No, Ray J. Sharpe's. I mentioned that to you because they were a retailer and wholesaler of radio and electrical equipment.

SR So in a similar business to Nicholson's.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR Was it a similar position as well?

**O'CONNOR** I was accountant there, yes. I was credit manager at Nicholson's; I was accountant at Ray J. Sharpe's. From there on I had an approach from two men who wanted.... I was looking around for something to go out on my own and two chaps - a fellow by the name of Arthur Taylor and Stan Huggins, who were in real estate - approached me and asked me would I take on the Beehive Tearooms, which was more than what I wanted to pay for a business at that time, but they had said that they would go in with me, and wanted me to run it.

At that time I was living in a house in Emmerson Street, North Perth. It's a house that I bought - £850 was the price of the house - and I'd saved up money from my deferred pay during the army, and I'm also a typist, so when I was away in the Army I used to type the records for the bookies up there and get some extra money that way. So I had a deposit and put that down on the house and then it was in pretty poor condition so when I got home from night school of a night I used to work on the house doing it up. Sometimes I'd work right through the night on a Friday night, right through till Saturday. Eventually I did it up and later on sold it. I think I sold it for £2 750 and put that down on another house. But at that time a lot of people probably didn't know but when you came back from the war if you'd bought a house and someone was living in it, you couldn't get them out of the house, and I was some two years before I could get occupancy of that house. [laughs] I don't know whether I've deviated now from what we were....

SR Your mention of making extra money while you were in the army leads me to ask about other income during the period of your employment with Coca-Cola, then Nicholson's and Sharpe's. Did you have other forms of income at that time?

**O'CONNOR** No, no, they were the only incomes I had. I think the wage in those days was about £13 a week, which was about $26. It might have gone up to about £17 or £18 by the time I'd finished at Ray Sharpe's or whatever, but when I went into the tearooms the figure there that I was earning was close up to £100 a week, which was a substantial amount of money in those days.

END OF TAPE TWO SIDE B

SR During that period post war, before starting in your own business, did you have any involvement with the racing industry at all?

**O'CONNOR** My father did. He kept on having a horse every now and again. I can recollect him going to the sales promising Mum he wouldn't buy a horse and, sure enough, one arrived up in the backyard. You can imagine, with Mum's washing on the line and the horse galloping around the backyard, the mess that it would make, but she was a very tolerant sort of person. And at that stage he bought a horse called Bergio. I think it won about 28 races here altogether, it was a very good horse trained by a well-known trainer, Albert Jordan. It won a couple of good races, one cup; I just can't think what it was offhand, but it was quite a good horse. I used to go to the races with him now and again but my interest was very small and I didn't have much time to have an interest in them at that stage.

SR And betting at that stage?

**O'CONNOR** No, I was never a big punter anyhow. I had a couple of good wins but with small outlays.

SR Coming back into your decision to go into your own business, what was the arrangement with your partners when you went into the business?

**O'CONNOR** It was on the basis that they got so much a week and I was paid a fee plus a percentage. In other words, I got a figure of say £50 a week for running the place and we each got £50 a week profit out of it. It was on about that basis. So I finished getting about £100 a week.

SR Can you tell me a bit about the Beehive Tearooms. What sort of place was it when you went into it?

**O'CONNOR** It had always been a very good business there. You'd have around, on a good day, say, a thousand clients in a very small shop. It only had about a 12 foot frontage, but you were in Forrest Place opposite the Post Office and just opposite the railway station. We had a big movement of people going through, and it had an enormous turnover and a good profitable sale from pies, sandwiches, that type of thing. It was a very good business before I took it over, and it maintained that right through.

SR What about staff? How many staff did it take to run that business?

**O'CONNOR** About six. We used to have two or three out in the kitchen and one in the dining room full-time (there were only about eight tables in the dining room) and then the others would be serving behind the counter. But we would get in there at six in the morning and start getting ready for the rush at lunch time, and making stuff up. You'd go through a thousand rounds of sandwiches, five hundred pies without any trouble, that sort of thing. It was a very good business.

SR So a substantial part of that business, was that takeaway, or people walked in?

**O'CONNOR** Mostly takeaway. You take, for instance, on Easter Friday for the weekend we'd sell hundreds of dozens of hot cross buns. We'd just have them keep on bringing them in there because we couldn't fit enough in the windows and that for it. It was a very very busy business.

SR What was your actual role? What did you physically do during the day in running the business?

**O'CONNOR** Everything.[laughs] I'd go in there, I'd unload the goods of a morning, I'd help make up sandwiches, I'd work on the counter selling, whatever. You didn't have room in there - it was only a very small shop - for anyone that wasn't active. It was a very busy shop and you did whatever was required at whatever time of the day. But, see, you'd have your regulars each day and you'd have the stuff made up for your regulars, and as soon as they walked through the door you'd know them, hand it to them, and save them waiting, you know. So it was essential to have people there who knew people, who knew who was coming and what they wanted, and you'd have it ready for them to save them waiting, which was important.

SR So did you have a stable staff situation there?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes, a very stable staff situation.

SR And did your wife also help in the business?

**O'CONNOR** No, she had young children at that time and so.... My mother and my aunt used to help sometimes of an evening because we opened at six in the morning and we'd stay open till ten past eleven at night. The pictures used to finish at about eleven, so they would give me a hand there of a night and then they'd run it on Sundays for me to give me a day off.

SR So it was actually open seven days a week?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. It was open every day.

SR Did you have any opportunity to do anything else during that period of time?

**O'CONNOR** No, not really, no. I was full-time occupied in trying to earn a living, pay a house off and that sort of thing, you know, so no, it was full time.

SR How did you develop the sorts of interests that were to take you into politics later?

**O'CONNOR** Really I didn't, until I got in there. It was my father came to me one day and said, "Look, I think you could win a seat in Parliament." He wasn't a wealthy man or anything, he said, "I'll pay half your expenses if you have a go," and I said, "I don't even know where Parliament House is!" And he convinced me to have a go, and that's when I stood as an Independent. I got extremely good figures and that's when the Liberal Party approached me and I stood for North Perth and won that for them. So, that was the area and my father was the one that encouraged me.

SR Why was it that he encouraged you?

**O'CONNOR** It was during the Evatt regime; he was worried about communistic takeover of the country and things such as that, which he didn't like. He'd been a very strong Labor advocate and he'd formed Labor Party branches in places such as Quairading, and he'd become worried about the track they were taking and it was him that encouraged me to stand for the Liberals.

SR And did he join the DLP?

**O'CONNOR** No.

SR So what did he do when the Labor Party was splitting up?

**O'CONNOR** What year was that, do you remember, Stuart? You've got me on that year, but I remember that when I joined the Liberal Party he came along and joined and was supportive of me there, and fortunately he lived long enough to see me become a minister, which I was very grateful for.

SR What were the sorts of issues then that you campaigned on in your first attempt to gain election as an Independent in the Legislative Council?

**O'CONNOR** There was talk of abolishing the upper House, and I stood for the Council on that one, that was the upper House, and I did it on the policy of "don't abolish the Council, rejuvenate it, get some younger people in". That was the sort of attitude we took, and of course I was only in my thirties, 35 or something like that; that was '56 and I was born in '26, yes, about **30**. Whether that had the desired effect I don't know, but the votes were very good.

SR So how did you go about campaigning for that election?

**O'CONNOR** We did all the old street-corner meetings and that sort of thing. I'd never spoken before and I can remember speaking at the Knutford Arms Hotel out in front of it on a soap box there, the first time ever, and I could feel the shakes in my own voice coming back over the microphone. But I had some very good supporters who went out and helped me, so we went round to as many places as we could. Bear in mind I was still working and that took up a fair bit of my time, but we did all the old soap box things and that type of thing that were prevalent in those days.

SR And you mentioned the rejuvenation of the upper House as one of the issues that you campaigned on. What other sorts of issues did you take a stand on then?

**O'CONNOR** I was firm on support for law and order in those days, and also job opportunities was another thing that was fairly to the fore in those days. But they were things that most of the parties took up anyhow.

SR What kind of response did you get on your soap box?

**O'CONNOR** Pretty good. You'd get a few catcallers there from opposition parties, whether they'd be Liberal or the Labor Party, and in those days with the lack of knowledge I had it was pretty difficult to handle some of them because I had had virtually no experience in politics at that stage and I was only just starting to learn it.

SR What were the things that you learnt from your early experience of public speaking?

**O'CONNOR** I learnt that you had to be quick at coming back with a response. If you hit the bloke straightaway, and this was so in Parliament too, but you had to know what you were talking about, you had to know your subject and you had to come back straightaway. They were probably the main things I learnt at that stage.

SR How did you finance the campaign?

**O'CONNOR** My father financed part of it and I did the rest of it, that's on the initial campaign as an Independent. No other funds came in apart from that.

SR And how expensive was it? How much did it cost to run that campaign?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, it wasn't very expensive. I didn't spend a lot of money. It would have been less than £500 - pounds in those days.

SR So £500?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, it would have been less than that; it wouldn't have been that much.

SR Yes. And what about advertising - what sorts of advertising did you use?

**O'CONNOR** Pamphlet form was the only form of advertising that I did use at that time.

SR So nothing in the newspapers?

**O'CONNOR** No.

SR Was it possible to get coverage in the newspapers, editorial coverage in the newspapers for the issues that you were bringing up?

**O'CONNOR** I don't recollect ever having done so, no.

SR So the election itself, can you reflect a little on your experience of your first election day?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. We got out and manned all the booths. We had enough friends and supporters who came out and manned all the booths around, and we got out early in the morning and put stickers out round the booths so that our name was up around there. We had some on cars, on the side of cars, we'd had some canvas signs made up, and we matched up pretty well, considering!

SR Were there any other ways in which your name would have been in the public mind or would have come to public attention before that that would have helped your campaign?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, the athletic events that I did, and also football; I'm sure that that helped me a lot because a lot of the football groups supported me at that particular stage.

SR So was that then prominent in your pamphlets and election material?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, the election material had the details of my war service, my marital position and my sporting activities, yes.

SR I haven't seen the figures, but how close did you actually come to getting elected?

**O'CONNOR** I can't recollect the figures offhand, but I performed much better than any Independents I believe had done at that stage. I did extremely well, and if I'd have got in front of one of the other parties I would have won the election with the [inaudible]. I got up pretty close. I haven't got the figures offhand but they were quite good figures.

SR And it was that, then, that led to you being approached. Can you talk a little bit about the approach from the Liberal Party?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. The approach from the Liberal Party came through the Leader of the upper House in the Legislative Council, Keith Watson, who was a very well-known parliamentarian and a very well respected one, and he approached me regarding joining the party. He said that if I wanted to win a seat it was very difficult in those days to do it without a party behind you, so I joined the North Perth branch of the party and eventually stood for that seat.

SR Can you tell me a bit about the party at that time, the local branches and so on. Could we get a picture of what that was like?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. The branches weren't very big in those days. The North Perth branch would have probably had 20 people in it, I suppose, or something of that nature, and you had a district.... Mt Lawley was also a branch in that area and I did later on join the Mt Lawley branch as well. You were allowed to be a member of two branches, and Mt Lawley was a stronger branch for the Liberal Party. At that time Mt Lawley was a fairly elite sort of area, and it had people such as Ric and Jerry New and the Schaffers from the brick company here, and those that were members of that particular branch. Ric New and Jerry were the owners of Midland Brick.

SR And what were the things that were of concern, were issues for local branches of the Liberal Party at that time?

**O'CONNOR** They used to have pretty good meetings and all issues were discussed, like where the party was heading, where they had differences of opinion they would put into head office their views and I suppose much on the same lines as they do today, but they were pretty well listened to, and the stalwarts there were very strong. You'd find the same ones at every meeting each week and some of them who had no financial gain or no interest in standing for Parliament or anything of that nature, but there were some very good members there.

SR Any particular ones?

**O'CONNOR** I'd prefer not to mention any because there are a lot of them that....

SR You'd leave the others out.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR So how did you come to be chosen then to stand as a candidate for the Liberal Party in North Perth initially?

**O'CONNOR** There was a selection committee. They called for nominations and myself and four other people nominated. When it was finalised, I won the endorsement. One of the candidates claimed there was one person on the selection committee who should not have been, and it was rerun again, so we had to have a second run, and I won it again on the second time. That was for the seat of North Perth. It had been a Labor seat ever since it had been initiated. It had never been won by the Liberals. That was in 1959. I did a house-to-house canvass; I took time off work and called every house in the electorate. It took me three months to do that. We had a very substantial swing, I think it was about 15 per cent, and we won it from a fellow by the name of Stan Lapham who I knew and who was quite a good fellow but was on the opposite side of the fence at that stage.

My campaign director at that time was Ric New. He was a good supporter and he got behind me, and him and his family were absolutely wonderful in the support they gave.

SR How was it different campaigning with the Liberal Party behind you compared to being an Independent?

**O'CONNOR** Much easier. You had people who went out and put signs up for you and that sort of thing, whereas when it was my own I had to supervise the whole lot myself apart from trying to handle the day-to-day operations. So it was much easier and much more support in there.

SR Was there also more coverage from the media?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, there was much more coverage then in the '59 election. I think I was more or less a backroom boy in the first one. But that was one, by the way, which we won by one seat, and David Brand became Premier at that particular time.

SR Which would have made your achievement in winning a seat that had never been won by the Liberals before all the more significant, I would imagine.

**O'CONNOR** Very important, yes, and the efforts of trying to hold it the next time [laughs] were just as important. But, yes, it was, it was really considered a seat we couldn't win, and we did get up and won it fairly comfortably.

SR So what was your experience of the first Parliament that you went into?

**O'CONNOR** A little bit scary, I guess. I went in there and, not knowing the rules and regulations, you had to sit down and find out how the order of the House proceeded and to make sure you complied with that. And also then getting yourself into line whereby you were competent enough to handle legislation or to combat legislation put up by other people.

So I believed that to do that I should settle down to two things that I knew pretty well and work on them, which I did: I worked on police and housing.

I remember sitting up at the beach shack, or the beach tent we had. It was a tent on the beach because there were no shacks up there at that time, and I'd sit on the beach there fishing every day with a copy of the Police Act in my hand, going through it, revising it and altering it because much of it was outmoded and outdated in those days, then coming back and making recommendations to the party room and others regarding alterations to it. I did a lot of work on that, and Housing, and eventually when I got a portfolio in '65 I got Transport, so I had to revise what I knew, or to start studying rather, in the other area.

SR Can I just take you back to getting to know the order of the House and how things worked there? How did you get to know, and were there people to offer advice and assistance in the Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, there were. There were the Clerks of the House and that and they would advise you, but also there were members who'd been there previously, like Ross Hutchinson and Charlie Court and people such as those. If you wanted to know anything they would tell you, and by watching carefully the procedure you would gradually learn what you could and couldn't do. I've seen people jump up and try to do things, speak at times when they weren't able to. I didn't want to be caught in that regard, so what we did was by viewing what went on, by asking questions about anything that you wanted to know, either from the Speaker, the Clerks of the Chamber, or from the members of Parliament.

SR What were your initial impressions of the people in Parliament, the leaders and the personalities in the Parliament at the time?

**O'CONNOR** My impressions were that they were a bit petty at times in issues they took up and the way they went about things instead of getting down to grips on issues. At that time, prior to me going in the previous election, Bert Hawke was the Premier who was a Labor man, a very good debater There was Herbie Graham and John Tonkin who were Labor Party members were also extremely good debaters. So, I learned from the early stages that if you didn't know your subject well you'd get picked to pieces. If you got up and knew your subject well, did a lot of study on it, you could answer any questions and beat anyone there on the floor of the House on the issues, and so it taught me in the early stages that you had to study if you wanted to get anywhere on them.

SR What about the leadership on your own side, Sir David Brand?

**O'CONNOR** Probably, in my opinion, the best Premier the State has ever seen. He was a great man, David Brand. He was a very caring person. I sat for a number of years in Cabinet with him, and he was the sort of guy that I've seen push through legislation that helped 99 per cent of the people and he worried like crazy about the one per cent that he had affected adversely. He cared about everyone and was absolutely a great man apart from being a good politician. I had the greatest admiration for him. He could bring a group together, he could debate, he was comforting to the people on his own side and where there were differences of opinion he was great at bringing them together, a great coordinator in that way.

SR Did he have a strong ideological position himself?

**O'CONNOR** When it needed to be, absolutely. He wasn't one that would run pig-headed into anything or anything of that nature, but he had his views and he would express them. He'd been away in the army, he was a chap who was shot in the chest in World War II, so he knew men, and he was rehabilitated back. He was a farmer; a very normal, natural sort of person.

SR What were his leadership qualities?

**O'CONNOR** Extremely good. He was very good, he never led you into a pit that had a hole in it or anything of that nature. He always studied what he did before he went into it, but had the ability to get people to follow him, great ability in that regard, a good leader.

SR Could you give us an impression of his style in the party room in that first period of politics?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, he was the sort of guy that would get up there and let everyone put over their own view. He would listen to them all before expressing what he thought. He would take into account what anyone said. When he made a decision he was usually very firm on it and that was where we went, but he was a good leader and a good listener.

SR And what about his style on the floor of the House?

**O'CONNOR** David wasn't the best debater in the House by any means. He was a good debater but you wouldn't put him in the top half dozen there or anything of that nature. But he always did a lot of work on what he brought forward and was always pretty sound. He was the same in Parliament as in the party room. If the Opposition put up a good proposition he wasn't one that would turn his back on it; he would listen and if necessary alter it accordingly.

SR What about the preparedness of the party at that stage for government? You've indicated that you as a new member were not particularly well prepared.

**O'CONNOR** [Laughter] No, I wasn't prepared! You had people like Charles Court, Ross Hutchinson, Dave Brand, who'd had a tremendous amount of experience in Parliament. They had been there under Ross McLarty, some of them, when he was Premier, then Bert Hawke was in for three years, so they'd been through those periods. We had some fairly good people in that regard: there was Stewart Bovell, who was one of the old-timers from Busselton (Stewart is still alive; I think he is in his nineties at the moment); Gerry Wild was another Minister. But there was a fair bit of experience in that particular regard, yes.

SR And was it a period of substantial change in government, there being a change from the previous three years of Labor to Liberal, or was it pretty much a continuity as far as government was concerned in those days?

**O'CONNOR** No, it was a period where there was a great deal of change in industrialisation. David Brand was one that set up the BP refinery at Kwinana which was one of the initial operations back there. This is when the mining started in the north. I remember going up and seeing the first ore train go through in about 1965. The Liberal Government got in in '59 and there was a great movement in the north of the State in iron ore and things such as that and there was a great move in industrial development generally in the State. So I would say that Sir David had a lot to do with that.

SR What about relations between the Government and the bureaucracy in those days?

**O'CONNOR** I thought it was pretty good. Certainly in the departments that I handled I found no problem there at all. You take it for instance when I was in charge of Main Roads, you had Don Aitken and Albert Tognolini were the leaders in that area. They were always forceful in giving their views of what should occur and if government or Parliament or the minister decided otherwise they did their utmost to cooperate in the way in which they put it together. We had many issues which I'll cover later on that were of interest at that time, but I found the departmental heads, or the bureaucracy as you refer to them, as pretty cooperative and I don't recollect having difficulty with them changing from one government to another. This changed in later years where, during the Burke regime, a lot of ALP supporters were put into major posts. I had eighteen portfolios in total when I was in the ministry and I don't ever recollect a departmental head being put there for political reasons - I'm talking about by the ALP or by the Liberal Party - and I don't recollect having any problem with any of those departmental heads as far as handling of legislation or arrangements were concerned.

SR What about as a new parliamentarian? Did you have access to departmental heads or others when you were working on a piece of legislation or you wanted information?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, we did. You would naturally approach the minister beforehand to get approval and that, and the minister would always get people to talk to the departmental head on particular issues. But, yes, we often spoke to departmental heads when we were arranging.... although when you're in government you're not so much as arranging legislation or putting up legislation yourself as helping the minister with it. You'd chase things up and probably be a help to him or a backup to him when he was presenting his legislation.

END OF TAPE THREE SIDE A

SR You've mentioned your initial interests as being in the areas of police and housing. What were the problems that you saw with the Police Act at that time?

**O'CONNOR** It was terribly outdated. You had a lot of obsolete wording in the Act itself that should have been deleted and brought more up to date. You had different sorts of crimes happening after the war than before it.

SR In what way?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you started to get the breaking and entering to a greater degree and the car thefts and that sort of thing which you'd never seen before. Probably not many people knew how to drive a car before let alone to thieve one. Also armed holdups were something that were very little known of them here before 1964, so you had all these sort of things that were coming about. But also there was lots of stuff in the legislation, wording where "tramps and vagabonds" were referred to and hotels had to have hitching rails to hitch the horses up to (this was in legislation) and there were things such as that. It was very obsolete so what I did, I went through it all and recommended substantial changes to the minister at that time which many of them were carried out to try to update it.

SR So how receptive was the minister to the sorts of suggestions you were making?

**O'CONNOR** Very much so. Jim Craig was the minister at that particular time. He was a Country Party minister.

SR And what was the attitude of the police to changes in the Police Act?

**O'CONNOR** Well, what I did at that time, I went and spoke to the police as well about it and let them see what I was trying to do, and they felt also that alterations had to be made.

SR And what was the view of the Opposition about this?

**O'CONNOR** We're going back, what, forty years [laughs]. As I recollect I think it was pretty cooperative. It was mostly legislation that everyone realised should have been done before and it was time it was done. My recollection was that it went through fairly smoothly.

SR And what about in the areas of housing? What was your particular interest in housing?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I was the first director or one of the first directors on the initial board of Town and Country terminating building societies. That was with Jim McCusker, or Sir James McCusker as you know of him; Arthur Taylor; and there were two others at the time; Dan O'Sullivan, [and ?]. We set up the first ever terminating building society in the State to bring together a number of people in an area whereby we could try to get them into cheaper homes on new ground and we started this at Thornlie in some land that Dan O'Sullivan bought out there. So I had a fair bit of experience in the setting up of that and the financing and the arrangements, and that's why I took an initial interest in housing when I went into Parliament.

SR That's a topic that we've kind of missed on the way through, so perhaps we should cover it here.

**O'CONNOR** Sure.

SR Your involvement with the Town and Country Building Society, where did that start from?

**O'CONNOR** About 1960. I can't give you the exact date but approximately 1960 is when we started that.

SR So you were already in Parliament.

**O'CONNOR** No, it was before that. It must have been about 1958. I'm sorry, it must have been about 1958 because I started before I went into Parliament and when I became a minister in 1965 I withdrew from it because I thought it would interfere with, or people would accuse me of having views, assisting a company if certain legislation went through on the Building Societies Act or anything of that nature, so because of that I withdrew from the society, from the board.

SR But in the initial stages what were the aims of the society as it got started?

**O'CONNOR** To try to set up operations whereby people could get into cheaper housing. See, after the war the housing industry was a bit behind and had to be caught up. What we were trying to do was to get people into houses at a cheaper rate whereby they could finish up paying for them at an earlier stage, and that was when Town and Country initially started.

SR And was this seen also as a market opportunity, a money-making commercial exercise or what?

**O'CONNOR** In the terminating societies the profits went back to the home purchasers, so that's why it was terminating. The profits went in, the money reinvested if they were in front, and they finished paying the homes much before, in many cases, they thought they would, so it was mainly for the benefit of the home purchaser.

SR So what was in it for the director?

**O'CONNOR** Well, some of the land was.... from a director's point of view only the thrill of being involved in it. There was no directors' fees or anything paid like that to them at that stage, so it was done free, gratis.

SR You mentioned previously a director having some of the land that was developed so was there involvement there?

**O'CONNOR** Two of the directors, O'Sullivan and McCusker, did have land out in the Thornlie area and obviously they had some benefit from the sale of some of that land, but they developed it and put the houses on it. But it was very pleasing to see the people that purchased through those original terminating societies had some great benefits.

SR And what actual role did you play in it as a director?

**O'CONNOR** A front role in the decisions on what we could do, how we could go about getting the funds and that type of thing, so it was an up-front role in it. Also, when we started the terminating societies, there were a number of them started; you know, you'd have a group form a terminating society and all the money would be involved in that group, say it was a dozen or whatever it may have been, and we used to go and meet them and discuss the issues with them and have meetings. I remember having them in the hall out there in Thornlie and letting the people know what the opportunities and benefits were in connection with them. To us, or to me at that time there was no direct benefit.

SR Were there other areas of . . .

**O'CONNOR** When I say no direct benefit, I'm talking financially.

SR Yes. Were there other areas of social or community service that you were involved in as well?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes. At that time there were a number of people in pretty poor conditions and when I was running the tearooms there in Forrest Place, whatever I had left over at night I knew of people who were in fairly poor circumstances I used to go and deliver to them what was left over from the lunch bar that day. I used to do that on a regular basis, some of them through no fault of their own and some through fault of their own.

I remember one chap on the corner of Vincent and William Street had six children, had a truck of his own and was driving along and he got out on the side to do something, fell underneath the truck and had his leg fractured in about eight places - substantially; very seriously, and he couldn't work for two years. During that period of time I through the shop and what I had left over helped to keep them going. When I say helped, helped to make their way of life a little better by making sure they had food and that type of thing and assisting them where we could. A couple of old army mates who were in similar sort of trouble I was able to help them. You know, sometimes, apart from that, getting them jobs. Some of them you could help, some you couldn't, the same as the position today.

I remember one guy, I went round there one night to his home. I'd got the message that they were in pretty poor circumstances. I went round to his home and they were eating brussels sprouts, that's all they had for dinner, him and the kids and his wife. So I rectified that position and I went and saw some people and managed to get him a job. He was a carpenter by trade but he said that his tools had been stolen and he didn't have any, so I got him a new kit of tools, got him started off again. A week later he hadn't turned up to work so I went round and we found him down the pub. He was one of those you couldn't help, but there were some you could help and they were the sort of things I did to help people at that particular time. I'd forgotten about those.

SR And were there any other community organisations that you were involved with?

**O'CONNOR** No. Oh, wait on. When you say community organisations, I was a member of bowling clubs and football clubs and that sort of thing. I did take an active interest in several other areas in that regard. Football was one that I took an interest in. Later on I was President of the East Perth Football Club and things such as that.

SR What about business organisations?

**O'CONNOR** No.

SR Or any of the service organisations - Rotary, Lions and such things.

**O'CONNOR** The RSL, I was a member of the RSL and took part in their functions and luncheons and meetings and that sort of thing, yes, as a returned serviceman.

SR As an ordinary member or as a committee member?

**O'CONNOR** No, as an ordinary member. See, I was pretty well tied up with things I was doing at that time and you can only do so much. I never sought for or became an official on any of those organisations.

SR We could probably return now to where we were with the parliamentary career and your interest in housing which was led us down that path. What were some of the legislative and political matters to do with housing that concerned you and that you were active on in that first sitting of Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** At that time there was a very long waiting list for people to get state housing homes and therefore those on the lower end of the bracket were the ones who had the bigger problem. It was in trying to assist in that area that I was moving initially and trying to get more of these terminating societies set up, which they did set up in other areas at a later stage, various other organisations. I think Perth Building Society was one that set them up and had them going as well. So it was in that area mainly and trying to help a number of people. It's amazing the pleasure you get out of it.

I remember I was at a function one day, this would probably be twenty years after I first became involved in the housing area, and a woman came up - I'd just presented an award to a lad as an apprentice of the year - and she said, "He's here because of you." I said, "What do you mean?" and she said, "Well, you got us a house twenty years ago and we couldn't have a family because of that, and because you got us the house we were able to have the boy and that's him." So they're pleasant little things that happen on the way through.

SR What about the situation with state housing at that time? Were you also working to increase the involvement of government in actually creating housing for people?

**O'CONNOR** I can't recollect that at this stage. Government were pretty well involved with and they were pretty aware of the position. What we were trying to do was to accumulate funds in such a way.... I was even trying to do through the federal area to get them to do something along the lines that were done in America at that time. I tried to get them to give some sort of tax remission or benefit to pensioners and people such as that who had money under the carpet. Those days many people had money at home locked away or under the carpet. This had happened in America and after the war they gave them some tax benefit by putting funds into a housing scheme. I tried to encourage our people to do that here because, okay, we get the funds out and give a bit of a tax benefit to the pensioner or whoever got the money hidden away and we get the homes built for those that need it, but I think it fell on deaf ears a little but that was one of the things that we did try at that time which, as I said, had worked satisfactorily overseas.

SR Do you recall your first speech in Parliament, your maiden speech?

**O'CONNOR** No, I don't. It was on housing but I can't recollect what it was, the detail of it.

SR I was wondering more about the feeling or the kind of . . .

**O'CONNOR** Oh, I remember that, yes. I was very timid and quite afraid and it was about a fifteen minute speech which took me about 25 days to make up. [laughs] I learnt eventually that if you know your subject thoroughly and you're not a bit afraid.... if you're a bit afraid it throws you right off, but later on what I learnt to do is you just have headings down and you can go through and speak for an hour or two or three hours without any trouble. Probably the hardest speech to make is a ten or fifteen minute one. [laughs] But that's what I did initially and, yes, I was quite frightened at the time. After I'd introduced some 200-odd Bills I suppose it made it a bit easier.

SR We talked quite a bit about Sir David Brand and his leadership. What about other prominent leaders on your side of the House? Sir Charles Court - what would you say of his role at that stage?

**O'CONNOR** Sir Charles Court was very prominent in the industrial relations area and involved in the commencing of the iron ore operations. He was in charge of resources in the State, therefore did play a prominent part in that and was a very active leader.

SR And his style as a minister, how did you experience him as someone to work with as a new member of Parliament and he as a minister at the time?

**O'CONNOR** He was rather curt, Sir Charles Court. He didn't waste a lot of time. I guess he didn't have much to waste, you know. A bit different than David Brand. Where David would take time with each member to tell him things and to carry on, Sir Charles Court just kept on going. He was like a steamroller and they were quite different types of people in that regard.

SR Did that make it difficult to deal with him?

**O'CONNOR** Once you got to know him it didn't. As I say, I knew Charles from back in the war in 1943-44. I certainly didn't know him well at that stage and when I first got into the ministry they had to create an extra ministry, so I had to wait a couple of months before the legislation was through approving it. I was assistant minister to him and once he knew you were doing what you were supposed to do he'd let you go, but if you weren't he was on your tail like a ferret.

SR What was the ministry in which you were assisting him?

**O'CONNOR** Transport.

SR What were the issues in transport then when you came into that ministry, the ones that you had to come up to speed on quickly?

**O'CONNOR** One of the main things then was the movement of grain in the State. You see, we were putting a lot of the silos out then in the country centres in conjunction with the CBH who've done a great job in that regard. All the truckies wanted to carry it by road and the railways wanted it to go only by rail. If you weren't careful you had to try to watch the budgets of both to make sure that the rail, where they could do it economically, could do it to keep the budget for the State on the right level. But where there were discrepancies that affected the farmers strongly where it was a lot more dear for them to cart by rail than road, you had to try to let that in. So you had these difficulties and they were strong in those days. There were many in the farming community pressing strongly to cart whatever they wanted wherever they wanted, which sounds pretty logical, excepting that where you put a railway you have to service an area only, you can't keep on servicing that area if you take the main commodities away. People wanted to retain the railway but use the other the way they wanted. This has changed a lot in recent times but that was one of the main things.

We were also at that stage pushing for the standard gauge to go through the Eastern States and I was involved in arranging that and putting the last spike in at Kalgoorlie and doing the first trip on the Indian Pacific when we brought the first ones across from the Eastern States, so it was in those areas. Also, we were involved in transport. In transport you had railways, buses, airways, shipping, taxis. You also had highways involved there and we were on a very big expanding operation of putting the bitumen road round Western Australia. Also, the road across the Nullarbor Plain had not been completed and we were pushing that, so there was plenty of work to do, I can assure you.

Those areas kept us pretty busy and trying to maintain our share of the road funds, because at that time we had a formula whereby the road funds in Australia - and bear in mind the Federal Government takes so much out of fuel all the time for road funds - was distributed on the basis of population, area and fuel consumption. Now, that led very fairly to us or very favourably to us because in our area we have such a big expanse. Our population didn't help us a lot but we used more fuel per head of population because of our distance than other States so we had to push very firmly to try to maintain the amount of funds, but they have been watered down very much over recent years. The formula has changed. One of our big things was to try to maintain that, which we tried very hard and very successfully for some time to do.

SR Of course, that first ministry, assisting in that ministry, comes after your first election as a sitting member.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR Could you tell a little about that election and what was involved in it?

**O'CONNOR** 1962 was the next election and my seat had been abolished. North Perth had been abolished so I then nominated for the seat of Mt Lawley and I won the seat of Mt Lawley.

SR How did you first of all win the preselection for the seat of Mt Lawley?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I had to go again before a selection committee and I had pretty strong opposition in that one. The Mt Lawley branch of the party was supporting someone who'd been with them for a long time, had stood at the previous election and been beaten by Ted Oldfield. It was Alex Barras. Then when my seat was abolished most of it went into Mt Lawley, which had been previously another seat, and it was only a very narrow victory at that time when I won it.

SR Did preselection contests in those days cause a lot of friction within the party?

**O'CONNOR** There was always a certain amount of friction between individuals who wanted someone else elected and didn't get there. I can recollect, following my endorsement, a very prominent Liberal and one who later on went to be president, come out and said, "Well, I'll never help this party ever again," and he later became president of the party and a good supporter of mine. But he had someone in there who he was supporting and was disappointed because he got beaten and expressed that strongly and to me. Yes, there's always some amount of friction there and I think you'll always get some. You're never going to satisfy everyone when you get more than one candidate.

SR What about the nature of the competition? Was it in those days a fair fight or anything goes?

**O'CONNOR** I think it's much the same as it is today. If anyone knew anything against you they'd throw it in there, and I think that's fair enough, too. I think if they know things and they hold them, and it's to the disadvantage of the party that they're representing, it's better that they come out, as long as they're fair and they're a fact.

SR So what sorts of things would come out in your experience of those first couple of preselections?

**O'CONNOR** Well, there was nothing that came out that could disadvantage me in any way, I don't think, but just that some people had supported the other candidate previously (and I think there was more than one candidate) and they naturally wanted to get their own up. But there was nothing untoward, I don't feel, at that stage.

SR So what did you use in attacking the other candidates?

**O'CONNOR** I never attacked them at all. I think the least you mention your opposition the better.

SR Is that something that holds in politics generally?

**O'CONNOR** I believe so, yes. People know what your opposition is like generally and, I mean, the fact that a candidate is besmudging one of his opposition I don't think does the candidate himself much good. I don't believe I've ever attacked a candidate in that way.

SR So having been preselected for Mt Lawley, what was then involved in the campaign that year?

**O'CONNOR** Well, then we had to get all the party together and we had a very strong ALP candidate against us, one who later on got in. Joe Berinson, it was. He was from the Jewish community who were very strong in Mt Lawley but who all obviously didn't support him. He ran a very strong campaign and I had a good group behind me and that was probably the hardest campaign I had.

SR In what way was it a hard campaign and how did you tackle the difficulties?

**O'CONNOR** Well, certain things occurred on the way through that made it difficult. For instance, on polling day our main office, someone would ring them up from a telephone booth and when we would answer, just leave the phone off the hook so that we couldn't get any incoming calls and things such as this occurred, which I've never seen happen before or since. There were all sorts of tough operations went on. The advertising was very strong, they fought a very hard campaign in doorknocking and all that sort of thing. A pretty tough election, that one.

SR Did you do a lot of doorknocking yourself?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Yes, I did.

SR And what was the response in that doorknocking to your Government and you as a candidate?

**O'CONNOR** I had a pretty good response at that time. As I say, I won the seat very comfortably so it was not a problem, but the response was very good. You can't always tell from doorknocking what the results will be. Some people will tell you what they think, a lot won't, but I think the fact that a candidate turns up and they meet him, they knew who he is and what he's like, I think that makes a lot of difference and I think that's probably what won me by the margins I did the first couple of elections.

SR What about the election on the larger scale, not just your particular campaign? What were the issues that you think were the turning points in that election, if there were any turning points?

**O'CONNOR** Well, we were in government at that stage and we had a lot going as far as industrial relations and employment were concerned. I think this was one of the big things, because, as I say, this is when the iron ore movement started. There was opposition to it. The Opposition came in on the basis of Bob Menzies supplying iron to the Japanese before and that it was fired back at us and things such as this. All those sorts of issues were brought up in those days which people would forget or not know much about today.

But the projects went ahead and we employed a lot of people here, both in the Kwinana area and in the northern parts of the State, and got things going. There was a boom on that made a hell of a difference and gave people a feeling of a boom being on and us being above the rest of Australia at that time, which we were. I think the great feeling helped us to get through and that came over pretty well when you went round from place to place.

SR What about the industrial relations issues? You've singled that one out. What was the Government doing in that area?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I can recollect they made some substantial changes to the industrial relations legislation and I recollect at that time and you wouldn't need much like one night there there was about 10 000 marched on Parliament House. They came down from Midland Workshops and various other places and they were in the galleries booing and carrying on. Gerry Wild was the Minister who was introducing the legislation, and I can remember when we walked out **after Parliament closed** there were thousands of them packed round the House and you had to push your way through them to get out to your car. That was quite scary at the time. Some of our boys were very timid about going out and I remember thinking I'll be the first, and off I went, but it wasn't without incident at the time.

SR How did you feel about that sort of level of opposition to what the Government was trying to achieve?

**O'CONNOR** We were able to express what we felt. I can't offhand recollect the full detail of the legislation. As I say, that was back in 1965. I can't recollect the full detail of it. I had a feeling that some of our people on our side hadn't done sufficient work on the legislation themselves to get it through properly, and I still have that feeling. There was a great deal of animosity towards it at that time.

SR So on reflection you think that some of the complaints of the people who were protesting against it may have been valid ones?

**O'CONNOR** I think the legislation wasn't handled well from our side at that time.

END OF TAPE THREE SIDE B

A further interview with Ray O'Connor recorded on 21 August 1996.

SR There are a couple of things I'd like to cover from the period we were discussing previously before we move on to your ministerial career. The first of those is in relation to business interests that you had during the time you had the Beehive Tearooms. I believe you had some involvement in the motor trade, what did that involve?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I had a partnership, or a share, in Sixth Avenue Motors at Inglewood with a fellow by the name of Bill Page. He ran the operation there. I put a bit of time in there when I had time away from the tearooms.

SR This was something you did in addition? You mentioned before the very long hours you were working in the tearooms, had that started to scale back?

**O'CONNOR** Not really. Bill Page did most of the work **at the car yard**. I used to do some work with him when I had others that would look after the shop. In '58 and '59 I scaled back a bit at the shop and I put more time into the motor industry at that time.

SR In contemporary times, car sales people rate with journalists in the public perception as pretty far down the scale, particularly when it comes to ethics. Was that the case in those days too, and to what extent was that perception of the industry a valid one?

**O'CONNOR** I think in many cases that I know of the ethics of some of the journalists are well below those of car salesmen. That can't apply in every case, of course, and there are good and bad journalists. The same with the car industry. I would say if you look today, politicians are put in the same class. As far as I was concerned, when we dealt there, we dealt fairly and I can't ever remember any comebacks we had against us there. I was dealing in most cases with people that I knew, I endeavoured as best I could to make sure they were looked after properly. I believe we ran it as a good car yard and looked after people properly.

SR Were you dealing in new or used cars?

**O'CONNOR** Both. We had the Austin agency at that time but we sold a lot more used cars than new ones.

SR Was it a successful business?

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR To what extent? How would you describe its success?

**O'CONNOR** It was financially successful. I quit it when I went into Parliament because I thought I should devote my whole time to Parliament - the same as when I became a minister I quit my association with Town and Country Terminatng Building Society.

SR Also around the time of your entry into Parliament another issue arose at that time and that is in relation to allegations by yourself that you were offered a bribe to vote against the Totalisator Agency Board legislation that was impending.

**O'CONNOR** This was at the time, if you remember, that the SP bookies were not licensed and it looked as though a licensing system would come in. I had a phone call one day [and] a certain offer [was] made. If you look through the royal commission [report] you will see where the judge involved said that he believed that did occur. They couldn't prove it against any individual at the time but the incident was witnessed by others at the time.

SR Was that one of the factors that led to the royal commission?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Somehow or other I think it was Geoff Paddick[?], who was a journalist, who found out about it and they pursued it and that was what led to the royal commission. I don't think it achieved anything in the long term, as most royal commissions don't.

SR At the time did you feel that the racing industry warranted a royal commission?

**O'CONNOR** No, I didn't think so.

SR With your father owning horses and what such involvement as you had, was there any either - I am not sure what the correct word for it is - corruption or illegal activity going on in the industry to any great extent?

**O'CONNOR** No more than there is today. There is the old saying that horses are always trying; some are trying to win and some are trying to lose. I think that has occurred in the past and occurs today. I don't think there was any more corruption in the industry then than there is today. At that time I knew very many people involved in the industry, as we were at that stage breeding horses and racing a couple. My father was. I didn't race them in the early stages but he did.

SR What about the royal commission itself? What are your reflections on that now? To what extent were you involved in the royal commission?

**O'CONNOR** Just to the extent where I had to give the information of the phone call I had, which was the only evidence that was really presented there, as far as I can recollect. It's fairly flimsy when you're on a phone call to try to prove anything. I think, quite frankly, that it didn't achieve very much and I wasn't particularly in favour of it going ahead at that time.

SR What are your reflections on the role of royal commissions generally?

**O'CONNOR** I have seen every part of a royal commission, from every aspect, I suppose, at this stage. I don't think they achieve a great deal. They cost the community a tremendous amount of money. I had a case at the recent royal commission where I had something that I wanted to confer with the royal commissioner on, and I wrote to him about it. One of the officers said so me, "There's no point doing that. He'll give it to me and I'll respond. It's me. I am the royal commission." I believe today that royal commissioners going in aren't able to cope with the amount [of work] involved in a royal commission. If you go through the WA Inc one, just imagine three fellows trying to handle all of those issues. I believe that they rely a lot on their backdoor boys, sometimes some of whom have a bias one way or another. Is that clear enough?

SR Yes, sure. Were there problems like that with that early royal commission into gambling?

**O'CONNOR** No, I didn't feel that there. I'm referring to the later ones. Let me say that the way in connection with gambling was in 1959 - nearly 40 years ago. It's very hard for me to recollect detail of that.

SR While we're on the topic of gambling generally, I'd like, if possible, to get clear from you the story about the winnings that you made on the occasion when over a series of bets you made a considerable amount of money. I'd like to get it clear because there are a number of newspaper stories which quote very different amounts of money and different details and things, so if we could get the story as clear as possible from yourself? First of all, when was it that you had this run of winnings?

**O'CONNOR** 1959. The members of Parliament who sat with me at the table will tell you exactly what happened because each week I notified them of what was happening. When I had the win in the following week I bought them a bottle of wine at the table. We used to sit together at that particular time.

SR Who was that?

**O'CONNOR** Clair Mattiske was one. Des O'Neil, who was the Deputy Premier and now lives in Mandurah was sitting with me when the last of the bets in that treble came in. And when the two first horses won and the third horse ran second, he said, "With your luck there'll be a protest", which there was, and I got the treble in on that basis. Des was sitting with me when that happened.

SR Can we just go back to the beginning of that story because there was a particular reason for betting on the horse that you did?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, those in the racing game back then will recollect very well that it was a horse called All India. I watched it race one day and the jockey dropped the whip at the turn and it finished on very well but was beaten. The following week it was racing against a horse called Aquanita, which was one of the best horses ever bred in this State. So I took a double with All India and another horse and got it in. The following week I took All India with Kay Michelle and got that in, and then I had All India and De Gauge, and that came in. And the last one, the fifth, I had a treble. I didn't know whether to take De Gauge or Kay Michelle with All India. I had a treble, All India, Kay Michelle and De Gauge. All India and Kay Michelle won; De Gauge ran second and won on a protest. The biggest bet I had in the whole lot of them was £30. I finished up winning altogether I think about £3 000.

SR Later newspaper reports referred to amounts of $100 000. What do you know about those?

**O'CONNOR** The only thing they can refer to, I bought a property with that which I later on sold for $65 000, or in sequence sold the properties for $65 000, and then I bought Mandalay with some of that in the long term. That was in property investments. But the biggest bet I had was £30. The amount I won in betting was nothing like $100 000. That's someone's figment of their imagination. The other money that I made was through real estate investments.

SR While we're on that topic, can you run through those properties that you bought? I would like to come back and talk about one or two of them in particular.

**O'CONNOR** Sure. The first place I bought was in Seventh Road, Armadale. It was 16 acres. I bought it for £3 000. I think it was $16 000 I sold it for to Harry Hoffman. I then bought a property for somewhere around the same amount - $16 000 - on the corner of Forrest and Rowley Roads in Armadale. I sold that for $65 000 to Bob Weir. When I sold it to him I invested that in Mandalay, which I bought for $72 000. Later on I sold that for half a million dollars. They are the transactions as I recollect. I might be a year out in some of my thoughts in connection with those, but they were approximately the amounts and they are the properties in the sequence that I bought and sold them.

SR Your first appointment to a ministry was in the Brand Government and that was as Honorary Minister assisting the Minister for Railways and Transport in 1965. What did that involve?

**O'CONNOR** It actually involved the running of the railways and transport system, but at that time they had to wait for another portfolio to be approved by Parliament before I could be appointed as a minister. What I did for those few months was to work as an assistant minister, or honorary. As Charles Court admitted, I didn't get paid ministerial salary, but I worked under him during that period until the Parliament approved the extra ministerial position.

SR I see, had transport and railways been an interest of yours before?

**O'CONNOR** No, not really. I had worked on police and housing before, so I had a whole new ball game to look at and had to go through and learn a bit more about those and start operating in that field.

SR What was involved in getting yourself up to speed on those issues?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you had to know exactly what was happening. See, in those times there was a great deal of grain coming in, mainly by railways from country centres. A lot of the farmers wanted to bring it in by truck. We had tremendous investments in railways and we had to try to get a balance where it was too costly if it was coming in by rail we would allow truck and vice versa, but also to maintain a system that they wanted. You see, all the farming community wanted the railways but they also wanted to be able to use their own trucks. If you went too far one way, you would have to think of closing lines down at that time. Transport and Railways brought in not only railways but airways, shipping, buses and taxis; all of those we had involved with Railways and Transport. Also at that stage we were negotiating and moving towards the completion of the interstate rail gauge throughout Australia. We had to try to provide finances and push for our budgets to get the funds that we required at this end to assist with it. So there was a fair bit in it at that stage. I think in '68 was when we completed the railway and ran the first *Indian Pacific* across Australia.

SR Yes, I think in '68 the railway was completed to Kalgoorlie and then in '70 the *Indian Pacific*.

**O'CONNOR** Okay. I recollect very well setting the last spikes in at Kalgoorlie with Sir David Brand, who was then Premier. That was a big day for us at Kalgoorlie and a big day for the Kalgoorlie people too. The other one, we had the connection, I think at Uldear, near the South Australian border, of the connection over to there, and then we ran from Sydney to Perth on the first train.

SR That first train, the *Indian Pacific* coming through, was that a big occasion in the city here?

**O'CONNOR** An enormous occasion here, yes. We had advertised it beforehand. We had a very big crowd at the East Perth station what we'd built the new premises out there for the arrival and as we were coming across the Nullarbor - because of the heat and that there was a worry about buckling on the line - we had slowed down. I remember when we got to, I think it was Rawlinna, the ministers from the other States had a meeting with us and said we should delay the time, I think it was four hours, for our arrival in Perth. We had advertised to the people to be there on time. I said, "No, we'll get there on time." In the turnaround at Kalgoorlie I remember the railway fellows were absolutely magnificent. We went and talked to them. They pushed the train along and we had to slow down from Northam in because we were ahead of time, which was a big thing. There was an enormous crowd at Perth. It was a very big day for us, yes.

SR You mentioned the struggle for budgets for these things. The railways, particularly a transcontinental railway like that, must involve an enormous amount of money?

**O'CONNOR** Of course a lot of commonwealth funds came in to help that line go through. In both railways and roads we had enormous budgets. Our system was a bit fairer to Western Australia then than it is today because the system then was paid out to each State on a percentage of its population, which didn't help us; fuel use, which did help us; and area of land, which assisted us greatly. So on that basis we were able to get a fair contribution. That's one of the things that helped us get the road around Australia as well. So there was a fair bit of commonwealth funds came in to assist in that.

SR What were relations with the Commonwealth Government like during that period, in your experience as a minister?

**O'CONNOR** That depended - around budget time it was often very tense. But I can recollect when Fraser was Prime Minister having a tremendous barney with him over commonwealth funds because they were cutting ours down. They were gradually cutting them back in Western Australia, and I knew that if that pattern continued it would be disastrous to us here in the long term. I think that is proving to be [the case] today. I can recollect him taking me at lunchtime and having a talk and trying to sort things out. While we got a few million dollars extra, we weren't able to stop the flow of funds in the opposite direction. But at times they were quite tense, there's no doubt about that. Whether they were Liberal or Labor ministers made no difference: you went there to fight for the State and to get what you could for it.

SR What about the struggle within the State Government for a slice of the state budget?

**O'CONNOR** I found that in Cabinet there was a pretty fair run. Each minister put up his argument as to what he should do. Let me say this: Treasury was very good. We had very good officers in Treasury at that time. The Treasurer would go and talk with **each department**, run through it and try to organise a fair share of the budget. Each Minister in his various portfolios would put up an argument as to what he thought should occur. It was usually a fairly amicable finalisation of the budget in State Cabinet during the time I was there. That was from '65 to '82-'83.

SR In relation to the first ministry in Railways and Transport, what about your departmental support? What reflections do you have on the work that was done by the department?

**O'CONNOR** I was always pretty happy with the department. We had three or four commissioners while I was there. Brian Horrigan and Jim Pascoe were two of them. Ian McCullough was another. I always had a very good arrangement with them. We got on well together and we had no problems. In other departments it was similar. In Main Roads we had people like Don Aitken who'd been a professional in the department for a number of years. He'd fight like crazy to get the best he could for the Main Roads Department, but was a fair and firm fellow. With him we were part of organising the extension to the freeway north and south, and arranging in the centre of it the railway **reserve** that has now been **built on**. He was also the one largely responsible for the large number of trees planted along the freeways. He was a very strong environmentalist.

With people like that, they were professional people in the departments. Each of those I have spoken to you about at this stage, they weren't someone plucked and put in charge who had not been in there all his life. They knew the score very well. In connection with those, I don't think the officers there, the professional ones, ever tried to put it over us in those ways. They always tried to get the best they could for their departments, and if you brought them down to ground level, they were pretty good. I didn't find any cases where they tried to con us.

SR What about issues to do with the work force in Railways and Transport particularly? In those days you had a large number of unions involved. Were there complications as a result of that?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, there always were. Midland Workshops was always a place where there was a little bit of a stir every now and again. I used to go up there and face up to them and meet the officers up there and go through the problems. I think there always will be some problems in that way with the union movement always trying to do the best they can for their people and officers trying to do the best they can for their department. To answer your question: Yes, there were problems from time to time.

SR What was your approach to dealing with those problems?

**O'CONNOR** Directly. I think if you went and saw those who were directly involved, and I did this with even people like [Senator] Peter Cook, who was a Labor Party minister in the last [Federal Labor] Government. We used to get around the table and quite often could sort a lot of the problems out beforehand.

SR Did you find generally that the kinds of industrial problems that arose, arose because of legitimate grievances and legitimate problems, or were they part of some political agenda?

**O'CONNOR** They were frequently part of a political agenda. That doesn't apply in all cases because there were cases where they were genuinely trying to get things for the men involved. I suppose they split about 50-50

SR What was your approach when you felt that it was more of a political matter?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you just had to take a firm stand at that point. We did that. I can recollect at one stage in connection with the linen and laundry dispute, for instance, we believed we were totally right. The unions were after an exorbitant increase in wages so we went and ran the linen and laundry service ourselves. The unions reckoned we couldn't do it but we put staff in and ran it, and they capitulated and said, "Okay, what terms do we go back on?" We never prejudiced any of the people that had gone out or anything of that nature, but we did lay a condition that there was no effect to be had on those that we did have working there, that continued to work. That turned out all right. But it wasn't often that it came to that stage. That was an extreme case, I suppose. I found that in most cases you could talk to them and there was often a compromise that could be made. If it was genuine, you could always get a compromise.

SR In terms of those ministries in the Brand Government and the nature of government in those days, was society, at least in so far as your responsibilities in those areas were concerned, highly regulated? Was it something where the Government had a lot to do with the way everything was done? I'm asking you the question in relation to the degree of government regulation because deregulation has become such an issue in later years.

**O'CONNOR** Let me say we're talking of a time when there was more development in this State than ever. You are going to '65 and around that time. We had the development of the railway lines and the iron ore operations in the North-West. We had Kwinana and developments down there; the BP refinery and all of those sorts of things. It was a go, go, go area at that stage. There was fairly high employment. Things were very on the up and upper. I can't think of a lot of deregulation that went on at that time.

My main recollection was that there was that much to do we had to keep going all the time. As I say, in the ministry, when you are a busy minister you work between 80 and 100 hours a week, which is a lot. While you've got to spend some time on the legislation and making sure your Government is up to date, I can't recollect a lot of that in connection with legislation at the time.

SR Can we run through a bit of what your 80 to 100 hours a week would have actually involved on a day-to-day basis? What was your pattern of work on a normal day?

**O'CONNOR** I used to leave home at about six in the morning. You'd get to work and you'd have letters done the day before. You'd run through them and check to make sure they were okay because you are responsible for what you sign. I always made sure that I knew pretty thoroughly any legislation I had, and I put over 200 Bills through Parliament while I was there. If you don't know your legislation thoroughly, you get knocked down in the House on it. If you know it thoroughly, you'll defeat them in debate at any time. So you go through your legislation. You'd have appointments with various people. You might have tenders out for certain things. You had to confer with your departmental heads. You had Parliament sitting.

I can recollect that during that time going to work at six o'clock one morning. We were sitting that afternoon somewhere around four o'clock. I went to Parliament, we sat through to seven o'clock the next morning and I went straight back to work and worked right through that next day again.

If you asked me to do that again today, I couldn't. But you did sort of acclimatise isn't the right word but you became used to that sort of thing and you can work with less hours [of sleep]. I used to go home, often not before eleven o'clock at night. On some of those, of course, you had functions that you had to attend. So I'd get home and my children would be in bed. I'd leave in the morning and they'd still be in bed. You'd be in Wyndham or Esperance on the weekend, so you might go a fortnight living at home with them and not seeing them. This was a big strain on the family. I've been lucky that my kids have been so strong in support of me.

SR What age were your children when you went into Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** I went in in '59. [calculates]

SR Roughly, were they primary school age?

**O'CONNOR** One was about five and one was about three at that stage, so they were quite young.

SR What about the strain of that on a marital relationship?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, it does have a strain because you don't participate much at home. When you're at home at those hours you don't have much time to talk to your wife or anything of that nature. Your gardening and that, you don't participate in any of that sort of stuff or any of the normal household work that most people have the opportunity to do. It is quite a strain on the family life. You'll find this with many broken marriages in the political scene - although there are in many other areas today - and I think it is because of the long hours and the strain that's on.

SR What happened with your own marriage?

**O'CONNOR** Well my first wife and I didn't get on and we decided that when the children were old enough that we would split. We did that. We waited until our youngest child left school and went and got a divorce, and went out to lunch together that same day. We have a good, healthy relationship today even.

END OF TAPE FOUR SIDE A

SR You mentioned the importance of being well briefed on the legislation. I wonder whether you could reflect on any of the incidents that occurred during your early years in Parliament, actually on the floor of the House?

**O'CONNOR** I can recollect one where a member of the Labor Party called Harry Fletcher got up and criticised a company in Bunbury in the building trade - Calageries was the name of the company - for underpaying staff wages. He really slipped into them. I didn't believe that they could be quite as bad as suggested so I went and tried to do a check on Calageries, and I couldn't find them. So I went to the companies office and brought back some documentation. Next week I got on my feet - I think it was in the Address-in-Reply - and I castigated Mr Fletcher and asked him was he sure of the company. He said, yes, he knew about it all. So I brought forward a certificate of non-registration which showed they didn't exist. He eventually had to get up and apologise to the House. He obviously hadn't done his full homework.

I recollect another day, a fellow by the name of Wyndham Cook, the member for Albany - I think it was during the Address-in-Reply - got up and claimed certain things he wanted for Albany and that he would do anything at all to get them. He really put himself in on this particular issue on the Address-in-Reply. So I got up on my section of it and moved an amendment to the Address-in-Reply to give him what he wanted. Of course, they couldn't do it on the Budget. His senior members spent a lot of time with him trying to convince him and eventually got him to change his mind, but I think it made a big difference to the seat, which he lost at the next election.

With any Bill that I was handling, I would spend hours and hours and hours on it, on every point, knowing every issue of it. I recollect a minister getting up one day on a Bill, was asked a question on the first clause and couldn't answer it. It was obvious he hadn't studied the Bill. So we jumped up on every clause as it came forward being handled in the second reading and it demoralised him to such an extent that he eventually had a breakdown. I believe it was just through not knowing the details of the Bill properly.

SR So that was during your period in opposition?

**O'CONNOR** That's correct, yes.

SR We'll come back to opposition, because I am interested in the style and approach of former governments once they are in opposition so we'll come back to that when we get to that stage. There are a couple of other things I want to ask you about. In '65 you had a trip to Britain to study transport. What was involved in that?

**O'CONNOR** I was invited by and the trip was paid for by the British Government. May I say that until I became Premier I had never had a trip in 23 years overseas at taxpayers' expense in Western Australia, which is rather unusual today. But the British Government apparently look at people who they think have a future and they invited myself; Bill Nielsen, who eventually became a Premier of Tasmania; and John Fuller, who became leader of the upper House in New South Wales. They invited the three of us to go to England at their expense and to have a run through on the operations of government over there. We went in, I think, January 1965 and we were there for about six weeks.

SR And what did you learn from that experience?

**O'CONNOR** Just their operations in the Westminster system. I went through things like Scotland Yard to see their operations; went through Parliament House; and met people like Selwyn Lloyd, who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and discussed things like Treasury operations and things such as that. So for a young fellow who was just on the up it was a big deal for me. I thought that it probably helped me a lot in my future in Parliament.

SR One of the other things that I believe you felt was important, you mentioned being familiar with the legislation, but I believe you also felt that knowing the figures was important?

**O'CONNOR** Absolutely. It's amazing how many members have little idea of the figures and get up and quote things that are so far off beat. If that happens and you can get them on the spur of the moment, it gives you a tremendous advantage in debate. But figures were always a long suit of mine. I think they helped me tremendously in Parliament.

SR Another aspect of transport in the '60s was of course the State Shipping Service. One of the things I noticed in doing some research was problems you were having getting loan funds from the Federal Government to purchase new ships. What reflections do you have on that issue and other issues associated with Stateships?

**O'CONNOR** Things then were a lot different than they are today. You must recollect that in the early days there were no roads through to the north - and we had to service the north of the State, it was part of Western Australia. You've got a 2,500 kilometre trip up there. The roads were virtually a couple of dirt tracks up there in those days. It was essential that we service the north of the State and keep the funds going to satisfy people who were doing a job up there that was necessary. Later on when we got the main roads through there, the bitumen road right through, it became less important, although a lot of people still think it's important today. But the cost of running it was substantial, it was a heck of a burden on our budget annually and it was one that gave a constant worry.

We did endeavour to get other people to take it over and run it. We appealed to the Commonwealth for funds. We always had trouble getting sufficient funds to keep it running properly.

SR Before we move on to the '71 election, were there any other things that you wanted to reflect on or refer to during your period as Minister for Transport and Railways in the Brand Government?

**O'CONNOR** No. One of the things I think was against us a bit in the '71 election when we were defeated was that we were trying to put the railway underground through the centre of Perth at the time. We had a quote from a company to do that from Moore Street in East Perth down through to the West Perth subway and past that. Ten million dollars was the figure, if I recollect properly. The ALP, I believe, got a group called A New Heart for Perth saying that it would be a concrete jungle there, and there was tremendous opposition to it. That was one of the things that probably did not help us in that '71 election. We were beaten by a very narrow margin; nevertheless, we were beaten.

SR What about the quality of the Opposition at that time? Had they been becoming more effective in Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** They had some very good operators there. Tonkin was always a good debater; Herb Graham was a particularly good debater; Colin Jamieson was probably one of the most knowledgeable people we've had on all subjects in Parliament that I know. So yes, they had some good people.

SR What about the public perception of the Government at that time?

**O'CONNOR** Well, we were defeated so it mustn't have been as good as we would liked it to have been. Although, as I say, I think the total number of votes in three seats was that with about 500 the other way we would have won it. But we didn't and therefore the perception wasn't as good as we would liked it to have been.

SR Were there any things that you think the Government itself could take responsibility for as being part of the cause of the loss of the election?

**O'CONNOR** The Government at the time had a Premier, Sir David Brand, who was a top man who really cared about people. Every time he made a move or did anything, people were foremost in his mind. As I mentioned, if he did something to help 99 per cent of the population, he worried about the other 1 per cent. I have tremendous admiration for the man he was. I think we did everything we could. People expected the rate of development that we had given from '59 through to '71. I think they took that for granted. I think the length of time we'd been there probably helped to oust us, because '59 to '71 - 12 years - is a long time for any government, and when we were beaten we were only out for three years and back in again.

SR So what was it like for you as a former minister finding yourself in opposition?

**O'CONNOR** Terrible in many ways because I'd geared myself up to working 100 hours a week, and then all of a sudden I didn't have 100 hours of work a week to do there. There was a big gap, a big vacuum. I've always liked work and enjoyed work. I did my parliamentary work, but I then set about building **a veterinary** operating theatre and a hospital **for animals** at Mandalay, the property I had in the Swan. Sometimes if I got home from Parliament at two o'clock in the morning I would go and start work and sometimes work through until six or seven in the morning, to spend a bit of time on it. A lot of it I built physically myself. For those three years the property helped to keep me occupied, apart from the other.

SR Could you describe the property for us, because it was a big part of your life?

**O'CONNOR** The property was a 38 acre property on the Swan River at Caversham. It was next door to Sandalford Wines and had about 350 yards of riverfront on it. The old homestead there was the homestead of John Septimus Roe, the first Surveyor General of Western Australia. The original part of the homestead was made from mud brick with straw in it. It had been built by the convicts, we believe, in the early days and it was built in 1835. So it was a lovely property. I irrigated it and grew lucerne and ran horses and had a veterinary clinic there. We got a horse that was brought over from Melbourne, a horse called Igloo. They brought it over here to win the Perth Cup but it broke down. We got it right then and sent it back. It won about $200 000 worth of stakes after that. They claimed that it was irreparable; they wanted to put the horse down before it came up there. So on the property is where I spent most of the time I had apart from Parliament.

SR How did you operate the veterinary clinic, the hospital there?

**O'CONNOR** Two vets worked there full-time, so they ran that. I just built it and leased it out to them. Often I used to set the irrigation going and move the sprinklers and that type of thing up there but I didn't have that much more to do with the operating theatre. I let the vets run that.

SR Did you have your own horses at that time as well?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I was breeding. I had a few brood mares that I brought over from the Eastern States and a stallion from England. I went over and bought a stallion in England - one of the Bold River breed. I brought that out and we used to breed horses ourselves out there.

SR And race them as well, or not?

**O'CONNOR** I don't think I ever raced a horse. My father raced them and my wife was in partnership in one with him, but no, I didn't race horses. I had a keen interest, obviously, in horses. I studied the breeding of them, and where the best parts were and all of that sort of thing.

SR You mentioned the house. I notice that here at your house you have some of Roe's furniture. Was that furniture in the house when you went there first?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. The dining room suite was there and several other pieces. The dining room suite is a magnificent piece and very well maintained. Yes, that was there when we went into the place and we brought it with us when we left.

SR What was it that led you to leave Mandalay? I mean, from your description of it with the waterfront and so on it sounds like an ideal place.

**O'CONNOR** Absolutely magnificent. I didn't really want to leave it, but your children grow up, and they were going to school down in Newman College in the northern district part of Perth. My wife in bringing them to and from school each day was travelling about 100 kilometre plus each day then they didn't want to come back at night; they had friends that they wanted to go out with and this sort of thing. It just became too much. We had five attending school at the one time, so we decided we'd better come down to Perth. We sold the property, reluctantly, and moved down closer to the district where their friends were and where they were at school. They've now all left home I'd love to be back in Mandalay, but that can't be. That was the reason for it; family was the reason.

SR During your period in opposition the Federal Government, of course, also changed at that time. What are your recollections of the life of a Liberal politician at that time in Australia when you had Labor Governments, both State and Federal, for the first time in a very long time?

**O'CONNOR** I'm just trying to think I probably had more cooperation in some cases with some of the Labor leaders than I did with Malcolm Fraser. Malcolm and myself had some differences of opinion at various times, particularly when that '83 election came along. We had quite severe disagreements at that time, and on the Noonkanbah issue we had disagreements. We went along as normal. We had our meetings when we were in opposition in a similar manner that we did in Cabinet. We had various shadow ministries handed out and we used to have to do our work in those particular areas. You had to study Bills. Bear in mind we knew them pretty well because we'd been in and we knew virtually every move the ALP was making in those days. So I guess that made it easy for us, having had the experience in those fields.

SR So did you retain the same portfolios in opposition?

**O'CONNOR** Shadow ministry? Yes.

SR To what extent were you able to use the knowledge of the minister and the intimate detailed knowledge of the department and people in the department and your relationship with those departments?

**O'CONNOR** I never ever contacted departmental heads or anything of that nature in an effort to get information. I believe that they are the rights of the minister. I can't recollect ever having done that, but bear in mind that having been the minister, if you knew your portfolio and what you were doing, you knew what was going on; you knew what the legislation meant, probably more so than the minister who was introducing it. But no, I never went back to departmental people in an effort to obtain information there. Let me say, in those days I don't think the [Opposition Labor Party] did when they were in opposition either - certainly not to the extent of things that have occurred in recent times. That was never something we had to worry about.

SR How did you get informed about what you needed to know to challenge the Government?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you find that in opposition you have a fair flow of people who are against things the Government is doing and bringing them back to you - people who may be involved in tenders or are working in certain areas and know what is going on. You have a lot of these coming back to you from time to time. So you have a fair inflow, sometimes too much, coming in while you are in opposition in that regard.

SR What about the kinds of things that you oppose? The very nature of the system is that Oppositions oppose. Were there instances, for example, where you had legislation coming up which was to all intents and purposes the kind of thing the department would have given you to put up, but you found yourself being in opposition having to oppose things?

**O'CONNOR** Sometimes that happens. Also, back in the days I am talking about, we used to talk to the government people or the opposition people in connection with legislation from time to time. You'd often be able to short circuit some of the things by discussing it with them and saying, "We'll agree to this, this, and this; this we do not agree to," so you knew where to concentrate your efforts. It saved a lot of time in the House and made a lot of sense to me to do it that way. We've done that from time to time with various members and ministers.

SR So what were personal relations like? I guess this goes back not just to while you were in opposition during that period but to the period before that when you were in government. What were the personal relations like between members of Parliament on opposite sides?

**O'CONNOR** A lot better than they are today. We'd get in there and you'd argue against a member. Say, for instance, it was Ken McIver, who was Minister for Railways. I'd get up and argue like crazy with him over certain issues that we reckoned he was wrong on and vice versa. When the Bill was finished we'd go out and have a drink together and things such as that and discuss the various aspects of the Bill. So relations then were generally very good. They deteriorated later in time - I'm talking about in the mid-70s - in that different types of people started to come in and different sorts of attitudes and actions were taken. I thought that from that time on the operations of Parliament and the things that could be achieved had deteriorated - that was my opinion.

SR On the social side of life at Parliament House, can you describe a bit of the social interaction of parliamentarians? Where do they get together? Where do they meet? What do they do?

**O'CONNOR** In the ministerial area it is a little different than an ordinary member because of the amount of time they have to spend in their office and at their work. When you go to Parliament, say, for instance, you sit at ten-thirty in the morning, you have your party meeting early to go through the legislation that is coming up that day and to decide the action you need to take on it. You often then had to discuss it with certain members who had doubts about it to explain it to those and to find out where you go. You go through then until about lunchtime on those sorts of issues. You have lunch and maybe a game of snooker or something at the pool table up there, or some of them go for a walk to have a bit of exercise, then you come back, usually around one-thirty and you work through, sometimes right through until late at night. Members can go in and out of the chamber. They can go and have a drink if they want to; they can have a meal if they want; they can have a game of pool if they want. So they can spend some time, depending on what the Bills are.

It's almost impossible for every member to know the full details of every Bill, so what you do, you get certain people to concentrate on **special** Bills and to spend their time and effort on those, which I believe is the right way to go. Therefore, if your Bill isn't there you can either go and study up the Bill you've got coming up, and you'll know when that will come up, or get ready for a comment in the Address-in-Reply or whatever. But often you can do better things than stay in for a Bill that you have got no interest in and that you know is heading in the right direction.

SR In those early stages, how does a minister keep up with the electoral responsibilities of a member of Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** Very difficult, I can assure you, because with the hours you put in it makes it very hard, although you have staff to help you. So if a constituent contacts you, you get the detail together and get your staff to do some of the work instead of having to do it yourself. Bear in mind that when I first went to Parliament we never had a secretary or anything of that nature. You sat in a room and you typed your own letters.

Today you've got all sorts of things; you've got computers you've got staff. These things didn't apply when I first went there in '59. Hansard operated in a corrugated iron shed at Parliament House. The members had either one or two rooms for the 80-odd members. I'm not sure whether it was 80 at that time; it might have been only 60 then. All the members had one or two rooms between them in which they did all their work and correspondence. The facilities were nothing near what they are today. So in those days it was pretty hard. Fortunately, I was a typist myself, so I could type all right.

But you asked the question as a minister: sure, you had staff to help then, and if there was anything of any consequence you went out and personally inspected whatever it was and discussed it with the people involved, or arranged for them to come into your office. But you always had to fit your constituents in. Let me say, sometimes with the pressure it's very hard, and when you realised that as a minister you are there looking after the finances of the State and the railways, and some of the complaints might be about a tom cat in a back alley making noise at night or a chook crowing too early in the morning. These are things that genuinely worry various people and these are things that sometimes take up some of your time.

So you get vast and varied types of complaints or operations, many of them in connection with local authority issues such as footpaths or things such as that. Today I suppose there's not as much of that because things are more up to scratch and we've been able to do a lot more to some of those areas than there was in those days. To answer your question - mainly with the help of staff of your office when you were a minister. When you were not a minister you had time to do those yourself.

SR What about electoral offices?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, well that wasn't in when I first went in to Parliament. I'm not sure what year they came in, but when you got the electoral office, you then got a secretary. She was in your electorate. I can recollect having an electorate office in Mt Lawley and my office in the Treasury buildings in town. Later on they did become better and the electoral office was there for my secretary to see anyone that had a complaint or a worry. I used to always arrange to be there at a certain time of the week so if it was necessary to have an appointment with me, that would be arranged.

SR But the secretary could act as a kind of filter?

**O'CONNOR** Absolutely, yes. Well, they got to know pretty well as much as you did about the electorate and the people involved, and the returnees.

SR And what about the role of the lay party? As a minister in the '60s, and in opposition did you retain an active involvement with the party?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, you attended whatever branch meetings you could in your electorate, but you were also often called to other electorates or country centres to speak to them on your portfolio, whether it was in transport.... You'd have a lot of the country people wanting you at their meetings so they could discuss the problems they had in Transport and things such as that. Also from Cabinet you would appoint certain ones to attend State Council and the State Executive of the party. So, yes, you retained a direct involvement.

SR What are your judgments on the quality of government during the time that the Labor Party under Tonkin was in government in this State? From your perspective as an Opposition member?

**O'CONNOR** Very average, let me say. They had two or three very good ministers. You put Tonkin, Graham and Colin Jamieson in that category, but they had some without experience; the rest of them I think were just about without experience. They weren't as solid as you'd want them to be if you were in government with them.

SR Any particular examples?

**O'CONNOR** I wouldn't like to pick out individuals. Some of them were good people but didn't have a very strong grasp. Some of them did, by the way, but some of them didn't have a very strong grasp on what they were doing.

SR Now, during that period David Brand resigned. What were the circumstances surrounding his resignation?

**O'CONNOR** David Brand hadn't been well for some time. He was a very close friend of mine, apart from being the leader. He used to come and stay with us at Mandalay from time to time to get a bit of a rest away from things. He was a very dedicated man who earnestly looked at everything he did. I think the pressures were just too much for him and he died at a very young age really for him. I think the pressures of the time got to him and he reluctantly resigned. He wasn't keen to, but I think his health was such that he had not much option. He was also very hurt at being defeated in the '71 election because of the time and effort he put in for people and I think that affected him a little as well.

SR And in the question of who should succeed him, what were the sorts of issues that were considered by the parliamentary party at that time?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, Charlie Court was the front runner in that, there's no doubt about that. He'd been the one who was responsible with David.

END OF TAPE FOUR SIDE B

SR What were the issues in the party in regard to the succession to David Brand?

**O'CONNOR** It was quite a clear-cut.... Some people wanted opposition to Charles Court as leader. I was approached to stand but I did not and he was elected unopposed, which was probably the best way. He'd been the one who had been with David Brand and assisted in the development that went on both in the Kwinana area and in the North-West. When members got into trouble in Parliament House, which a couple of our ministers did from time to time, he often filled the gaps there and took control. So he was the logical one to come on after Sir David.

SR Later on in the eighties there were reports referring back to that time which talked about you being nominated but not being willing to stand, and that there had been circumstances the day before which had put you off - a document that had been shown to you the night before, this sort of thing. What are your reflections on that question?

**O'CONNOR** I don't recollect any document at all, but my marriage break-up was at that time and that was probably one of the things that convinced me. Although, Sir Charles Court, I thought, was the logical one to take over. He'd had the experience, he'd been through the mill, he was fairly well-qualified.

SR So, matters which later came to be reported on under the heading of the Cruttenden[?] affair related to a document that made allegations against you which the newspaper says was presented to you the night before the election of leader, and the implication is that allegations that were in that document had an effect on your decision not to run against Sir Charles Court. Can you give us your description of that whole incident?

**O'CONNOR** I recollect being asked to oppose Sir Charles Court back in that time. The incident, as far as I was concerned, as I recollect, was that my marriage had just broken up at that time and I thought it wasn't an appropriate time to stand, and that was the reason I didn't.

SR What were the circumstances in relation to this document?

**O'CONNOR** It was a cooked-up document. As you see, if you read the article involved there it said it was an effort to blackmail me and was obviously false. The chap who made the allegation later came forward and signed a declaration to the fact that it was false. He claimed to me at the time that someone had a gun at his head at the time and forced him to sign the document. But anyhow, the thing is it wasn't true.

SR It was a fairly serious matter. Blackmail itself is a very serious crime. There are other serious crimes associated with this - the alleged threat, holding a gun at somebody's head, all this sort of thing. Why did you not do something about it at the time?

**O'CONNOR** Well I did something about it: I brought the fellow in and he signed the declaration that it was all false. I didn't sit there and do nothing. We have many things as members of Parliament - allegations are made almost every day while things are occurring. For instance, the kidnap attempt on my son, and things such as that, when he was five years of age, death threats and those sorts of things. They happen. While they don't happen regularly, as a member of Parliament you're a target, you're like a bullseye, and a lot of people shoot who don't know what direction they're shooting in at times.

SR What was the nature of the allegations that were made at the time?

**O'CONNOR** I can't recollect it fully, but the allegation appeared to be that I'd mixed with some wrong sort of people, and I don't know whether Cruttenden was one of them. Cruttenden was jailed for something later on. I think it was in connection with a company affair. I don't even remember what it was. I knew Cruttenden quite well. He was a member of the Liberal Party. He approached me to do something for him once, which I did. That was about the amount of my association with him.

SR What were the circumstances around the kidnap attempt?

**O'CONNOR** I was at Parliament House one night when a head of the CIB at Perth called to see me and advised that they had been notified that there would be a kidnap attempt on my young son Raymond. He was five at the time. Apparently, the chap who said he was going to do this had told his girlfriend what was going to happen and she had fortunately notified the police. So they put a tail on Raymond for a few days and apparently picked the fellow up. He was a chap that had had some mental problems previously and he was put away. Let me say that was one of the most worrying two or three days of my life because you have a five year old child wandering around. I hadn't told my wife about it because she would have been devastated. I had to hold that within myself for the time. The police kept me notified to what was happening along the way.

SR Of course you'd have to have a lot of faith in the police.

**O'CONNOR** Well, I did. I'd been Minister for Police and I certainly had a lot of faith in them. What else could you do? You have to let life go along as normally as you can. I thought the best thing was to tell no-one until such time as we found out what the position was, and that is what did happen.

SR What was the reaction after he was arrested.

**O'CONNOR** Well, my wife was obviously very relieved that it had happened, but she was also terrified that that sort of thing could happen again. These things in political life - a lot of people don't realise you have these sorts of thing happen. We've had cases where we've been at home when a Bill was on - I always had my number in the phone book - where someone would ring every hour right through the night to keep you awake so that you wouldn't be right for the next day's parliamentary sitting and things such as this. A lot of people don't understand or realise the things that do occur or have occurred in the past in that area.

SR Have there been other threats against you personally?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes. Yes I've had death threats both through the Police Department, I think it was through one of the TV stations. Personally I had a case where once I was supposed to go to a function at the East Perth Football Club one evening and at lunch I went and had lunch at the Oyster Bar in Perth. That morning my wife's car ran out of petrol and I sucked some petrol out of it and I got some fumes down my throat and I felt very sick. I had lunch and I was supposed to go to the function that evening, but because I was sick I didn't go; I stayed home and went to bed. About nine o'clock that evening the phone rang and my wife answered it. The person said "Mrs O'Connor?" and she said, "Yes" and they said "If you want to find your husband, he's half done up with a bird. Slip around to the Oyster Bar." She said, "That's funny, he's here in bed." That's the sort of thing that occurred and rumours that got around that were false and unfortunately some of the mud on those sort of things does stick.

SR As recently as 1995 newspaper reports have used terms like 'dogged by rumour' and 'allegations of criminal links'. What is your feeling about that kind of reporting because even just in looking through the cuttings that you've collected yourself it comes through as a running theme whenever they mention you looking back over your career? This is something that is mentioned.

**O'CONNOR** Journalists often do anything for a story, don't they? I was one of the people who.... I treated people as I saw them in life. I didn't disregard someone because they may have done something in the past or something of that nature. I treated people as I found them, and I still do. Quite frankly, when I was in Wooroloo in recent times I found some people there more considerate than some that I've struck outside, and I certainly mixed with criminals at that time. [laughs]

SR Do you think that it had an adverse effect on your political career during the time that you were actively in politics that there was this aura around you?

**O'CONNOR** I think most people knew it was false and if people think you're rising to the top often in the Opposition ranks they do things to try to hurt you. Now, would I have continued to get better results in my electorate and to get from a private member to a minister to a Deputy Premier and Premier if they had affected me substantially? Sure, all of them have some effect, but I don't think they have a substantial effect and I think most people knew what the position really was.

SR What about accusations coming particularly from opposition members of Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you've seen those there - that smear claim that came from Burke, I think. The person who witnessed it said it was obviously a criminal conspiracy to try to implicate Mr O'Connor - they were the words he used. I think that speaks for itself. I think it's unfortunate that people, from time to time, try to use these things. This isn't the only occasion where I've had people who've made false accusations that have been printed in the media and certainly do you some harm. But, as I said, if they did a lot of harm I would never have got to be a minister or a Premier.

SR To return to the topic of the leadership following Brand - did you have any other aspirations? What about deputy leader or anything else?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I always worked hard to achieve the best I could. I didn't work to get to the bottom of the ladder, I worked to get to the top. To answer your question; yes, I had aspirations to go further and that was one of the reasons why I worked so hard at the time.

SR Did you actually stand for the deputy leadership at that stage?

**O'CONNOR** No.

SR Why? For the same reasons?

**O'CONNOR** No, I can't remember the reasons I didn't at that time. When I went for deputy leader and for leader I was appointed, I think, unopposed both times.

SR So in the lead-up to the '74 election what kind of work was the Liberal Party or the Coalition - I'm not sure whether it was the Coalition at that time - doing to prepare for the election?

**O'CONNOR** You're going back 24 years. I'd only be playing this by guesswork, Stuart. We would've been out helping the various electorates in the bush and bringing up as many points about inefficiencies in the Government as we possibly could. To answer your question - I can't readily recollect the full details of what we did.

SR Okay. So, coming back into government again, you again got Transport but you had additional portfolios. Was this something you had particularly sought or was it a case of just being allocated the Police and Traffic portfolios?

**O'CONNOR** It was allocated to me by Sir Charles Court at that time. Let me say I'd always hoped at some stage I would get the Police portfolio because my father had been a policeman. He'd had about 40 years there. He'd encouraged me to join Parliament and just to get to the top of that area would've given me a bit of a thrill.

SR Were there particular issues in the Police portfolio at that time?

**O'CONNOR** That was the time when we started in the later stages to get some armed hold-ups around, which we hadn't seen in this State before. I took a very strong attitude towards traffic and I had a very close connection with the department. The road deaths was one area I concentrated on fairly substantially and I used to have an officer from the department report to me every morning with the fatalities and the serious accidents from the day before and I used to study them. Where we found that say pedestrians were getting a disproportionate number of deaths we would then concentrate on that. So we had a daily area where it might be pedestrians or motor cyclists and we had tremendous cooperation from the media at that time.

Subsequently, we were able to draw the deaths per 10 000 down substantially over the three years that I was there. I also kept in touch with the police and would know what was happening all the time. So the liaison there was very good. I thought the road deaths area was one that we achieved a fair bit on. We built the new premises down in East Perth. We also put the stables up out in Maylands, which are still operating where the Academy is. Those things were done during that regime.

SR On the traffic side, one of the things of course that happened around that time was the introduction of seat belts. Was this one of your initiatives?

**O'CONNOR** I introduced seat belt **legislation**. I also introduced the legislation to take the authority for traffic control out of the country shires. We set up one operation called the Road Traffic Authority which brought them all under one area because we were getting a disproportionate number of accidents in country centres and on country roads. We felt it was fairly difficult. Say, for instance, you were an inspector in a local authority and one of your councillors or the shire president was picked up by you for speeding and you took action, where do you finish up? It was felt that there was a need to tighten up in that area and I thought that was an important piece of legislation which helped us a lot. So I think I introduced seat belts, the 0.08 [blood alchohol content] and the Road Traffic Authority - they were some of the ones I did during that time **[and the first Aboriginal police aides]**.

SR The Road Traffic Authority in the metropolitan area, did that take police from the Police Department into the Road Traffic Authority as traffic police? Is that how that worked?

**O'CONNOR** Correct, yes. It was done in such a way that we'd get everything under one and eventually, if need be, it could be taken back into the Police Department without any additional costs, so that a fair bit of thought was given to it over a long period of time. There was a lot of opposition too because the traffic inspectors in the country centres were worried about losing their jobs because some of them were too old to normally be taken in as a policeman, so we put through special legislation to let them qualify in those cases to take it on and to retain their positions.

SR There was also opposition on the seat belt front - making the wearing of seat belts compulsory at the time?

**O'CONNOR** I wasn't even very happy about that myself because I thought it was an infringement on individuals' rights, but Cabinet decided that it was to go through and I had to put that legislation through. It's turned out to be the right thing, there's no doubt about that. It saves a lot of lives. Maybe it has infringed on rights. I think probably today one of the problems is that it's more of a money grabbing exercise than anything else. I think it is a $90 or something fine for not wearing a seat belt. Well, I think that's out of proportion to what we wanted it to be initially - a $20 fine or something like that. It's not a serious breach and it's the individual looking after themselves. I just think the price of them has got out of the hand today.

SR And the 0.08 legislation: drink-driving of course has always been an offence, but the introduction of 0.08 - what sorts of controversy surrounded that issue?

**O'CONNOR** We didn't introduce 0.08 without giving it a lot of thought. We studied legislation throughout Australia and throughout the world. We, even at Cabinet, brought certain people in and put them in a room where we tested them over a period of time - some drinking beer, some wine, some spirits - to see what effect it had on their driving. We drove these people home obviously after the issues. We did a great deal of study. The study then indicated to us there was no need to go below 0.08, so we introduced the 0.15 and 0.08 legislation.

SR And the testing for this at that time.... was the breathalyser introduced also at that time?

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR Were there problems with the introduction of it?

**O'CONNOR** I've yet to find legislation there hasn't been problems with. Yes, there were, but I can't remember the specific details of them, Stuart. We even had trouble within our own ranks, let alone when you got to Parliament.

Often with legislation you'll have problems with your own ranks and you might have to make amendments or adjustments before you take your legislation to Parliament, but you've got to be pretty sure that you've got full support of your own group before you start legislating.

SR So how did you win over the opposition from within your own ranks?

**O'CONNOR** With difficulty in connection with the Road Traffic Authority, the RTA, but we were able to convince them in the long term it would be beneficial and often I had to go to country centres. I had to go to almost every country centre in the State to talk to the shire and to the people there. Members wanted me to go and put the case forward because some of them were a bit afraid of the effects on them in the long-term.

SR The Road Traffic Authority didn't survive in the long-term - is that an indication that it didn't work?

**O'CONNOR** No it is an indication that it did work because, what it did, it took the authority out from 80 or 100 authorities handling road traffic into one, and that is why it worked. As I said to you earlier, I did it in a way in which it could be integrated back to the police in due course, if need be, without cost. But, if we'd said we were going to give it to the Police Department at that stage we would never have got it through. It was very clear from our own people and from the Opposition. The only way it was possible to get it through with the possibility of it going the way it has done, and I foresaw that the time, was to do it the way it was and I think it has been very successful.

SR So, an example of really quite long-term planning?

**O'CONNOR** You've often got to do that and had we not had that and had we not been able to get it over to the RTA and eventually into the Police Department, I think you would find that the deaths on the roads today would be substantially higher than they are.

SR You mentioned having a good relationship with the Police Department. Could we discuss a little bit about the way in which a Minister for Police interacts with the Police Department and the Commissioner of Police, because that can be a controversial sort of a relationship?

**O'CONNOR** I don't ever recollect directing the Commissioner for Police to do anything. You let the department run itself, but you've got to have hands-on and know what's going and be able to discuss with him, or other departmental people, problems as you see them. In connection with the RTA, that was my idea - I brought it forward and put it to them. They concurred with it.

I would discuss all the issues and I'd have a senior police officer up every day at my office and say, "Look, this is happening in the Police Force can we do this?" And I would leave it to them to do it, but you would obviously give them food for thought at times.

I've done that in connection with railways. I can recollect, for instance, a Commissioner for Railways bringing him in one day, and in this case, it is probably the only case I recollect directing a commissioner to do anything, was where I had complaints about the train from Geraldton arriving in three hours late every day. I said, "We can't let this happen." He said, "We can't avoid it because there's work going on on the tracks up there." I said, "Allow for it." I said, "Make it so that the time for it to arrive is three hours later." He said, "We don't want to do that", and I said, "Well, you're going to do it", which we did. Several months later he came back to me and said, "That was the right decision." I mean it was not a major thing, but it was to people if you had to meet someone at the railway station at ten o'clock and they got there at one in the afternoon and that sort of thing. Generally speaking, there was no direction but there were often discussions on how things went and what you did.

SR What about internal problems within the Police Force? Were they an issue during your term as minister?

**O'CONNOR** No, I can't recollect any internal problems there. There was fairly good cooperation. You'll always find a few little odds and ends but no, I can't recollect any serious problems at that stage.

SR Was the issue of powers of police an issue that concerned you at the time? Did the police have sufficient powers, for example, to combat crime in the State?

**O'CONNOR** No, they didn't. I think this has degenerated over a period of time. There were times when, if someone offended, a policeman would get him and give him a good talking to or something of that nature. In the case of child give him a little boot on the tail. Those things have gone because you can't do that now. You've got to charge the person. This has affected a fair bit. The criminals over a period of time have become more difficult to get because of, sometimes, the legislation we put through. I think the police have had a pretty hard time over a period of time.

SR What about powers, for example, like the phone tapping and those kinds of things? Were they an issue then?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I think this really started to come in when the drug dealers became more prevalent around. See in the early days when I was there drugs were a thing that didn't worry you much. I can remember the first cases that we struck were when someone brought some drugs in the heel of a shoe or there were some batteries came in from overseas filled up with drugs rather than battery acid.

A couple of those were pretty serious at the time, but the way of going into a place was fairly difficult for phone tapping. I think it has been necessary to try to overcome some of these problems. My feeling today is now that whatever we do we will never overcome the drug problem; we're kidding ourselves if we think we will. I'm not saying we shouldn't try to, I'm just saying we won't.

SR Did the police in those days go outside of what they were legally allowed to do in the area of things like phone tapping, for example?

**O'CONNOR** Not to my knowledge, no.

SR What other changes were there in the issues facing police. You've mentioned the armed hold-ups starting and drugs coming into play. Were there other matters of particular concern for police at that time?

**O'CONNOR** There was always the case where they felt there weren't enough of them to cope with the problems we were having in the increasing types of crime that were occurring. We didn't have in those days the great amount of car theft we have today, and that is a major issue today, not only in connection with the amount of vehicles stolen but what has happened today is that these crimes occur where there is breaking and entering or car theft or whatever in 90 per cent of cases are done by people who are on drugs or trying to get sufficient funds to satisfy their habits. This I know does occur because I've done some work on it in recent times and spoken to a number of people involved. I've spoken to people, for instance I can mention two young people, I won't mention names because it would be improper to do so at this stage, who between them have committed something like 500 offences. That's for breaking and entering, of stealing motor vehicles, of committing other crimes like arson and things such as that. They were both in as first offenders when I struck them. Between them one had had 300 and one about 200 offences and in both cases it was to satisfy their drug habits. Strangely enough, one had broken into about 200 business premises and about 20 private homes and claimed his reason for so many business premises was he didn't like to hurt people, that's why he hadn't broken into many private homes. That particular person claimed that he spent in excess of $100 000 on speed in one year. By speed I mean the drug, not speeding in a car. So, it shows that today you have a different area. You have those that are hooked on the drugs who have difficulty in getting off it, who are committing a disproportionate number of offences and are, in many cases, getting away with it because they just haven't been caught.

SR What about the other area which police have responsibilities in - the area of prostitution? What was the policy of the Government in that time and how was it implemented by the police?

**O'CONNOR** Same as it is today, containment. It was never satisfactory. There were always waves[?] in at about who was operating and whether someone was helping them get by, and things such as this. It was the same as today and was never satisfactory, any more than it is today.

END OF TAPE FIVE SIDE A

SR What were the aspects of the containment policy during your ministry that were unsatisfactory?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you always had people being picked up who claimed that preference was being given to others and that they were doing the same. I know in containment you can only allow a certain number of operators, and it was considered that preference was being given and that others were being detrimentally affected.

SR So how did you as minister deal with those kinds of problems?

**O'CONNOR** Well, we obviously discussed this in party rooms and I discussed it with the Commissioner of Police. He didn't feel there was a better way of overcoming it at that particular time.

SR Was there consideration given to some form of decriminalisation or deregulation, further deregulation?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, and licensing and that type of thing. That was considered on a number of stages I think by both us and the Opposition, or by us and the Labor Party should I say because they weren't always in opposition. It was very difficult to come to a satisfactory conclusion. You're never going to stamp out prostitution. I think we all would agree on that. It's very unsatisfactory if you've got an operation next door to your place and cars coming and going all through the night, and we had those sort of complaints. You have Church groups and many others opposed to the legalising of it so you're in a bit of a cleft stick. It's not an easy one. It wasn't then and it isn't now.

SR What about the potential of the policy for corruption of the police force?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, that's one of the reasons I think probably legalisation is preferential.

I'll quote that for these reasons: first of all, if you have legalisation you have control on where they are, how they operate, the health standards on them. If you don't, they'll operate anyhow and your health standards, of course, can't be checked on to that degree and that's one of the reasons I say at this stage I think legalisation is the better way.

SR Were there particular instances of police corruption in relation to prostitution that you became aware of during your time as minister?

**O'CONNOR** Not that I can think of, no. You hear rumours from time to time but you're talking of something without substance; not that I know of.

A further interview with Ray O'Connor on 27 August 1996.

SR Your period as Police Minister was a period of three years. You indicated earlier that it was something that you had really wanted to do since you'd gone into Parliament. What happened that it was only for three years and wasn't longer?

**O'CONNOR** That I can't say. The Premier, who was Sir Charles Court, is the one who makes the decision on the allocation of portfolios. From then I got a heavier load and was distributed into various fields. I was disappointed because I felt that in the Police area I'd done a good job, we'd achieved some very good results, and I was very happy with it, but when asked to do other portfolios, naturally I took them on.

SR Police, of course, is a very high profile portfolio as well.

**O'CONNOR** That's correct, but it's not as high as some of the others on the allocation of funds etc. You take Health and Education are the major ones, and Industrial Relations was a fairly important one to us at that time. But while I had Police taken off me there was no shortage of other portfolios I was given.

SR Did you discuss that with Sir Charles Court at the time?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, no, no. When the allocation was made I just accepted what was given to me.

SR And so in '77 you got Works, Water Supply and Housing. You said that there was an increased workload. What did that workload involve then in those new portfolios?

**O'CONNOR** Works involved all the operations of the water supplies throughout the State, the buildings of schools, hospitals etc, the dams, all of those sorts of things. We were building a couple of new dams at the time, Wungong being one of them, and it was a fairly heavy workload there.

SR What is the minister's responsibility in those sorts of portfolios?

**O'CONNOR** In any portfolio the minister's job is to make sure that Cabinet policy is carried out as far as possible; discuss with the departmental heads the operations as Cabinet requested, and take back the detail of what he gives back to Cabinet. In many cases you can discuss it, and I have discussed with the departmental heads how we should operate and what we should do, and often have come to better arrangements between us through discussions. So discussions generally with the departmental head and members of the department.

SR Are these areas, Works and Water Supply particularly, are they areas where Cabinet policy or political policy has a big impact, or are they things which basically just go along anyway under any government?

**O'CONNOR** They go along generally under any government, but different decisions can be made by different governments in connection with them. For instance, when I became Minister for Works in 1974 (that includes roads, by the way, and highways etc at that time, so roads, highways were all included in that area), one of the things that was brought to me the first day was the extension to the freeway south. This had been shelved by the Labor Party at that time because they weren't happy to proceed with it. There was a reclamation of five acres of river, and I had to make the decisions on what we did on that. I discussed this with Don Aitken. His views were very firm that we should proceed and I agreed and we went ahead with it.

But you also get letters in and detail in from all local authorities throughout the State, from people throughout the State. It's not just dealing with the department up there. You get hundreds of letters monthly and often sometimes weekly, depending on what the operations are. I was one that read every letter that I got, because you've got to sign the replies and you've got to know what you're doing in that way. So all in all, when you take in highways, roads and all that in connection with it, it's a pretty big run, and at that stage we were battling very strongly to retain the amount of funds we had for roads because there was a breakdown, the Commonwealth were trying to sever the system that we previously had.

SR What about Housing, which you got as a portfolio in '77?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. There was a backlog there in Housing. There was a requirement, I don't remember the number, but there was a substantial number on the list and we had to try to get funds to assist in that way. It was always a busy one because there were always people approaching the Minister to get preferential assistance on the basis of various grounds, so you had those to deal with every day. Believe me, there was no shortage of work being a minister and, as I said to you previously, I don't believe that any minister that I know, or many anyhow, could work under, say, 80 hours a week without doing their job properly.

SR That area of housing, or public housing at least, is generally seen as being more of a Labor Party interest in a sense. It's one of those social welfare kind of things.

**O'CONNOR** I was certainly involved in social welfare and the housing of people. Even before I went into Parliament I went out and helped people who were impoverished and had problems and as I mentioned to you I fed them sometimes for weeks or months to help them along. I didn't have a silver spoon in my mouth when I was born. We were from a very average family, a good family but not a wealthy family, and I knew the problems of many of these people and it was certainly in my heart and in the Government's heart to do what we could to help them.

I would not accept ever that the Labor Party are the only ones that are involved or worried about that sort of thing.

SR What about that public/private kind of debate - the Liberal Party being associated with the view that more and more things should be done in the private sector? Isn't housing one of those where....

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes, but we're talking in different areas. I was talking about the welfare of the people who needed the housing. You're talking now about the building of them. At that stage we believed that we could get more houses built and more people housed properly by putting it out to the private sector. We felt that there was some money being wasted in the government sector in that field. All our interest was was to get as much as we could for the money to satisfy the people who had the problems.

SR And what were some of the housing projects that you recall being involved in as minister?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, gosh! Off the cuff I couldn't tell you, but we were continually involved in them through the commission. I don't know that there was any one specific area. What we were trying to do was to split them up to put the housing people or people in state housing homes out amongst the average Australians, not put them all together because that seemed to help degenerate the community in that particular area. You've got your Lockridge and places like that that didn't come up very well. What we were trying was to put a percentage of them in each area so that we would give them the opportunity of growing up and their children growing up with various sorts of people, rather than putting all those that were the needy in one area that could in some ways help to degenerate them.

SR So in your time as minister that was already part of the thinking of the Government.

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes.

SR To move away from those blocks of flats and those kind of things.

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes, and this was discussed with the Chairman of the Housing Commission at that time.

SR We were just talking about your role in the Housing portfolio. You mentioned people coming to you with particular problems they had and seeking special treatment to get up the waiting list and that sort of thing. What was your general approach to those kinds of approaches to you?

**O'CONNOR** You looked at each one individually and saw the amount of hardship involved. You took into account their earnings, their marital life with the children involved and all aspects that you could, and discussed this with the Chairman of the Housing Commission and then made a decision on what could be done. These also went to the Commission themselves for approval before anything was done, but that was generally what you did.

SR These sorts of things that were coming to the minister, were they generally coming to you as an appeal against something that the Commission or the staff had already decided?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, some of them would have, yes, and sometimes you could get a reversal of the decision when you looked at everything that they put forward. Sometimes there were other difficulties involved with the individuals because some of them would have, for instance, had a number of previous State Housing homes and had bad relationships regarding the looking after the homes and the payment of rent and things such as that. Some of them had substantial rents outstanding and all this sort of thing was taken into account.

SR Were there particular issues associated with Aboriginal housing?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. I believe at that time we set up a special section of the Commission to deal with Aboriginal housing and had an Aboriginal placed on that board.

SR And how did that work during your time there?

**O'CONNOR** It worked quite well. There were always some difficulties there because they have special problems that some of the others in the community don't have. Of course, let me say there are whites have special problems too at times, but everything used to have to be taken into account. I thought it was good to have someone from the community involved in that area.

SR Just going back for a moment to the Works and Water ministries, they're ministries that employ very large numbers of people. Were there issues that came to you as minister associated with the staff, the workers, the unions involved in those ministries?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes. Yes, there were at times. To ask me for detail, we're going back twenty-odd years, Stuart, and I can't give you the detail, but, yes, I was very open. If there were any problems the union wanted to see me about or I wanted to see them I didn't hesitate. I believe negotiation is the best way to handle anything if you possibly can. If negotiations totally break down, well then you've got to look at other things, but while there's a chance of doing it by communication and that I always believe strongly in that.

SR And how were your relations with the particular unions that were involved in those ministries?

**O'CONNOR** My relationship was quite good with them. Obviously at times they opposed the policies we put forward, but my relationship with the unions and union representatives I felt generally was very good.

SR Were there issues associated at all with contracting out of work, those kinds of things that became issues later?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, there were times when we contracted work out that unions didn't agree with, but I've had union reps say to me that after negotiation with them [they] wished I was in the Labor Party not the Liberal Party [laughs].

SR What sorts of things would bring on a comment like that?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, well, because of the way in which I dealt with them and, you know, often you would break down half their argument by the negotiations and they felt that some of the Liberals didn't do that to the extent, but I believe very strongly in that and I still do. The unions themselves know whether it's a phoney claim they're putting forward or whether they're just having a go or not, whether it's politically motivated or in the interests of their members.

SR So about eighteen months after your appointment to Works, Water Supply and Housing, you had added to that Labor and Industry, Consumer Affairs and Immigration. Could you describe the circumstances surrounding the addition of those portfolios, please?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, that I remember very well. Bill Grayden got into a little bit of a problem at one stage and resigned his portfolios and we were down opening the Tammin water supply. This was the other things you do in the country centres that I mentioned. I had to go down there, we'd put money up and built a water supply. Tammin had badly needed it. On the way home the announcement over the air came that Bill Grayden had resigned and I said to the people with me, "There's one thing I wouldn't take on those portfolios," and the next minute the announcer said, "In his absence the Premier's announced that Ray O'Connor's taking on them"! [Laughter] So I went back and argued strongly with the Premier I didn't want to take them on and he gave me a couple of weeks to think it over, which I did, and eventually he said to me, "Who can take them on if you don't?" and I mentioned a few names. He disagreed and eventually he talked me into doing it and after a fortnight I took over those portfolios. A big load, though.

SR What was your concern about those particular portfolios?

**O'CONNOR** I wasn't happy to go into Industrial Relations. It was an area that I wasn't particularly keen on. It was an area of controversy frequently and particularly at that time, and with the load I had, I had a fair load on my plate as well. I thought that it was a bit much but it just meant that I had to work a few extra hours a day.

SR What was the Premier's reaction when you said that you didn't want those portfolios in the first place?

**O'CONNOR** Well, as I say, he asked me who I thought could do them and I mentioned it and he disagreed for various reasons. I said I didn't want any and he said, "Well, look, I'll give you a bit of time to think it over," which he did and eventually in the interests of the party and the Cabinet I took it on.

SR Your concern about Industrial Relations about not wanting that portfolio, was it that you had any difficulty with the party's position, its policy on that?

**O'CONNOR** Not really, no. My problem was mainly that I had a fair load and I think you've never known anyone have as many portfolios as that at one time, and particularly important ones because, see, Works took in all the highways and all that sort of thing as well at that time; you had the Water Supply of the State, your Industrial Relations, Housing, and you put them all together and you could really put in full-time to one or two of those to do the job properly and I just thought it was a bit of a load. But, no, there was no particular reason.

SR So within a fairly short time, that period of a couple of weeks, Works and Water Supply and Housing were dropped from your load and you ended up with Labour and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Immigration, Fisheries and Wildlife, Conservation and Environment - still a heavy load.

**O'CONNOR** Oh, yes.

SR Can we take each of those, then, in turn? First of all in Labour and Industry, what was the first major issue you had to face in that ministry?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, that I couldn't tell you offhand, Stuart. I was that busy at the time I didn't have much time to put them in the back of my head to remember them. [Laughing] I was just absolutely flat out. But I remember negotiating with various union leaders in connection with problems that they had. I don't remember any specific one or the first one that came out.

SR What would you see, then, as the big issues in the course of the time that you had that portfolio, because I think that went through from about '78 through to 1980?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Look, the big issue that I can recollect was that when Malcolm Fraser came over here and we had a Liberal Party annual general conference at Bunbury. I got up and, following Cabinet's decision, said that we were prepared to put through legislation to create secret ballots and to stem some of the powers of the union. Malcolm Fraser got up and supported it fully and said that they would put through complementary legislation. I put through the legislation here and it caused a lot of controversy with the union movement and opposition obviously to it. Malcolm Fraser never put his through and he left us hanging on the limb virtually, because with a lot of legislation, if you're going to do anything and if it's going to be of any benefit it must go across the board. It's no good having it whereby unions, if you're putting in legislation that is fair and reasonable to them - and I believe that secret ballots is fair and reasonable; that's one of my beliefs strongly and I don't see any reason to hide that. In connection with that, if you have it and the unions don't agree what they do is slide from the State to the Federal legislation, which proved to happen later on, and it makes your State Legislation and State operations ineffectual. I felt that we were badly let down by Fraser at that time.

SR How were your relations with Malcolm Fraser generally?

**O'CONNOR** We had differences.

SR Over what sorts of things? What other things?

**O'CONNOR** Well, Malcolm in my opinion wasn't the most popular Prime Minister of Australia. I can recollect, for instance, him calling me one night while Charles Court was away wanting me to pull the troops, as he called them, out of Noonkanbah. Now, that was a fairly strong **issue** from Court's point of view and I said, "Look, the Premier wouldn't like that." He said, "He's not the Premier. You're the Premier. Why don't you do it?" So I had to tell him what the Cabinet decision was very strongly on that.

On another occasion, in the '83 election a couple of weeks before we were going to the poll here and all the indications were that we were going to win the election - we were running at about 52, 53 per cent, you'll see this from the polls - and we built that up substantially in the 18 or 20 months I had been in there as leader. If you have a look at the Morgan polls in November of the two years previous just when I took over you'll see that there was a substantial variation. He said, "We're going to run an election a fortnight after yours. We're going to announce it in the morning." We'd already announced that we didn't want Fraser to come over because he wasn't the most popular thing in Western Australia. I said, "Malcolm, if you do that you'll kill us." He said, "No," he said, "the State Liberal Party have done their polls. You'll win the election. The Morgan polls have done it, we've done an independent one. You'll win and we'll roll in on your tails."

So that was two o'clock in the morning, one or two in the morning. So I rang the president of our party at that time who contacted Fraser but wasn't able to talk him out of it, and I think that contributed to our demise in that particular election. I have copies of the press cuttings at that time indicating very clearly what the position was likely to be.

SR We'll actually come back to that election and talk about it little bit more later on.

**O'CONNOR** You were just asking about my relations with him. I just mentioned that. They didn't enhance it, I suppose.

SR No. What about the industry side of the Labour and Industry portfolio?

**O'CONNOR** Well, in the Labour and Industry [portfolio] you handled all the things such as the Shops and Factories Act, consumer affairs and all that type of thing. They were all within the same operation. That was at the time when there was fairly new legislation coming in to control the operations of goods. If you go back 15, 20 years there was little done about controlling what went into the shops and what could be sold to the community. It was around that time that there were substantial changes made. Also weights and measures were under that particular branch. All the complaints.... we set up the consumer affairs officer, I can't think of his name offhand, where people could go and complain to him and take things up to a certain figure. I think it was $1 000 initially. Small Claims Tribunal was the word I was trying to think of. We set up those things at that time.

SR Was there any conflict as a minister being responsible for industry on the one hand and consumer affairs on the other?

**O'CONNOR** I didn't think so because we had a consumer affairs committee that reported back to me on things. I'd get the departmental heads in if necessary and the committee head, and we used to discuss all those aspects. So, no, it didn't bring any great difficulties.

SR I'm just wondering about the businesses in the industry sector whose interests you had been promoting, and on the other hand the consumers who were wanting protection from some of the things that these industries might be doing.

**O'CONNOR** I think in the long-term fairness overall is what counts and if you've got two groups coming to you it's the same as in a court. Often the divisions are fairly substantial and you can find it fairly easy which is the right one and which is the wrong attack, or maybe a compromise in between. But, no, I never had any difficulties that I can recollect in that area.

SR Is there anything else on the role as Minister for Consumer Affairs?

**O'CONNOR** Not that I can think of offhand. We had immigration under that portfolio.

SR Yes, I was wondering about Immigration and even why it was a State ministry.

**O'CONNOR** Well, we did have it at that stage, and I can remember we had it when the first Vietnamese boat people arrived in Darwin and I was very hostile about that.

SR Really? What was the nature of your worries about that?

**O'CONNOR** The people coming in without any check on their criminal records, without any check on their health, their imprisonment or their criminal records or anything of that nature. I said that we should help them - I remember this very clearly - we should give them money, petrol, turn their boat round and send them home. It finished up costing us $7 million in the Health Department in this State to overcome the problems that were encountered then.

SR Really? What sorts of problems were they?

**O'CONNOR** Disease, sexual disease problems and things such as that. I didn't believe that we should let these people jump over those who had legitimately tried to get into the country. Had we done that with the first boat we'd probably have had less problems than we have had since. I remember I got about 100 letters in, two opposing it and 98 supporting the view that I had put forward. I was very strong about it because you must look at the criminal element you bring into your country, must look at the diseases you bring in, and the legitimacy of those people coming forward.

SR What was the general run of the work of the Immigration portfolio? I mean, that was a big issue that arose, kind of an incident that arose, but what was the general work?

**O'CONNOR** We had here operations and setups - setups I don't mean in terms that it could be used! - whereby the migrants came here, we had a migrant centre where we housed them and then arranged for them to get out into their own homes. It was quite substantial. It was south of the river, and we used to, from our Agent General's office in London, encourage the migrants to come here. We would then follow them through into the housing that we'd put them in and arrange for [accomodation] in that housing area that we had. We had complete areas for servicing of their foods and all that type of thing. So they went in there, they had their accommodation, the kitchen requirements and everything provided and supplied, and from there they went out into other housing areas.

We also through the housing area encouraged some people to arrange for special units to be built and that sort of thing where they took them from there into the second stage. We had a fairly big migrant inflow at that time and so that was one of the things in connection with migration. It was quite a big thing as far as the State was concerned as compared with what it is today.

SR What were some of the priorities for the State in terms of the migrants that you were attracting? Did you have a preference for people from a particular part of the world or anything like that?

**O'CONNOR** At that time the majority were coming from Europe and so that's where we looked to, and that's why we had our Agent General working quite hard in Europe, going round to the various countries and that and encouraging [people]. We were encouraging and trying to get more migrants here at that time.

END OF TAPE FIVE SIDE B

SR You also had responsibility for Fisheries and Wildlife, and Conservation and Environment. They too have the potential to be quite controversial. What are some of your recollections about the period?

**O'CONNOR** Fisheries and Wildlife in those days - as a matter of fact, we put through initially through Graham MacKinnon, legislation to restrict the take of crayfish in this State; in other words, anything under certain size had to be put back. We did this in both the crayfishing and prawning industry and limited the seasons and such things as this. I think that was a master stroke because our industry is thriving here today, whereas had we let it go on as it was prior to those times, we would virtually, I believe, have no crayfish or prawning industry here. We had people like Michael Kailis, who was very good in the research area, he did a heck of a lot of work in the **Exmouth** Gulf, and that gulf area is still running very well these days. But they were important issues and they were brought to us by the then head of the Fisheries Department, Bernie Bowen, who was a very earnest sort of person as far as the operation of fisheries was concerned. He was keen on protecting and they had regular meetings with the Eastern States. He brought these things forward and we supported them I think to the benefit of the State.

We also set up the conservation operation. Colin Porter was at that stage employed. I think he was the first person in charge of that department, and there was always some controversy. I even had controversy with Colin myself in certain ways, but we discussed and always came to a compromise on where we thought we should head. One of the problems we had in those days, we had probably if anything over-indulged in developing land for farming. While it was all right to say we have cleared a million acres a year, it left some problems in its path and those things we had to start to clear up by bringing forward new areas and restricting some farmers from developing any further of their property, which obviously brought some problems in their area and they hadn't been used to this. But this was necessary because of the salination that was starting to settle in in certain areas. That has been carried on today, not to everyone's satisfaction, but it is a lot better than it was in those days.

SR What were relations with the National Party or the Country Party like over that?

**O'CONNOR** I can't recollect clearly the relations back then in connection with this issue. But salination was creeping in. They were as concerned as we were about salination and something had to be done and they obviously agreed in Cabinet to take some action with us; whether at the time it was with some protest or not I cannot remember. I think at some stage we certainly had to turn the corner on that issue.

SR I'd just like to ask you another question on the fisheries side of things. You mentioned your own fishing earlier on and catching large numbers of fish off the coast in a way which today would be a very different story for somebody fishing off the same area.

**O'CONNOR** Are you talking about the long line fishing and that?

SR Well, I think you mentioned off the beach catching, you know, 300 fish or something like that.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR So there have been -

**O'CONNOR** See, you are going back 30 years there or more.

SR Yes. I'm comparing the plentiful supply of fish in those days compared with the decline in fish stocks we have seen more recently. That leads me then to ask about the effectiveness of Fisheries at that time?

**O'CONNOR** Around that time if I remember rightly, Stuart, we also took some action in connection with the tuna operations because the tuna come around from the Eastern States, around past Tasmania right across and over to the coast here. We put restrictions on the size that the tuna boats could take the fish; in other words, to make sure that breeding stock to some degree was left behind and we didn't take all the small stock. Those sort of actions were taken at that stage. There is no doubt in the world that there has been a depletion of stocks. You talk about things like the long lines and that and I think they are disgraceful because while they catch fish for people mainly used in other countries, they catch a lot of innocent stuff that we wouldn't like to see caught - turtles and things such as that.

SR Were there attempts to deal with those kinds of issues then?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I mentioned to you that we restricted not only in the crayfish and prawning area but in the tuna area, and yes, we put restrictions of times when certain fish could be pulled. So, yes, they were being introduced at that stage - what's that, in the 1970s, isn't it?

SR Yes. What about problems with overseas fishing in the area? Was that an issue too?

**O'CONNOR** We have control three miles out. We had no problems there, but in the area 200 miles which is the Commonwealth's area, sure we had some problems. There were lots of boats going out there catching fish that in some cases our local fishermen were limited to catching; they weren't allowed to catch them under our local laws. But when they were outside of the limits, it didn't affect the international people who were able to pick up fish out there, take them away and not bring them into our ports.

SR What about restrictions on recreational fishing?

**O'CONNOR** No, we didn't put a lot of restrictions on recreational fishing in those days. Let me say, I suppose if we have a look at it today, the most sport anyone in Australia or people are involved in is fisheries. Angling is the largest single sport. You don't catch today what you could catch off the beach in those days and your bag limits are way down. I don't recollect any severe limits there. There were limits we put in in connection with some of the traps that they were putting in up around the Exmouth area because they were finding the fish were getting bruised severely in them and not totally suitable for export and things such as that. There were restrictions put there. There were some restrictions put on angling but I cannot remember what they were. As I say, it's 30 odd years ago.

SR In the Conservation and Environment portfolio, what were your relations like with the various organisations - the community organisations - working on environment and conservation?

**O'CONNOR** Community operations weren't as strong as they are today. Greenpeace and those I don't think existed, to my knowledge, in those days. There were obviously people who objected and who I saw from time to time. When you allow anyone to do anything that is against them, obviously they aren't happy about it, so issues can become tense in cases like that. The main areas I can remember are logging. But where people were given permission for logging, the law allows them to carry on with it. These things have improved considerably over the years. I'm one that believes that some logging doesn't do a great deal of harm. Regeneration is the main thing as long as it is looked after properly, and replanting in certain area. Here again I think this is being done better today than ever before. In our days I think it probably left a little to be desired. But some of the problems that exist weren't as prevalent as they are now, or weren't as easily seen.

SR Can we move now to 1980? What were the circumstances that led to you standing for the Deputy Premiership in 1981?

**O'CONNOR** I think at that stage I was the **leading contender** in it from all the press speculation and that and I had been approached by a number of our members to stand and to support me. I was pretty confident that I would win. As I say, when you work you work to get to the top not to the bottom. Those things, with the encouragement from some of my supporters and members of Parliament, I decided I would stand.

SR What was the main base of your support? Who were some of your friends who were close to you that were supporters?

**O'CONNOR** I think at that stage it was from most members of Parliament. But I had people like, even from the Country Party (the National Party) who indicated strong support for me - people like Dick Old. In our own party we had a number of the members who had indicated support like Tony Williams, Tom Knight, many others. It was pretty general.

SR So you had Cyril Rushton also standing in that election. How did the election go? Obviously, you won it but....

**O'CONNOR** I won it fairly **comfortably**. I think if you have a look you'll find from the figures available that Cyril, while a lovely guy - and he certainly was that - didn't receive very much support.

SR What kind of a role did you take on as Deputy Premier? What exactly is the role of Deputy Premier when you have a strong leader like Sir Charles Court?

**O'CONNOR** Your job then, apart from your own portfolios, is to be very closely associated with everything that is happening in every department, every portfolio. I was helped in this way because of the large number of portfolios I had had, and also to take charge when the Premier was out of the State or out of the country. You were much closer with the Treasury operations and the Premier would lay anything, if they were in other departments or other portfolios, he'd lay a lot of that on your plate or shoulders to go ahead and to sort out any problems that existed there. So it was a general overlook of the whole situation and taking charge when the Premier was out or away.

SR What change did it bring about in your relations with Charles Court at that time?

**O'CONNOR** As I said, I have known Charles Court since 1943. We always got on fairly well. He is a very strong individual. I knew him very well. I could almost tell you the answer to any questions. If you asked him a question I could give you the answer virtually before it came back, knowing him as I did. We got on quite well. We had no problems. He was always very firm. As I say, I understood him pretty well. We got on quite well.

SR How did the division in the responsibilities between Premier and Deputy Premier work?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I had my own portfolios. Anything where, if I was to interfere in another portfolio, would come from the Premier. He would ask me to have a look at this, this or this, or get a group together and see if you can't sort something out. Often in that area, I would negotiate with the members or ministers from the other departments and assist them in trying to solve any problem that may have developed.

SR So did you have daily meetings with the Premier, or weekly? How did that work?

**O'CONNOR** I was in offices not far away, in the same building as the Premier, so we saw each other fairly frequently. I'd say yes, on a daily basis.

SR What about Cabinet at that time? Can you describe a bit about how the Cabinet operated?

**O'CONNOR** Well, Cabinet met every Monday of the week, usually just after lunch, but sometimes it had to be varied because of circumstances, someone being away. What we'd normally do, unless there was something come up of an urgent position, we would give a couple of weeks notice of anything that was coming before Cabinet. In other words, a minister would type out a Cabinet minute documenting the detail of legislation he wanted to put through or problems he was encountering and ways in which the solutions were being achieved. So he would put up a document, depending on size, on the amount of detail he needed to give on it. It would go before the ministers and in the following week would be listed on the Cabinet agenda or it'd be listed on the Cabinet agenda in accordance with the date it was recorded. Now, some would be lifted up the list if they were urgent and had to be dealt with on that particular day. After the ministers had read through it, they would then debate it in Cabinet and make decisions on it there. The minutes were then taken back to make any corrections or variations that were required by Cabinet, and if necessary bring it back to Cabinet for verification the following week. Sometimes he would be given approval to proceed with it subject to certain things being done. Does that cover it reasonably?

SR When you were putting something up to Cabinet, are there things that you kept in mind particularly in the way that you presented it?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, you get to know your Cabinet ministers. Let me say, every Cabinet minute that went up didn't go through. Sometimes they would interfere with another department, so it'd be often necessary to discuss it with that other minister from the other department. Often you'd come in with two contrary views from those two ministers in Cabinet and you'd have to sort these out. Bearing in mind you take into account your policy, what your promises were to the electorate and things such as that, and put it forward. Yes, there were often difficulties in connection with getting legislation through, which is healthy I think.

SR Were these minutes prepared by ministers generally in the form of recommendations for a particular line of action to be taken or did they present options to Cabinet?

**O'CONNOR** Generally speaking they would give a direct line on what was required. They'd sometimes indicate options as well, but you would generally want from a minister his number one option. You might change that but at least you know what he thinks after having had the opportunity in speaking to his departmental heads and bringing forward legislation taking their views into account as well.

SR What about when there are two different ministers with two different perspectives on it, in the Cabinet at that time what was the nature of the debate? Did it get heated?

**O'CONNOR** Sometimes it'd get heated, yes. It would depend on what the issues were. But ministers just didn't say yes to things. If they had strong views about it they were expressed. So, there was strong opposition to various things at various times.

SR What about lobbying prior to the meeting, backgrounding people and generally sort of building up support for your position before it went to Cabinet? Was that something that was done?

**O'CONNOR** Not to any great degree to my knowledge. Sometimes you might be speaking to a minister and he asks you certain things about something that was coming forward and you'd discuss it with him. But I never, ever did a phone call or a contact to them in that way. If you did that you would have a pretty weak bit of legislation coming forward. But generally speaking that didn't occur.

SR What about the importance of the Premier's view on it?

**O'CONNOR** Let me say the Premier was fairly firm and his view was looked at very closely. Sir Charles Court, who was the Premier at that time, was a very strong man and if you brought legislation up and he opposed it strongly, well he often got a bit of support from others on it. But he could oppose you strongly or support you strongly. But yes, his view was taken into account very firmly.

SR Were there other particular ministers who you would regard as being influential?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I think Ian Medcalf was fairly influential because he was a legal man and a very nice man, a person who went through the minutes very thoroughly and took all the legal aspects into account. I think you need a legal man in a Cabinet. He was very good in my opinion. Another man that was quite good, a very quick thinker, was Des O'Neil. He was a previous Deputy Premier. Des was a very fast worker and a very quick thinker. He was also very good.

SR How did you come to replace Des O'Neil? I'm sorry, I should perhaps know that, but did he retire at that stage?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, Des retired and that's when I was appointed.

SR Thank you.

**O'CONNOR** We came into Parliament on the same day.

SR Are there any particular aspects of your role as Deputy Premier that you would like to discuss before we move on to your achieving the premiership?

**O'CONNOR** Nothing else I can think of except what we have discussed.

SR Okay. What was happening in relation to the leadership during your time as Deputy Premier that eventually led to the resignation of Sir Charles?

**O'CONNOR** Charles had obviously been thinking for some time of retiring. He'd been there for a fair while and the indications from him, although he didn't say very much about it, were that he was going to retire before long. He spoke to me regarding the possibility of me being follower-on without really saying he was going to retire. But I think even the media and that knew at the time what was happening. So I suppose there was at least six to 12 months notice of what was going to happen as far as I was concerned. It was about that long before he retired that I believed I knew about it.

SR And once you believed that he intended to retire, what did you then do about setting things up for you to take his place?

**O'CONNOR** Nothing different than I did before. See, if you are in there and doing your job, you work hard. And if you are working hard it is pretty difficult to work much harder. I was one that usually got on fairly well with people. I got on well with our members. I got on well generally with the public. I just kept on putting as many hours in as I could to the work and trying to achieve the results that we wanted. I'd have many others coming to me for assistance from within our own party ranks and that and often I was able to help them.

SR So, when it actually came about that Sir Charles announced his resignation, was there anything that prompted that from your side?

**O'CONNOR** No, nothing at all.

SR Did you have any discussions with him about perhaps his showing in the polls or these kinds of things?

**O'CONNOR** No, Sir Charles was a fairly private sort of an individual. If he talked to me about anything it was about work.

SR To what extent was his showing in the polls at the time an issue of concern amongst your Cabinet colleagues and party colleagues?

**O'CONNOR** I can't tell you at that time. But towards the end of - when was the election? I went in in 1981 -

SR Yes, Deputy Premier in 1981 and then Premier in 1982.

**O'CONNOR** Yes, early. At the end of 1981, if you have a look at the Morgan polls, we weren't running particularly well. We were running - sorry, I have got the wrong year. At the end of 1981 (that's correct), we were running very low and I have got the Morgan polls somewhere around, but I don't know where they are offhand. During the next 18 months, we substantially increased that figure to something around 52 per cent as is recorded in the media run-up prior to election in 1983. We thought we would win that election at that time.

SR So when the Premier actually announced that he was retiring, did the timing of that take you by surprise or were you by that stage pretty well aware that it was imminent?

**O'CONNOR** No. I was pretty sure that it was coming on around that time. It didn't take me by surprise.

SR Were there discussions then about who should take over or was it very much a fait accompli?

**O'CONNOR** I think it probably was. If my recollections are correct, I was unopposed at that time. So that'd be an indication that there was no other opponent, although I believe June Craig was thinking of standing, but she didn't.

SR One of the reporters at the time, Jill Crommelin, described it as being like an abdication when he left. What are your views on that?

**O'CONNOR** Well, he'd been such a strong man and in there for such a long period of time. Abdication is when you do it on your own will, isn't it really? That's the way it was. Charles had been a strong man in politics from back in the 1950s. He didn't let things get in his way. He walked right through. I think it was a big hole in many ways when he stepped out. But I don't know whether an abdication is the right word to express it.

SR Did he retain a close interest in the role of the Premier once you became Premier? Was he in touch with you?

**O'CONNOR** He would have been if required, but I believe that most of the people thought, the same as they believe today, that Charles is directing Richard, that I had to keep at arm's length because if people thought I was there and somebody else was running the Government, it wouldn't have been good for the Government. While Charles indicated he was willing to participate, for those reasons we didn't proceed with anything.

SR At the time that you became Premier, *The Western Mail*, in an editoral, referred to you inheriting a State plagued by allegations of police corruption and political corruption, industrial problems and soaring taxes. Is that how you saw it when you took over?

**O'CONNOR** No, I didn't. Look, I was in Cabinet and what we did, we ran a pretty good ship. We had our finances in shape. We had had no deficits as far as our budgets were concerned. We'd run a clean sheet and paid for our way all the way. That didn't happen after. But, no, I think we'd done pretty well. Sure we'd charged taxes but we'd got people to pay for what they required. You'll get today people asking for more and more and expecting someone else to pay, but the money only comes from the taxpayers' pockets to satisfy all of these issues. I thought we did it as well as we could in the interests of what the people wanted at that time.

SR On the specific question of the allegations of police corruption that *The Western Mail* had raised in that time and were making a big issue of, your response was to set up an inquiry into it all, to call for a report on it.

**O'CONNOR** Was this in connection with prostitution?

SR Look, I'm not entirely sure what the....

**O'CONNOR** If it was, we had the same problems that we have got today. There was containment and there was always allegations that there was corruption in that area. It wasn't a good way to run it. Containment isn't the best way. I don't think you'll ever get rid of prostitution and I think that some sort of licensing should have been done. But Cabinet decided otherwise at the time. While that position was running, you'll always have those claims. I think they are still made today - in fact I know they have been made in recent times.

SR What sorts of changes did you institute when you came into the premiership in terms of the way the Government operated?

**O'CONNOR** I gave more rein to individual ministers to run their own departments, rather than to have to come into one area. It meant that they had more freedom, less instructions. Sir Charles Court, if he had a minute to go to an individual - say for instance it was the Minister for Consumer Affairs, we had 14 ministers and it might be a three page letter - he used to frequently send it to all ministers so you'd have 14 ministers reading three pages which at times they didn't have the time to do. I cut down on that and made ministers more responsible for their own operations.

END TAPE SIX SIDE A

SR So how was that change seen by your colleagues?

**O'CONNOR** Quite good, and I think it was seen by the media and the community to be good because it meant that ministers were dealing directly with them rather than referring back from time to time. I thought it gave an ease up on pressures from that point of view. I think it was looked on rather favourably. I also changed portfolios around to fit in with the individuals who had them because there were some changes made to the ministry at that time.

SR Let's talk about that, but first perhaps looking at the Deputy Premier. You had Cyril Rushton elected Deputy Premier. To what extent was that an issue where your preferences carried some sway?

**O'CONNOR** No, I thought that Ray Young or Bill Hassell would have got the Deputy Premier. I think it was surprise to me and to everyone else when Cyril won it. I'm not having a go at Cyril in this way, he was a lovely guy, a tremendous worker in his electorate and a good member of Parliament, but people were looking at something different for the deputy because when you have a new leader in, you have to have someone who is fairly fiery underneath there to help in some ways. Cyril wasn't looked at generally as the one to do that. But I thought, to answer your question, that Ray Young would've got in as deputy.

SR So what was it that led you to the view that Ray Young was the most likely contender?

**O'CONNOR** From discussions I had with other members of Parliament. People that supported me indicated that Ray Young or Bill Hassell were most likely, and Ray Young was the most likely of them.

SR And in those discussions with them, did you let them know what your opinion on that would be?

**O'CONNOR** No, I don't think I did. I kept it pretty close.

SR What would your opinion have been?

**O'CONNOR** They were both capable of it. I would have probably preferred Ray Young to have got it.

SR For what reasons?

**O'CONNOR** His general conduct and association with members. I felt that Bill Hassell was a person who didn't have close contact with people. He was more of a closed, reserved sort of an individual whereas Ray was more outgoing and I thought got on better with people.

SR What about the question of whether either of them would have been leadership contenders themselves in the future?

**O'CONNOR** Bill Hassell was a leader in the future, but Ray Young of course wasn't in at that time. Either of them could have been in that position.

SR What was it do you think that led to Cyril Rushton being elected then?

**O'CONNOR** I think the split votes of the supporters for Hassell and Young. See, we have a countdown. Apparently Rushton must have scored more than one of the others and got the votes of the other one to win it. So, I think it was a split up of those votes that gave him the deputy leadership.

SR How did he perform in the role of deputy leader?

**O'CONNOR** Cyril worked very hard. He was a chap that when speaking he used to ramble a little bit. This was one of the things that people having functions weren't that keen of having him there because of that. But he was a very arduous sort of fellow, he worked extremely hard and tried to do the right thing by both the leader and the party.

SR How were your relations with him?

**O'CONNOR** Good - always good with Cyril.

SR Just going back to the sorts of changes that you introduced then, what kinds of changes were there in Cabinet in the way that Cabinet operated?

**O'CONNOR** Not necessarily in the way in which they operated. We had some additional members. Some went out and some came in and there were some variations to those that were in Cabinet. We had a couple of new ones. There was a redistribution of portfolios and a couple of the portfolios were changed from what we had previously had.

SR Could I go through some of those people who were in your ministry and get your views on them and any particular recollections you have of issues that came up in relation to them during your premiership? We've talked a little bit about Cyril Rushton as Deputy Premier and also Minister for Transport and Emergency Services.

**O'CONNOR** He loved the Transport portfolio, Cyril; he really loved that. He did a very good job too as Minister for Town Planning and Local Government. Throughout the State, the local authorities mostly loved Cyril. He was the one that was responsible for a lot of the parklands being set aside. You take the Burswood area, all those parks around off the Causeway, Cyril is responsible for those being there as he was for a lot of other free open space out in Gnangara and various other places around the State. I think he was the one responsible for setting up the free land along the strips where there was development of housing on either side of them, which proved to be pretty good I think.

SR Yes. But when it came to appointing ministries, you didn't give him Local Government or Town Planning; that went to June Craig.

**O'CONNOR** June Craig had previously handled that also. She was doing that at one stage but I thought Cyril did an exceptional job of town planning. What were the portfolios he had then?

SR Transport and Emergency Services.

**O'CONNOR** He loved that, he really did. That was his selection I believe. He chose that.

SR Is that a prerogative of the deputy?

**O'CONNOR** No, but I discussed it with him and if my recollections are right, he indicated that is what he wanted at that time.

SR What was your approach to allocation of portfolios? Did you discuss it with them beforehand? How did you do it?

**O'CONNOR** I did. I brought every minister in and potential minister - those that thought they were going to be - and discussed it with them and gave them reasons why they did or didn't get it.

SR Before you allocated the portfolios?

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR Of those who lost out at that stage, what were your reasons for dropping them out of the ministry?

**O'CONNOR** Well, just because I thought the way the allocation of portfolios were made, there was someone more capable of handling it.

SR If we could go down the list. You had Dick Old in Primary Industry, Agriculture, Fisheries and Wildlife.

**O'CONNOR** He'd been there from the early days with the National Party and he had done quite a good job in that area. I was very happy with Dick.

SR Can you say a bit about his style, what sort of a minister he was?

**O'CONNOR** Dick fought very hard for his departments. If they put something forward he'd fight very hard to get that through for them. I don't know what discussions he had with them obviously. He came from Katanning, he had a country background. He was a National Party member, as you'd recollect, resigned from the National Party, or when the breakup came, he and Peter Jones left those ranks. Dick was fairly forthright and if he had a view he didn't like much opposition to that view.

SR Was he one who featured in the more heated discussions in Cabinet?

**O'CONNOR** He could do at times, yes.

SR Any particular ones that leap to mind?

**O'CONNOR** Not offhand, no.

SR Okay.

**O'CONNOR** Graham MacKinnon used to at times but of course he wasn't in this particular group. He wasn't a minister then.

SR He used to what, sorry?

**O'CONNOR** Fly off the handle a bit. He was one that could get fairly stroppy at times if felt the need to. I've seen Graham have a couple of differences of opinion in Cabinet, strongly, with the Premier then, Sir Charles Court.

SR Was he still in Parliament at this stage? Was he one that you left out for any particular reason?

**O'CONNOR** I can't remember whether Graham was in at that stage. He had been defeated in the upper House as leader and the leader of the upper House was always one that went onto the front bench. I think Graham had left at that stage and Gordon Masters was the leader in the upper House. He got Industrial Relations from being a pommy. We had a lot of problems with pommy shop stewards, and I thought a pommy Industrial Relations Minister wasn't a bad idea. He did a great job too.

SR We'll come to more about that in a moment, because obviously one of the big things in your premiership were some pretty serious industrial relations issues.

**O'CONNOR** That is correct, yes.

SR It is interesting that that should be the reason that [laughter]

**O'CONNOR** It wasn't the full reason. I thought he would handle it pretty well as well. That's what I told him at the time anyhow. [Laughs].

SR You mentioned having a great deal of respect for Ian Medcalf. He was your Attorney-General and Federal Affairs.

**O'CONNOR** Sorry, I said Gordon was the leader in the upper House - that was later on. Ian Medcalf was leader in the upper House at that time. Have you got him listed as being leader of the upper House.

SR No. I haven't got a leader of the upper House on my list just here.

**O'CONNOR** Yes, it was Ian Medcalf at that time.

SR So, can you say a little more about Ian Medcalf and his role as a minister?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Ian Medcalf was like a father to Cabinet. He was a very sincere man, a very decent person, hardworking and went through thoroughly any documentation given to him. As a legal man his views were respected very much in Cabinet. But not only as a legal man, he was also a very righteous sort of person. Ian was very highly regarded by both myself and other members of Cabinet. If you came up with a point that might have a legal problem he was the first to bring it to the fore and would make sure that you were on the right track in any of that sort of thing. A good minister Ian, yes.

SR Was he someone that you'd discuss things with privately beforehand?

**O'CONNOR** If need be, yes. Anything where a legal issue came up, apart from his own portfolios, yes, I would.

SR Andrew Mensaros in Works and Water; these were portfolios that you had held.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR But he also had Education and Minister assisting in Economic Development and Regional....

**O'CONNOR** A top-line Minister, Andrew. Unfortunately he has passed away now. But Andrew was one of the hardest working and most able ministers we've had here in Cabinet in my opinion. He had a language difficulty. He never ever spoke English in a way that was totally acceptable, even to Andrew. He had lessons and schooling trying to improve his way of speaking but it didn't achieve the result there. But if you read any of Andrew's speeches, they read much better than listening to them. He was a very able minister, a very conscientious minister, and very hardworking.

SR What about his political stance in the party? Where would you place him in the political spectrum?

**O'CONNOR** Near the top. See, Andrew was also a person who understood standing rules of Parliament and that, and if anything came up on standing orders he would know the answer to it right away and was very good in that regard. If something came up you had a problem with and weren't sure of, Andrew would know about that because he had studied them thoroughly. He was a single man who probably had a bit more time on his hands, and he devoted a lot of it to learning about the operations of Parliament and the various aspects of it. But in the political spectrum he was very good. He used to regularly attend State Council meetings and things such as that. In his electorate he had, before computers came in, probably the best filing method you ever had. If somebody had been to him 10 years ago on an issue, he had it filed and bang he'd bring it forward. He was very methodical, Andrew, a very good member of Parliament and a very good minister.

SR I guess what I meant on the political spectrum was in terms of left and right.

**O'CONNOR** Andrew if anything was more to the right of centre. He didn't let that sway his judgment to any large degree but if he was anything, he was more to the right of centre. I suppose you could say that of most Liberals couldn't you?

SR Yes. I meant in terms of the spectrum within the Liberal Party where would he sit?

**O'CONNOR** I was talking generally when I said that. No, he was more centre of the road.

SR Peter Jones, your Minister for Resources Development, Mines and Fuel and Energy was also from the National Party. What are your reflections on him as a Minister?

**O'CONNOR** Peter was a fairly competent individual. He was again from a country centre. He originally came from Tasmania. He lived at Narrogin and had a farm at Narrogin when he entered Parliament. A very hard worker in his electorate and was very conscientious about what happened there. He was Minister for Resources Development for some time and did a fair bit of work overseas with various people from Korea and Japan and places such as that. He was a good minister, Peter. He was probably a bit right of centre even though he'd been a National Party man.

SR Why do you say "even though"?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I would have thought that generally speaking the National Party were not to the right at all of centre.

SR In Western Australia?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. I am referring to the West of course, yes.

SR Okay. Ray Young as Health, Community Welfare, Housing and Consumer Affairs. Again some of the portfolios (though not Health) that you'd held.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR What are your reflections generally on Ray Young?

**O'CONNOR** Ray was an accountant by trade and a figures man is always handy to have in the Cabinet. I think he was limited in the amount he could handle at one time but he was pretty thorough in his figures and things such as that. He was very handy in Cabinet.

SR In what ways did those limitations.....?

**O'CONNOR** You had to be careful how much you stacked on top of Ray in connection with his portfolios. See, Health was a fairly substantial portfolio on its own and he kept himself fairly full-time occupied with that department.

SR And Bill Hassell who, as you said, was to go on to lead the Liberal Party later. He took on Police, again one that you had held yourself, and Prisons and assisting in Emergency Services.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR What are your reflections on his ministries.

**O'CONNOR** Bill was a fairly competent bloke but had communication problems in my opinion. He wasn't a person who could.... Bill appeared to have had a restricted upbringing where he didn't play sport or anything like that to any degree and didn't mix as much as some of the other people. While he had ability (he was a legal man as well and that was very advantageous to us in Cabinet and in Parliament) he seemed in my opinion to have a little bit of trouble in communicating with people. That was the only....

SR What about his performance in Parliament itself?

**O'CONNOR** Quite good; yes, quite good. He never left himself out on a limb. He did his homework, he knew what he was doing and was quite a good debater.

SR With several of these ministers that we have spoken of already, they are in portfolios that you had in the past. What effect did that have, you knowing those portfolios as a former minister?

**O'CONNOR** [Laughs]. It was pretty difficult to get one that wasn't in a portfolio that I had had before, if I may say. I think that only helped because it meant that often if they came to me with a problem I had the answers because I knew the department and that. I think this was one of the bonuses that I had in becoming Premier, that I had almost all the portfolios.

SR You had Gordon Masters in Labour and Industries.

**O'CONNOR** He did a great job in Labour and Industries. He was a tough operator, Gordon. If he got in and believed something was right he'd fight like heck for it. He was like a tiger in that way. If he thought there was a problem with it he'd bring it back to Cabinet and say so and so and still go out and do what he was asked to do. A very tough operator, Gordon, and as I say, from the land where a lot of our union reps came from. He obviously had a bit of experience over there previously.

SR And June Craig in Local Government, Urban Development and Town Planning.

**O'CONNOR** Yes. June was our only woman Cabinet minister. June had some ways that offended some of our members. She ran into some difficulties sometimes with some of our people in our own party. She went ahead and did things in her own way. Being the only woman I suppose she was a bit lonely in there at time but she was very conscientious in what she did.

SR What were the ways that she did things that offended people or put them off side?

**O'CONNOR** I just recollect the members coming back to me in connection with it. Some of the members were unhappy. I can't give the detail at this stage.

SR She was later to express some surprise that she got into your ministry. What was your reason in appointing her?

**O'CONNOR** She had previously been a Cabinet minister and she'd done a reasonably good job there, and she was the only woman that we had as well. I thought it was appropriate to have a woman in Cabinet. I was thinking that if I had not put her in being the only woman in Cabinet there'd have been a bit of criticism the other way.

SR Were there particular advantages in having a woman's perspective in Cabinet?

**O'CONNOR** Definitely, yes. Yes, I believe that was beneficial and certainly there has been a substantial increase in the number of women in Parliament since that time. But when June first went in I think she was the only woman that the Liberal Party had in the Assembly and I think it was essential to have that view and also to let the women know that they were being represented.

SR What about in the Cabinet itself where you have a men's club basically with one woman there? Was it possible for her to be heard and to have an equal say in the Cabinet?

**O'CONNOR** June would make sure she was heard, there's no doubt about that; and she was. She was accepted quite well into the Cabinet and she fitted in quite well with all the discussions and the debates that we had.

SR Getting down to the other members of the ministry there. You've got Ian Laurance in Lands, Forests and Conservation and Environment.

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR Any reflections on him?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, Ian was a good Minister. He also did a very good job previously as Tourist Minister. Remember he and Noel Simmons worked a number of things to our advantage here and worked very well. Ian was quite a clever sort of individual and quite hardworking. I cannot recollect offhand details of what he did in connection with Lands at the time but I suppose it's a bit hard to put everything back into place.

SR Barry MacKinnon, who also became a leader at a later stage, he had Industrial Development, Commerce, Regional Administration, North-West and Tourism.

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Barry worked very hard in many ways trying to assist in the manufacture and sale of local goods. He did a lot of good work in that area and one of his things was that he really looked forward to benefit and promote Western Australian products and he did a very good job of that.

SR What about his performance as a Cabinet minister?

**O'CONNOR** Quite good. Barry was very good. His uncle was also previously a Cabinet minister, Mr Graham MacKinnon. Barry did a good job.

SR And Bob Pike as Chief Secretary and Cultural Affairs and Recreation. What is the role of the Chief Secretary?

**O'CONNOR** Now you've got me! [Laughs]. The Chief Secretary handled a lot of odds and ends that were outside the normal scope. He handled sports and all those sort of things at that time. Bob was the one.... he was very up-front in the Liberal Party. He was one responsible for forming a number of branches throughout the State and would always attend State Council meetings and things like that - with the lay party I'm talking about; he was very closely connected there. He was the one that was responsible for getting some of Lotto or the lotteries at that stage put into sports to help develop sports, a percentage of it. This was coming from the cigarette tax. He was the one responsible for some of it coming over and going into sport and things such as that. He was very conscientious. I have often had Bob at my home at six o'clock in the morning to discuss things with me before I went to work. Unfortunately he has passed away now. Bob was not always popular with members of Parliament or other people, but he had a very good head on his shoulders.

SR Why wasn't he popular?

**O'CONNOR** You'd better ask those people. Sometimes he stepped over them and things such as that. But Bob had his own way of doing things. He had a lot of ability without any doubt but while he set up branches and did it very well and organised things within the party, he did tread on some fingers on the way through.

SR What was his role in terms of communication between the Cabinet and the party? Was that a two-way thing? Was he taking Cabinet's view to the party or the party's view to the Cabinet or what?

**O'CONNOR** When Cabinet was there, if there was a party view he'd express it strongly, there was no doubt about that. Bob wasn't a person to be down-talked. If he had a view he made sure that it got through but he would also very strongly press the lay party's point of view. He did that always, in Cabinet or anywhere.

SR Then you had a couple of honorary Ministers: Jim Clarko assisting the Minister for Education, and Richard Shalders assisting in Community Welfare, Housing and [Consumer Affairs].

**O'CONNOR** Well they became full ministers after. They were temporary. Jim Clarko was a school teacher himself. He also worked previously in oil companies in the country centres. But he was a school teacher and got the Education portfolio. Jim was there when they built, what do they call it, the silver palace.

SR Silver city?

**O'CONNOR** That's right, yes. He was involved there. Jim did some good negotiating with the unions for us in connection with teachers' pay and things such as that. Obviously he knew a fair bit about that department having been a teacher himself. Jim later became Speaker of the House, as you know, and is resigning shortly. The other one you mentioned, Richard Shalders, was also a school teacher. He came from the Mandurah area and represented a country centre. One of the things we tried to do was to get a fair representation of country as well as metropolitan ministers in our Cabinet. I failed to mention before: in selecting Cabinet you'd be in serious trouble if you appointed all metropolitan or all country ministers, and we had to try to get a proper split up there.

END TAPE SIX SIDE B

A further interview with Ray O'Connor recorded on 28 August 1996.

SR Just going back to your appointment of the ministry on becoming Premier, a couple of former ministers, Grayden and Wordsworth, were dropped from the ministry and some of your supporters elevated. Did that have any impact on the party room?

**O'CONNOR** It didn't appear to have. Obviously the members involved wouldn't have been very happy about it. When you form a Cabinet you've got to take into account all issues - age, locality, bringing in a certain number from country centres, make sure that the State is fully represented. While I may have made mistakes in what I did, you've got to do what you think is right at that time.

SR On reflection, do you think there were any mistakes?

**O'CONNOR** Grayden is one that probably could have been held there. He had a lot of experience and was a very good debater. There's a possibility that that could have been a mistake.

SR Did it have repercussions for you?

**O'CONNOR** No. Bill took it very well. We are good friends today. We go to lunch about once every two or three weeks with half a dozen other former members.

SR Looking now at your record as Premier and some of the things that you were involved with there, one of the big characteristics of your premiership would be your Government's handling of industrial disputes. Could you describe for us the circumstances surrounding one of the big ones of the time, say the hospital linen dispute?

**O'CONNOR** Certainly. That was a case where the union, who was, I think, run then by Peter Cook, put to us extortionate demands for wage increases, which we couldn't accept. The cost of it would have been prohibitive and we took a firm stand to it. They decided that they would go on strike over the issue, so we advised them if they did, we would run it. I don't think they thought that this was possible. Gordon Masters was our Minister for Industrial Relations at the time, and Ray Young was the Minister for Health. We had discussions and negotiations and they failed, so we went in and operated the linen and laundry, which the union thought we wouldn't be able to do. We were able to get through the picket lines and we were able to get staff to work it, including some of those that were currently employed or had been previously employed by the service. Eventually the union capitulated. They said "Okay, we'll toss the towel in", and they asked us what were the conditions on which we went back to work. None of the workers were disadvantaged in any way, but we made conditions that those that worked were not to be disadvantaged either, and they went back to work without the increases that they had demanded. It was a bit of a breakthrough because I don't know that that had ever been done before here in this State.

SR In the sense of running the place without the union workers there, or in the sense of the breaking of the picket lines, or what? What part of it....?

**O'CONNOR** In the sense of where people go on strike and going in. I cannot recollect anyone going in and running the operation, certainly not as big as the linen and laundry, which was a fairly big operation.

SR How did you prepare for that? What sort of work did you have to do to ensure it? You must have gone into it knowing that you could do it - or did you?

**O'CONNOR** You always go in prepared. We had discussions. I had substantial discussions with Gordon Masters, who was the main party in it. I mentioned that he was from England. We prepared the way so that we had other volunteers ready if there was any backdown. We did it through the Liberal Party ranks. We had party members from various parts of the metropolitan area who were prepared to go in and work. We made sure the law was complied with, that there were people there to see that if anyone went through that they weren't unfairly interfered with, and things such as that. Yes, we did a lot of preparation; you've got to if you are going to take on anything as big as that.

SR What about the actual picket lines themselves?

**O'CONNOR** The police were there to make sure. There were some disturbances there initially, but eventually when the people got through and started working and that, they seemed to break a little.

SR How important was it for the Government as a symbol?

**O'CONNOR** Well look, governments have got to be responsible. I have always looked at government as being the same as housekeeping. If you give your wife $250 a week for housekeeping and she spends $400, you're in trouble, and it's pretty hard to get out of that trouble. It's the same in government. We had a budget. I remember my first budget was $3 billion, and the first time that we had hit $3 billion; and if you spend three and a half you go down the drain, as we have gone down in the country in the last few years. Now governments if they are responsible have got to stand up, be fair with what they pay for wages but don't give up to extortion.

SR Did you notice a difference then in the way other disputes came up following that, as a result of the precedent that you had set in the hospital and linen dispute?

**O'CONNOR** I can't recollect very well, Stuart. I always was prepared to negotiate. While I had a Minister for Industrial Relations, the unions often asked me to sit in on the discussions, which I did, and I was always prepared to sit in on the negotiations with the minister and, if necessary, talk to him separately and come back with some sort of conciliation from time to time. I preferred that if it was possible. We did that on many, many occasions.

SR Were there any other particular industrial disputes during your time as Premier that stand out?

**O'CONNOR** That was the major one, and that is the one that stands out mainly in my mind.

SR Just looking at some of the other issues that were running at the time, another one was the question of whether or not there should be a casino in Western Australia.

**O'CONNOR** Yes. That went to our party room. Actually, I supported it. I thought that it would come in eventually. The party room decided against it and it was rejected, and that was it.

SR Why was it rejected at that time?

**O'CONNOR** Some people felt that it would affect too many other places in the community, which it does to some extent. You take when the casino first came into operation here, I feel from information that I had it affected restaurants and those sorts of people, it affected the horse industry, the racing and trotting. For reasons such as that, some people thought it should not come. Also, they thought it was a place where people would go and neglect their families, spend their wages there, and that type of thing, which in some cases, of course, it does.

SR What were your reasons for feeling that it should go ahead?

**O'CONNOR** I felt that eventually it would come in. It was operating in the Eastern States. In Tasmania it had been operating there since, oh gosh, back in the '50s, and it didn't seem to have done a great deal of harm there. It was also some added income to the Government, which you don't disregard.

SR And looking back on it now in retrospect when we have had the casino now for several years, what are your views on it now?

**O'CONNOR** I think it has probably attracted a lot of tourism to the State, mainly from the Asian areas, from the eastern countries, like Japan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, places such as that, and you have had substantial turnover from those sorts of things.

It certainly would have caused some problems in certain areas with some people overspending, and that will always happen. I think it had to come and I would support it still.

SR Another priority for the Government was the cutting of red tape. Just how much were you able to achieve in that regard?

**O'CONNOR** I can't recollect the amount offhand, but what I did in connection with that, I got there with the Under Treasurer, Les McCarrey, and we spent substantial time going through the budget, and you can often see from budgets.... say, for instance, a department - I will just quote some figures that are quite irrelevant to what I am saying - had $10 million to spend for the year and you saw that $3 million of it was spent in the last month, you would know from that that those departments were trying to spend money, in my opinion, to make sure they kept their budget up for the following year. So we tried to put in the incentive whereby if there was money saved they got a preferential for it, rather than spending it quickly and maybe in cases where it wasn't properly needed.

We also went through each of the departments and endeavoured to get a slice of the percentage off each department if we could, bearing in mind, of course, Health and Education are the big ones as far as spending is concerned - I think they take up two-thirds of the budget. So they're the big areas, but we tried to cut a percentage off each department and we brought the departmental heads in and discussed this with them, listened to their arguments, and then tried to readjust it after that. So we went right through every department, trying to slice them down to the bone, and going through those that we could see, or felt that we could see from previous expenditure, had a bit of spare money and were just spending it at the end to keep their budget up.

SR Did you bring a team of people in to do this sort of work or did you and the Under-secretary [sic] do it yourself? How did you go about it?

**O'CONNOR** No. I talked to the Under Treasurer about it. We were in daily touch, sometimes several times a day, and he organised it through his departments and brought the heads in, and when needed I would intervene or be involved then, but it was mainly done through the Treasury Department. They are the specialists in the field, and they also see year by year and they have the records of what happens in each department. They can see if over a period of five years, for instance, a department has increased by 50 or by 5 per cent, and also know whether it should evolve in that way. For instance, Main Roads was a big spender, but of course a lot of that money we were getting from the Commonwealth, and we were trying to get our black road around Australia, which we did. These things all had to be taken into account - the effect they had on the State and the effect they had on the departments.

SR And was the aim to cut money out of the areas of red tape, of bureaucracy?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, absolutely. Well, you often get and you still get comments where someone will say, "I drove along the road and there were six so and so employees sitting there talking, none of them working", and this sort of thing. We went into all of those aspects to find if it could be improved and what we could do. As you say, in Public Works we farmed some of our work out to private enterprise and things such as that to see if the variation in the figures was worthwhile, because in the Public Works Department if you set up a project and start it there is no guarantee that that is what it will cost in the long-term, whereas if you put it out to tender there is a guaranteed quote on it, and sometimes that makes a difference. You know what you are up for.

SR What about red tape in the accessing of government services, for the public dealing with the Government?

**O'CONNOR** We tried very strongly to overcome that too. Where there had been complaints and that, we took these straight back. We were very accessible as a government. I think you will see that from the press comments at the time. This was one of the things that I insisted on: that each minister was accessible to the press and to the public, and we worked on that base.

SR That brings up the question of the press, which was one of the things I was going to come to a little bit later on, but I might deal with it just now. How were your personal relations with the media?

**O'CONNOR** Quite good. As I say, we were very open with them. If they wanted to know anything, there was no hiding behind bars or anything of that nature, or hiding information. We were very open. If there was something that could not be disclosed for a few days, we would say, "Here's what is likely to happen. Please don't print it until we give it to you, and we'll let you have it as soon as we can". The cooperation we had was very good.

SR What about the reporting of you personally? How do you feel you were treated personally during the time you were Premier?

**O'CONNOR** As far as I know, I think I was treated quite fairly. There may have been instances over that period of time - and Stuart, it's hard to remember that far back - particular instances, but generally we're speaking of, and generally speaking I think I was treated quite fairly.

SR Can we broaden that out to looking at the media coverage over your whole career in politics. Do you still feel that you were treated quite fairly?

**O'CONNOR** Generally speaking. Rumours get around that are false and the press print them at times when they hear them. You've got to cop that and there is not much you can do about it.

SR So it's not something then that you hold grudges about, or do you?

**O'CONNOR** No. It's part of politics. When you go along in politics, if you can't take it, you should get out. It's the same with me. When I got sent to prison for something I didn't do I was extremely angry, and I finished up finding out the only person I was hurting was me - and my family.

SR Again on the question of media, you mentioned having good relations with them. To what extent can politicians and governments use the media or manipulate the media to let out information in a timely fashion just as they want it, and so on?

**O'CONNOR** It's done substantially and has been right through politics as far as I can recollect.

SR Can you talk a bit about how it's done and in what way?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you work through your.... I had a press secretary, not a dozen as they have today, but you would discuss any aspect with your press secretary, and sometimes he would say, "Well look, the press have been on to me about this particular issue. What can we say?", and I'd say, "Look, we can tell them this on the basis that it is not released until such and such a time", and you'd achieve good relations with them by keeping them fairly well informed. We tried as a government not to hold anything any longer than we could.

SR Were there things, though, that you did need to keep from the public, or keep from the press?

**O'CONNOR** Nothing that I can think of at the moment. I think if you have a look at the press comments during those days you will find that they thought we were pretty open, and that's what we tried to be.

SR Can we move to one of the big priorities for government in Western Australia, which is attracting business, attracting industry to the State. What sorts of things were you involved with there?

**O'CONNOR** Probably the biggest one I was involved with, or the two biggest, were in connection with Italy and Korea. I believed, and bear in mind I wasn't in as Premier for a very long period of time - for about one and a half years - I believed that there was a strong possibility of setting up a mini steel mill operation in the Pilbara, and I took this to IRI, a major Italian organisation, and I finished up I went to Italy, and with Finsida, IRI and a couple of other companies, we drew up an agreement for them to do the feasibility study to set up a plant in the Pilbara on the basis of using our iron ore and them purchasing the total products from it, which gives you a market for the whole lot, which was a very good operation.

We had that agreement signed. Unfortunately, we went out of government just at that time. We were also negotiating....

SR Before we move on from that, I would like to know more about the steel mill proposal because it goes back a long way, the idea that the iron ore should be milled on site, and Sir Charles Court had always wanted that to be part of it, hadn't he?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. I have a copy of the agreement there; if you want it, you are welcome to have it a copy of it. Yes, it had been talked about for a long time, but little had been done, I felt, and I was pushing very strongly to have that done.

SR Why was it that so little had been done in the past on it?

**O'CONNOR** Probably the market was the thing. It's all right to produce something, you have got to be able to sell it, and in this case with IRI and Finsida we had the proposition whereby they would use it in Italy and also for markets because they did a lot of pipe work for the Russians and people in other countries, and the Italians were quite adept at that, so this was one of the things. We had the iron ore, we had the gas, we could produce, we then had the market, and that was very attractive to me.

SR Which of the iron ore companies was it that were involved in it at this end?

**O'CONNOR** I think they were talking to Hamersley and the other companies up there at that time, so it was a matter of trying to get something going for Western Australia. We had to do it, and let obviously the Italians negotiate with them to a degree, and they did come over here and commence negotiations.

SR Did Lang Hancock have any involvement in this, do you know?

**O'CONNOR** Not that I can recollect, although I did certainly have involvement with Lang Hancock.

SR What sort of involvement?

**O'CONNOR** Well, he was interested in getting the iron ore down to the coast, and he wanted to use Mt Newman's line. He approached me on that, and we weren't prepared to give him that. He wanted to open a new port up there and put his rail line down at Port I just forget the name of it offhand, and he said that no-one would give him approval, so I gave him approval to use the port and to build his operation there. He had it all designed and planned but never proceeded.

SR Why was it that he didn't get support to use the Mt Newman line?

**O'CONNOR** Because that belonged to Mt Newman. If it had been Lang Hancock's line and I had said Mt Newman could use it - an opposition group - what would he have said? If he was going to use the line, he would have to negotiate with Newman, whose line it was. A government cannot step in and take over a line and say these people shall or will use it. To me, it wasn't the right thing; nor do I think it would be legal.

SR What are your reflections on Lang Hancock's role in the history of development in Western Australia?

**O'CONNOR** Oh, he had a major part to do with it. Lang, as I say, together with Ken McCamey, who I met a number of times, did tremendous work in the Pilbara, and they had the manganese deposits at Marangaroo, I think it was, they had McCamey's Monster, and the various other ones. He had found most of the major iron ore deposits up there and handed them on or organised leases or arrangements with other companies to control them. He'd done it over very many years. He was a very ambitious man, very hardworking. I think his brain sometimes got in front of him, you know, he was going that quickly. Some of the things he did were extremely good for Western Australia; some of the things he wanted were not feasible.

SR To move on then to Korea, you were involved there in trying to get a power station and refinery for Bunbury?

**O'CONNOR** Correct, and also a sugar industry for the Ord River.

SR Perhaps you could tell us about both of those.

**O'CONNOR** Yes. We were negotiating with them. Actually, our negotiations went up as high as President Chun, who was the one who was condemned to death yesterday, I think. He was in control in Korea at that time, and the people that we were negotiating with took us and we met Chun at the time when we went to Korea. We were hoping to get a power plant built down there, which they were prepared to do. One of the things with Korea, we must remember they take a great deal of Western Australian iron ore, and our negotiations were on the basis of them taking more ore to give us an additional benefit as well. So we were trying to do a deal with them to build a power plant there for us, and to take additional ore.

In the Ord River.... Korea imports, I think, nearly all of their sugar, if not all of it, and they therefore had a major market for it, and some of the people we were negotiating with had major supermarts throughout Korea. We had done the studies, and the Ord River produced substantially more sugar per hectare than they did in Queensland, but there were arrangements with the Commonwealth Government and CSR that precluded us from proceeding with it. I went into Korea, and on the way in I met Joh Bjelke-Petersen at the airport in Hong Kong. He was coming out as I was going in, and he had been there trying to negotiate for the sugar agreement to proceed with Queensland, and he was not able to get to first base.

That was because they had had discussions and made arrangements with us. So I went in, and they were quite prepared to proceed with that if we could have done so, but the Commonwealth arrangement with CSR prevented us from proceeding at that time.

SR And how about the refinery proposal? How did that go?

**O'CONNOR** Oh gosh, I can't remember the full detail of that, Stuart, at this stage. Peter Jones was handling that for us as Minister for Resources, but I had discussions with them. I can't remember the full detail of them.

SR As you mentioned, President Chun has been convicted and sentenced just very recently, and that is amidst a whole array of accusations and claims of bribery and corruption of all sorts in Korea. What was this Government's experience of that in dealing with Korea?

**O'CONNOR** We never had any experience of that at all. I don't recollect anything in connection with bribery mentioned to me by anyone. I am talking about on our own side of the fence as well. Chun was the President at the time we were there, and he had taken over when Park got shot. Park was the previous Premier who got killed, assassinated. Chun was in charge of the military and they took over the country. They were in a very strong position when we were there and actually the operations in Korea, South Korea, were the most efficient I have seen anywhere. When you went anywhere, everything was spot on. You'd go along the streets and the people were in the right places to see everything was done properly. I can't recollect anywhere in the world where I have seen efficiency of the way it was at that stage. It was a military style operation obviously, but that's what Chun has been charged with - the killing of people. But in connection with bribery, we never saw any of that at all. Actually, Chun's brother was the one that took us around mostly, and, of course, we went to the Posang steelworks and places such as that where they were operating **mills** and making steel at that stage.

SR And what about Western Australia's relations with the Asian markets and Asian countries generally? Has the issue of corruption come up in your dealings with those places?

**O'CONNOR** I haven't seen any at all, no. Let me say this: If you go to those places, they wine and dine you very well, but I think that is generally recognised. If they come here, we probably do the same to them - make sure they're looked after properly and that while they're here. No, I haven't seen any of **bribery**, and I haven't heard of it even. Have you?

SR Yes, [laughs] quite a bit, but this is on a much smaller scale, of course. I have not had any experience of multi-million dollar projects at all.

**O'CONNOR** All ours are accountable through government operations here.

SR Also on the subject of developing business here in Western Australia, one of the issues that was of concern at the time and has come back into the news lately as well is the issue of States competing with one another to offer incentives to business. Was that an issue for you?

**O'CONNOR** Yes it was. You see, you take, for instance, Albany depends on about three or four industries: the meat industry; the export of grain through the port; Hunts canning factory; and the woollen mills. Now without those, Albany would be substantially down the drain. We worked hard to try to keep those businesses operating and sometimes had to give incentives to assist them. There were other issues; for instance, the canning factory in the south of the State here was for many years by different governments subsidised to keep it going in the interests of the growers in the area and the employees. Eventually that was canned itself, and I think it was a good thing because it was losing so much over a long period of time. You can only go so far with these things, but you must take into account the issues of the employment that they provide, the income for the State and the country, and whether it is likely to be viable in the long-term.

SR Another of your initiatives at that time involved the Small Business Advisory Service. Can you tell us about that?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. We set up a committee of small business people and Government combined to just see what we could do to assist small businesses and what incentives, and, of course, one of the main things they wanted was a reduction in the payroll tax and things such as that, although a lot of the small businesses did not pay that, but when you get into the medium, you did. We had recommendations back from the people themselves who were involved, and whether that is still running today, the Small Business [Advisory Council] or not, I do not know.

SR And to what extent was it effective during your time?

**O'CONNOR** Recommendations would come back to me on a monthly basis and we would implement those that we could of those recommendations - those that we could and thought were viable, so it was quite effective at the time.

SR There was also Job Bank. What was that about?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. I put that under Bill Hassell to look after. This was a set-up where we put some money aside to try to employ more younger people who had been out of jobs for some time, and we gave incentives in that area to try to assist, to create more employment.

END OF TAPE SEVEN SIDE A

SR One other thing about your visit to Italy when you were negotiating that deal on the steel mill that I wanted to get you to talk about, and that was your meeting with the Pope.

**O'CONNOR** Yes. That was arranged by the Italian Government, and one of their former Prime Ministers and Foreign Minister - I'm just trying to think of his name - but anyhow, he arranged it, and we met the Pope at St Peters. My wife and my son were with me and it was a great pleasure to have that opportunity to meet him on that occasion.

SR Having been brought up as a Catholic, that would have had added significance, I guess.

**O'CONNOR** My son had the pleasure of taking the photo of the Pope back to his school, which was a Catholic school here, Newman College, and I think it's still hanging in the hallway of the college these days.

SR What did it really mean for you?

**O'CONNOR** It's like meeting the Queen of England, or someone such as that, the President of the United States. It's a very important occasion in your life. During my time I have dined with the Queen on several occasions, I have been in the royal box with the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret at Kempton Park races. On the trip I did to Japan, I met a fellow by the name of Suzuki in the morning, he was Prime Minister of Japan at the time, and in the afternoon, I met the Prime Minister who had been appointed during the late morning, so I had morning and afternoon tea with two Prime Ministers of the one country who were different people. I'd put meeting the Pope certainly up in those categories.

SR And meeting the Queen, on what occasions did you meet the Queen?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I had to host a lunch for her here in Perth at Government House. I've been on the royal yacht with her and Phillip. I've sat next to her during dinner because I was the senior minister or person from Western Australia at the time, and we chatted away. She was a very keen horsewoman, and knowing that I was involved in horses we had plenty to talk about.

SR Was that the main topic of conversation, horses?

**O'CONNOR** No. We talked about the country as well. I flew with Prince Charles to Geraldton on visits taking him to various parts of the State. But no, they are very normal to talk to.

SR And what are your impressions of Prince Charles?

**O'CONNOR** At the time he was obviously trying to learn a lot of what was going on and it was quite obvious that in his discussions he had been fairly well briefed beforehand and was speaking on issues that he knew a little bit about. Obviously those people have a heck of a hard time. They're expected to know everything about everything and to respond to everyone's demands, but he handled himself quite well here.

SR And your impressions of the Japanese Prime Ministers you met?

**O'CONNOR** I only met them very briefly. The one that was in the afternoon - I am just trying to think of his name. Was it **Nakasone**? I just can't think of his name offhand.

SR Nakasone?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I think it might have been. He was the one in the afternoon. He had a daughter in Sydney going to university there at the time, and he spoke fairly good English so it was much easier to talk with him than Suzuki. But they were quite nice, particularly Nakasone was quite a nice sort of person and we got on very well.

SR Just a little thing from your time as Premier. I noticed in going through some newspapers that one of the things that the newspaper does on Australia Day is it gets comments from prominent people in society about what they think about Australia or what's important on Australia Day, and that sort of thing, and there was a quote from you where they quoted you as saying something like the best thing about Australia was the Australian people, and the quote was, "Together they make a jewel in the crown of humanity". Was that an original phrase of yours?

**O'CONNOR** Yes it was. I hadn't seen it anywhere before, but fortunately they give you notice of what you're going to say, so it gives you a bit of time to think it up. So yes, it was an original.

SR Before we actually come to the '83 election, were there any other things about your time as Premier that you think it's important to record at this stage?

**O'CONNOR** Stuart, I think we've covered it pretty well year by year as we've gone through; I think it's covered everything.

SR So in the lead up to the election you've mentioned in passing the polls at that time and also I notice *The West Australian* newspaper in its editorial on the day of the election said that the case for change had not been made. What was it, you think, that went wrong for your government?

**O'CONNOR** I think what went wrong was Malcolm Fraser announced a federal election a fortnight after ours, and he wasn't top of the pops here at the time and we had notified him that we didn't want him to come to Western Australia, we hadn't invited him over for the election, and I think when he made that announcement it made a sufficient difference to swing the votes against us. We were only narrowly beaten, but the indication prior to that we would have won reasonably comfortably.

SR What were the achievements of your government that you were going to the polls on?

**O'CONNOR** Well, on the basis that we'd been able to manage the country financially well, that we had cared about people. If you have a look at our budgets over the years, they'd been all balanced budgets; we hadn't gone into deficit. In connection with the people, we'd been very open with the public and very perceptive in endeavouring to help in cases and areas where it was needed.

SR What about the Opposition at that time, the Labor Party? By this time, of course, Brian Burke had taken over the leadership of the party. How had he been performing?

**O'CONNOR** Brian is a very good television performer - of course that's where he used to work - and his oratory was probably second to none. So he was a good speaker and a good performer on television and was able to get a good message over in that regard. I would say that on TV he performed much better than I did.

SR And what about in Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** A good performer. When he got on his feet he was a very good speaker, and he obviously selected the sections that he wanted to debate himself as leader, which is fair enough, but no, he performed quite well. You couldn't criticise him there.

SR And what about changes in Parliament as a result of his leadership? Was there a difference in the approach of the Opposition in dealing with the Government?

**O'CONNOR** I think that had changed prior to that, the time when [Arthur] Tonkin, [Mal] Bryce and some of those came in. There was a change - a younger group got in there and seemed to get control of the ALP, and some in the Liberal Party came into that too, and I think the changes started to take place then in Parliament. In my opinion - if you're going to ask, and I'll answer it first - it wasn't for the better of Parliament.

SR In what ways? What were these changes first, and then in what ways were they not for the better?

**O'CONNOR** Well we used to operate in Parliament whereby if you had something that you were putting forward as legislation or vice versa, you'd often talk to the opposition spokesman in connection with it and sort things out, but things seem to become very bitter between the two factions, and, you know, the amicability between members of Parliament deteriorated. The debates, in my opinion, became just furores, and there was just the interjections and carrying on, and the deterioration in Parliament and the standards, in my opinion, dropped considerably, and I think that's a great pity.

SR Where would you place the responsibility for that?

**O'CONNOR** I'd place it with the younger ilk that came in around that time, and there was a number of them.

SR What about the role of the Speaker then?

**O'CONNOR** It got that bad that the Speaker was in an almost impossible position; he'd be throwing people out all the day if he'd kept going. I felt sorry often for the Speaker because they try to keep Parliament going and they try to keep some control, and you'll get people baiting them all the time, taking them to the brink all the time. This is what was happening. You'd get members, even with their eyes, testing the Speaker, daring him, and this occurred.

SR Why was this? What was the [reason]?

**O'CONNOR** Just bitterness seemed to have crept in there. Why, I couldn't understand it really, but it did, whereas before you had the old-timers around who'd get up and they'd blast you in the House on their feet and go out and have a drink with you after and that sort of thing, and that's the way it should have been, in my opinion. That sort of thing just went out the window.

SR What about changes in the use of strategy in the House?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. That changed substantially because of the reasons I've just given you.

SR Can you give me some examples of how people would use parliamentary procedure?

**O'CONNOR** They would often use it to test the Speaker to the maximum, hoping sometimes that he'd throw them out because that would give them a bit of publicity and things such as that, things that I thought were quite unsavoury.

SR So, any recollections of the election itself - election day, or lead up to the election?

**O'CONNOR** Mainly disappointment after. No, we were quietly confident we would win the election. We worked very hard. I spent every day away from home for six weeks or so before the election, going to every part of the State, just flying our colours, going to the various places to speak, and when I was back in Perth trying to get our policies together, which is a pretty hard thing to do when you've got all the other work and are expected to be everywhere, it was a very hard time. We thought we would win it. When we found out that we were in trouble on the night, it was a great disappointment because we believed we had worked hard in the right areas, we believed we had done the right thing by the community, and we had hoped that we would get back.

SR So you then found yourself in opposition. What were your thoughts at that stage about what to do next?

**O'CONNOR** Well I guess it took a few days to settle down. We had to move out of our offices, take the incoming ministers in and introduce them to the departmental heads and staff around that they were working with, and hand over and take any of our papers out that we wanted and notify them what else there was there, so the first week or so was taken up doing that sort of work. Then we had to get back and get our own party together and set up our shadow Cabinet and that type of thing, so we went ahead and did that.

SR Did you need to stand for re-election as leader of the party at that stage?

**O'CONNOR** There was a call for nominations, but I don't think I was opposed at the time.

SR Did you have any second thoughts yourself?

**O'CONNOR** Yes I did. I'd been in Parliament for 25 years at that stage. I wondered whether it wasn't time to give it away, which I did the following year.

SR Can we talk a bit about your year in opposition? What was your approach to Opposition as leader? How did you tackle it?

**O'CONNOR** We got together with our Cabinet. We had a sort of shadow Cabinet meeting each week. We got together and discussed the various Bills that were coming forward. We would then direct whoever it was to lead the debate on that Bill and get backup speakers all the way for it, which is the normal procedure. I also then set about towards the end of that year taking a break with my family, which I hadn't done for so long.

SR What did you do in that break?

**O'CONNOR** We went to Europe. We went to London, and then we went over to France. We got a mini-bus, a 10 seater, and eight of us - the family, six of the children, my wife and myself - travelled down through Italy, through the Alps, Switzerland, Austria, back to Belgium, and then back to London where we stayed for another week again. So we just travelled around. We stayed at a place called Livigna for about eight or nine days, which was a skiing resort in the Alps, and just got together as a family.

SR Quite a different experience from the previous 25 years then?

**O'CONNOR** [Laughs]. Yes. Fortunately I'm very lucky. I've got a lovely family who have been very supportive all the way through, and it was just so nice to get with them and to have dinner with them every night and to be there with them for breakfast each morning. We had a great time.

SR During your period in opposition, what were your difficulties or problems as a leader? Did you have issues that were difficult for you?

**O'CONNOR** I don't recollect any, until the challenge to me came up, which was....

SR Any hint of that earlier?

**O'CONNOR** No. Well, the Whip mentioned to me that there was going to be a challenge, and that was done when I was overseas. When I was away for my six weeks with the family the work was done in the background then, and the challenge came up as soon as I came back.

SR You mentioned the role of the Whip there. The Whip is something that I did want to raise with you generally, the role of Whips, and as you've brought it up, it's perhaps a good time to do it just now.

**O'CONNOR** Sure.

SR How significant are the Whips? Let's take in government first.

**O'CONNOR** They are vital to you, the Whips, because the Whip, apart from keeping the numbers in the House, he keeps you advised of what happens, problems members have, and things that are in the background that you might not hear about, so he is a general listening board for you and he comes back to you with all the information in that particular regard. He has a very important job of making sure the numbers are there when the Bills are debated in the House. Particularly when you are in government and you have, say, a majority of one and one is missing you are in trouble, and if that falls down the Whip is the one responsible, so he has a very important job, and sometimes a job that doesn't make him tremendously popular.

SR It's a position - as you've described it, as a listening board - it's a job that would require a good deal of trust in the person's ability to keep confidences and that sort of thing. Is that an important part of it?

**O'CONNOR** Absolutely, yes, yes. The Whip is notified of so many things, and anyone that....

SR You were talking about the Whips and the question of confidences and so on.

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Tony Williams was the Whip when I was there and he did a very good job of it.

SR What sorts of things come to the attention of Whips that they would pass on to the leader?

**O'CONNOR** Often disgruntled members who have problems, and if you find this out and go and talk it over with them you can often save a miserable period to come thereafter, you know. Also, sometimes it is necessary for someone to be absent from the House because of illness in the family or something of that nature, and he lets us know and we make sure that that person can get away, or get a pair, as they call it. The Whip is responsible for all the pairs, for allowing them, and he discusses those with the leader, just to make sure that someone is not taking too much advantage of it.

SR There's an implication just in the use of the term Whip that there is a disciplinary aspect to it as well. Is that part of it?

**O'CONNOR** Not really. The Whip, usually you find out he talks with all the **Members**, and a lot of them also want to talk to him because if they want to get a pair for something or other they've got to come through him, so it's to their advantage to know him pretty well and to get on all right with him.

SR What kind of a person makes a good Whip?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you've got to get someone that can talk to people easily but someone that can also be firm at the time when they have to be and tell them why they can't go if they want to go.

SR Is it a position for someone who has ambitions in the party or is it a place for someone who is not going into that ministerial path?

**O'CONNOR** It's usually for one that is probably next step up into the ministerial ranks, so while he is not a minister, he is one of those that is next in line.

SR Were there other Whips whose work you particularly recall?

**O'CONNOR** Well Tony Williams was the Whip when I was there, so he's the one that I knew better here than any of the others. There were a number of Whips previously but my contacts with them were only when I had to get a pair to do a ministerial function or something of that nature and get them to arrange it.

SR Coming back to the time in opposition, we've talked about the House - what of the things that you had seen happen, the changes that you had seen happen in Parliament over the previous years, how much of that did you incorporate into your style as opposition and how much did you try to turn the clock back, as it were?

**O'CONNOR** I tried as much as I could to get some sort of discipline into the House within our own ranks, but if someone keeps rankling someone all the time there'll always be a kickback. You can't prevent it entirely, but I did the best I could, as Charles Court did when he was there, to make sure that our fellows were reasonably disciplined and obeyed the Speaker and made the House appear as a House of Parliament should.

SR To what extent do you feel you were a match for Burke in Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** I think I was able to match him all the way. Figures wise, I was certainly better than he. We had a television debate and figures came up which I was able to quote and he was bamboozled on the answer and said, "Look, I just don't know". But let me say he was a great orator and there was no better orator than him in the House. I thought I was able to match up mostly to anyone in debate, but I'm not saying I was as good an orator as him or, say, Herb Graham. They were outstanding.

SR What about overall media appearances? You've mentioned that he was skilled, having come from that background.

**O'CONNOR** He also had a lot of his friends in the media whom he'd worked with, which would be an advantage I would think.

SR Just how important are things like the ability to perform in the media and the ability to perform on the floor of the House?

**O'CONNOR** I think they're tremendously important. Quite frankly, I think it's more important today to perform in the media than on the floor of the House, because on television you get out to the public and they're the voting people. Anyone who can get up and put over a story there, whether it be right or wrong, can do better than someone who doesn't perform well. I can name, and I won't, certain prominent departmental heads in recent years who have performed appallingly on television, and if they were going up for a vote would get very little.

I'll mention their names later on but not in here. Some of them might have been able people, but good heavens, on television shocking.

SR What about dealing with the change in government style? With the Burke Government coming in you had a change in a great many different things about the way government operated. To what extent in that first year of the Burke Government were you aware of the nature of that change and how did you deal with it?

**O'CONNOR** It was prominent right from the start. They started disposing of departmental heads and putting their own people into prominent places, and this was something that had never occurred before, in my knowledge, in the whole of the government service. Prior to me there was Ross McLarty and Bert Hawke were Premiers; then there was David Brand, then Charles Court, John Tonkin and then myself. I don't know of anyone that ever effected a career public service operator for his political reasons or to put a political appointment in their place, and this certainly changed and you had a lot of departmental heads overridden with outsiders, if I may use that word, brought in and put in their place, and I think it was part of their downfall in the long-term.

SR And how did you deal with it as an opposition?

**O'CONNOR** We brought it to their notice as much as we could and tried to get it made prominent in the media and things such as this, but nevertheless it proceeded. Burke was a pretty strong fellow as a Premier. Within the departments, what he said went. He had control and made sure that he kept it.

SR So you came back from your overseas trip to find that there was this move against you. What did you then do?

**O'CONNOR** I did nothing. I went along as normal until such time as a meeting was called and the challenge was put up. I had a number of people who came to me and gave me their promise of support but later on I found that they had not supported me, and this was disappointing - some who had been ministers and some who had not.

SR Did you do any lobbying, discussing, persuading, yourself?

**O'CONNOR** If I did, it was only when I was approached. I am not one that believes in going out and approaching people. Other people did on behalf of Bill Hassell, make some approaches according to information I had, but no, I didn't do that. I went along thinking I had the numbers with the people that had contacted me, but, as I said, some of them changed without letting me know.

SR Did you have anyone who was close to you, loyal to you, who was working the numbers?

**O'CONNOR** The Whip kept me advised as to what was happening, pretty well, yes.

SR That was still John Williams?

**O'CONNOR** Tony Williams.

SR So what was your reaction when you did lose the leadership?

**O'CONNOR** Any of the members in the party room will tell you I got up and said, "Look, I'm a Liberal, that's what you are. You've got a new leader, get right behind him". That's what I said.

SR And how did you feel inside?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I was disappointed, obviously, but okay, you've still got to get on with life and, as I said earlier, you've got to have a thick hide, and if you haven't got that in politics, you shouldn't be there.

SR Did you decide there and then to leave politics?

**O'CONNOR** Within a short period after that I did, and I left in the August. I waited. Don Taylor retired at the same time. We had a discussion and we both retired on the same day so that it gave them the opportunity of bringing the two by-elections up together rather than waste the money on a single one. So it wasn't long before I decided to go out and leave Parliament.

SR Any regrets on leaving Parliament when you did?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, there was. Later on when I thought about it, it may have been hasty, but still it was done and there was nothing you could do about it then.

SR What about what happened in the rest of the 1980s, as an observer of what was going on in Parliament and politics in those next few years?

**O'CONNOR** I watched it very closely and I still do today. I suppose once it's in your skin you can't get it out from underneath, but in connection with it, I get the paper first thing every morning, I go through it, and I keep a close watch on the politics and what is happening throughout the country.

SR Did you retain a personal contact with the people involved in politics?

**O'CONNOR** With a number of them. There is about 10 of us, we regularly get out together. As I mentioned earlier, there are some former members and current members, we get together once a fortnight and have a meal together at lunch time.

SR What were the business interests that you took up first when you left Parliament?

**O'CONNOR** I set up Ray O'Connor Consultancy in the Terrace and I worked as a consultant in connection with government and local government operations and things such as that.

SR What sort of clients did you have as a consultant?

**O'CONNOR** Most of the major people around town, like Multiplex Constructions, Bond Corporation, Connell, they were all clients, and a number of other people. I had people from the Eastern States who had problems with government and that sort of thing used to approach me and we would go and see what we could do for them, or I'd be able to advise them what I thought would happen and then proceed on that basis if they wanted to.

SR So what was the general nature of the advice that you gave in dealing with government?

**O'CONNOR** It depends on.... see, having been there that long, I knew the operation of government and, generally speaking, what the response would be. Or if there was a chance of achieving a better result, to tell them how to go about it. With 25 years in government through all the departments and as Deputy Premier and Premier, I guess I was well tutored to know the problems they would run into and short-circuit them for them.

END OF TAPE SEVEN SIDE B

SR A couple of the people that you have mentioned as people you did consultancy working for went on to feature very prominently in WA Inc. so I think it is relevant for us to ask what in particular they were consulting you on.

**O'CONNOR** Put it this way, at that time in Perth if you weren't doing work for them you weren't doing work for anyone; they had most of the operations going in Perth. In connection with Connell, Bond and Multiplex, who I mentioned, they had me on a retainer to give them priority in connection with their particular fields if they required me and they used to then pay me so much an hour for work that I did for them. They were in various aspects.

For instance, one that I recollect was that Bond purchased some land in Italy, about 8 000 acres just out of the centre of Rome. He needed to get to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Italy, whom I did know, and I was able to make an introduction and get him in there to see him, and that's where they were able to take on an Italian partner to buy the land. Whether it was in connection with that or various other aspects they would often contact me. For instance, they contacted me about Observation City and I did some work on that for them.

SR What sort of work did you do for them on that?

**O'CONNOR** Advising them on what the outcome was likely to be.

SR Was this in relation to the development application with the Stirling City Council?

**O'CONNOR** Yes.

SR That, of course, brings us to the issue that brought so many problems for you later on.

**O'CONNOR** Yes, that is right.

SR It is incumbent on me to ask for more detail of what was actually happening. What was it specifically you were advising them on in relation to that?

**O'CONNOR** What I did, I spoke to a couple of councillors with respect to the voting and how it was likely to proceed. They notified me as to how they thought the voting would go. I also attended meetings on their behalf to see what was happening and to generally keep them.... There were certain aspects of the road provisions and that that I was able to advise them on and save them several hundred thousand dollars.

SR Really? In what way?

**O'CONNOR** By being able to get a rearrangement of the roadway. I don't remember the full detail of it now Stuart, but to get a rearrangement and reappraisal I was able to save them a substantial sum.

SR What about those discussions with some of the councillors? Were you approaching those who might be against it to try to persuade them?

**O'CONNOR** No, there was no persuasion at all. I spoke to two councillors - Cash and Tyzack - to find out what the running was and I checked with one against another to see if they coincided, which I think they did at the time.

SR And the view that you had at that time was that they would approve or not approve?

**O'CONNOR** I think it was that they would approve at that time. There were certain areas where there was doubt at certain times. See that's 1984, that's 12 years ago. I guess I am getting old and my memory is getting dimmer, but there were stages when they thought it would and would not go, but the information I had generally was that it appeared it would go through.

SR Later on, of course, a conversation of yours was taped by Terry Burke.

**O'CONNOR** Correct.

SR I was wondering about that. What was it that you said in that conversation?

**O'CONNOR** I do not want to go back through things that will cause legal complications again, because I have already been through that. It wasn't what I said but what Terry Burke said and I agreed with. If you listen to the tape you won't be able to understand it because it's not decipherable really. Even Les Ayton of the Police Department admitted that. The Police Department and the royal commission both had transcripts of it and I went through and there were **200** variations between the two of them. I'm talking about substantial variations, because the tape itself was really indecipherable.

SR Did you acknowledge, though, that you had admitted to passing on a bribe at that stage? Was that something you admitted to in the royal commission inquiries and so on?

**O'CONNOR** I think that I never denied that at any stage.

SR I thought that had been said. Why was it that that was said?

**O'CONNOR** Stuart, I am not going to get myself back where there is going to be a legal complication that I can be involved in again. I have been through this once.

SR Yes, sure.

**O'CONNOR** I am not prepared to go ahead and give them further stuff where they might want to come back again. But to answer your question: after I was with Terry Burke for a while, I realised the tape was there and I paused and didn't answer, just nodded my head a few times and shook my head to indicate what had happened and that I knew that. I answered it as I thought he wanted on the way through, knowing it was being taped, never realising what would happen with it in the long-term.

SR On that question of the taping of that discussion, is this something that you've had any other experience of at all? Is it something that you've ever done yourself or do you have any experience of it happening elsewhere in government - the taping of conversations like that?

**O'CONNOR** No, I haven't. It's something that I would find distasteful to do.

SR Given that you were involved to some extent in the whole issue of whether or not approval should be granted at Observation City, did you have any indications at the time that there might be anything untoward happening in relation to that development application, any hint of someone being bribed or persuaded?

**O'CONNOR** There had been rumours two years before and people had mentioned this in the royal commission, that prior to that there had been discussions on this. I had heard myself rumours, but they were only rumours.

SR We were talking in general about the sort of consultancy work that you were doing. What about work for Connell?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I did quite a lot of work for Connell in various ways. For instance, I recollect at one stage we made an arrangement with the Chinese Government in connection with setting up chicken outlets throughout China. We had an arrangement with the Chinese Government at that time for us to set up franchises and to operate chicken outlets, similar to Kentucky Fried, throughout China on the basis that they would supply the land for us and we would build the operation, then we would have a joint venture with them. This was a major thing at the time, then Tiananmen Square came along and it failed. I also, jointly with him, looked at the possibility of setting up an aluminium processing plant in Wuhan province up the Yangtze River in China. There were some things like that. In connection with Bond Corporation there was an offer made to him of setting up a brewery there. These sort of things I did for them - State, national and internationally.

SR When Rothwells started to get into trouble did you have any role in negotiating with the Government on their behalf or advising them at all?

**O'CONNOR** No, I had nothing to do with that part at all. If you look at it, Burke and Connell were pretty close together at that time and any negotiating they did, they did not need a third person in. To answer your question: no, I had nothing to do with that.

SR We've also got another incident where accusations have been made later happening around that time and that's the running of the AHA Cup at Bunbury. Were you aware of the running of the Cup at the time? Do you have recollections of that time at all?

**O'CONNOR** No. They proved to be false. Even the DPP [Director of Public Prosecutions], I asked him to investigate it and they came back and said there were no foundations in anything that was there.

SR This was the allegation that somehow you masterminded the...

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I think someone was looking for a scapegoat at the time and they chose me. I suppose I was one that used to be involved in horses but not at that time because I had given it away at that stage. But those things hurt a lot, particularly when they are lies. As a matter of fact, I saw Laurie Connell in the Perth gaol when I was going through there and he said that was done contrary to his instructions, because he would have known it was false.

SR Looking at the way things developed through the 1980s with Rothwells' collapse and what later came to be known as WA Inc, what are your reflections on that period now, looking back on it with hindsight?

**O'CONNOR** My recollections are as has been printed: that governments never should have been involved to the extent they were in private operations. When you purchase a petrochemical plant for $400 million when there is nothing there except in the land and you give someone $350 million for a half share and another party $50m for a half share it seems a little strange. I think that when you have things like that occurring it is very difficult to run a country and be involved in that. I think it was proved that it was substantially to the detriment of Western Australia what occurred at that stage. A pattern was set up by the then government here that was followed by other governments in the Eastern States, for instance in Victoria and South Australia, with similar results. They both went down the gurgler substantially.

SR What do you think about the argument, which was put at the time, that Rothwells was so integrated into the business community of Western Australia that if it had been allowed to collapse at the time that a lot of others would have collapsed with it?

**O'CONNOR** That is probably correct but wouldn't that apply to any business that went bankrupt or got into financial difficulties? I saw in today's paper there is a building firm that has gone through three or four times. This would obviously apply, but is it the Government's job to pull it all out? I don't think it is. In government we didn't do that. I can't recollect at any stage that that would have happened. But to go for figures as big as that and to guarantee for $150 million as well....

SR Were you working for any of the parties during that period?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I was. I was still a financial consultant to them up to 1987 or 1988 - no, as a consultant to them to 1987-88.

SR There is one quote I noticed in the clippings that refers to a retainer from Connell of $500 a week in cash. Is that correct?

**O'CONNOR** That's correct, yes.

SR Why pay it in cash? It's a large sum of money?

**O'CONNOR** He said, "Well I will pay you $500 in cash", and that was paid in cash to me weekly.

SR Did you advise on any donations to political parties? Was that part of your strategy for advising them to deal with governments?

**O'CONNOR** They spoke to me about those things, yes.

SR What was your advice on that?

**O'CONNOR** Well, it would depend on what the circumstances were. They made their own decisions, but sometimes they spoke to me about it, particularly if they thought there was someone they could help a bit. They would speak to me and say, "Well, what do you think about this?"

SR What were your thoughts on it at the time, given that the people they were giving the money to primarily were or had been your opponents for so long?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you must realise that if you give money to a person in Parliament you've got to do it on the basis of no guarantees in any way. If you do give guarantees you might as well pull the plug and get out altogether. But if you assist them in some way it's obvious that those people try to assist you. You've got an 'in' to them if they want to see you at any time. That should apply to anyone, and it does generally. But if you had come over to help me shift and you said, "Look, I want a hand to shift," Stuart, I would help you. It's that sort of mentality.

SR As we go past 1987, did you continue in that consultancy role or did you take up new business activities?

**O'CONNOR** I was mainly dealing with overseas people after that time. I was doing some work for some locals in connection with a few developments and things such as that, but mainly overseas people.

SR In what sort of capacity?

**O'CONNOR** Well, for instance, in the Wuhan province in China, I had contracts with them to arrange anything for them within Australia. We were looking at bartering and taking products from here and bringing back products from there. They were after things such as wool, sheep, wheat and things such as that. I did a bit of work with them.

SR What were your feelings about the calls for a royal commission into what the Government had been doing? You mentioned that you were closely watching what was going on.

**O'CONNOR** I think it was warranted.

SR What about when it actually happened and then turned its attention to some of the allegations that arose in connection with yourself?

**O'CONNOR** I wasn't worried about that because the event never occurred and I never thought that you could get convicted of a crime you did not commit. I was a believer in the Westminster system and the jury system. I still don't know a better system than that. But I felt that if you were innocent you had nothing to worry about, and I didn't worry about it.

SR What about when you were actually called to appear before the royal commission and you saw the way the line of questioning was going?

**O'CONNOR** Well, I tried to help them to what extent I could, which I found out in the long term was to my detriment.

SR In what way?

**O'CONNOR** Well, you go back 13 years and I had through my account probably seventy eighty $25 000 amounts go through it during that period of time. Now, $25 000 was the normal going thing. I mentioned to you Connell and Bonds - those I was on a $25 000 retainer. When the figure of $25 000 came up and it was not from me - I never used the figure of $25 000 even in discussions with Burke - they said to me "Where did it come from?" I said, "Look, 12 years ago or 10 years ago, how do I know where it came from? All the bank records are destroyed. Bond has never laid a charge. They didn't report a cheque missing, lost or stolen."
I gave them information, I said, "Look, I remember getting $25 000 from someone in Malaysia." We checked back and that was correct. It was in 1984, at a later stage - one was April and one was August or something of that nature. They used all these sorts of things as me saying I was trying to cover up because I had done the right thing and tried to give them the answer I could see. If it ever happened again I wouldn't talk to them. That was used against me in the courts.

The other thing I was going to say was this: you believe that if you are going to give information to a royal commission that is confidential and not used in the courts. That was really contrary; it was used in the courts. I went and had discussion on tape, the same as I am with you here, with the representative of the royal commission and that was used against me in court, those tapes.

SR In addition to being cross-examined by the royal commission, they also had a warrant and came and searched your house. What was the effect of that?

**O'CONNOR** That was devastating, Stuart. What happened in connection with that, they kept on to me, and if you look at the records, about my cash book. It's a big book, about two foot six long by about two feet wide. They claimed that I had hidden it from them; I had concealed it. They notified me that there would be two adverse findings coming out against me. One was that I had concealed the cash book and I just forget what the other was offhand.

SR This was the diary?

**O'CONNOR** No, that came up later on. I'll just proceed on that.... They said that I concealed the cash book from them and anyhow I said that I thought I had given it to them and they said I hadn't. So they came and searched my house and my wife was devastated. They went into drawers. One of the fellows pulled out stuff and said "What's this? What's this we've got?" It was some imitation jewellery. They carried on like, in my opinion, a school child. A chap who was an accountant acting as though he was being a cop for the first time and had achieved something. When we told them it was imitation jewellery, they went up and went through our stuff. Then they got my secretary and interviewed her for three or four hours, mainly on the cash book. They said they would then subpoena her to court, which they did. On that day she was notified she wasn't required, that the cash book had been located.

I then went and saw them. They never notified me. I said, "I believe the cash book has been located." I saw a fellow by the name of Mark Snell, who was one of the legal representatives. He said, "Yes, there will be an apology forthcoming today." There was no apology that or the next day, so I blew a fuse on it.

Then Mr Weekes, who was the chief solicitor for the commission came out and said, "Look, while we didn't find the cash book at Ray O'Connor's, (he admitted that they had it but he did not say that in his press release) but while we were looking for it we found on his desk a diary, his 1984 diary, which he swore under oath he didn't have." He was saying that I had lied under oath. They had to admit later that it wasn't my diary at all - it was my son's diary - and they had had that cash book for four or five months while they were persecuting me on the issue. So, anyhow, I notified them of this. If you have a look at the royal commission you will notice that Peter Dowding they paid $2 million worth of expenses for him, $1.5 million for Burke, $1.5 million for Parker, and $83 000 for Charlie Court. **[Ray O'Connor - nil.]**

Mr Weekes contacted me one day and said he wanted to see my solicitor. I said that because of the costs I did not have one, but I said I will speak to him at any time. He said "No, we don't want to speak to you, we want to speak to your solicitor." So I said, "In that case I will appoint one." I appointed Paul Olivier and sent him in there. What they wanted to talk to me about was the possibility of giving me immunity from prosecution if I could dob someone else in. That bill was $285. I sent that bill in and it was rejected. So I had to pay 100 per cent of my expenses. So, am I bitter? Yes, I'm bitter. They took away from me all my superannuation, everything that I'd put aside for my family for life. With this there were so many errors in what they had done. It's unbelievable that a royal commission in my opinion could carry on in that way. I've given you a bit there.

SR Yes, there is a lot to think about there. Then of course, what came of that then was the prosecution?

**O'CONNOR** That's correct.

SR That led to the prosecution. What about the handling of that?

**O'CONNOR** I was then charged with stealing $25 000 from Bond despite the fact Bond has never laid a charge, never reported a cheque missing, lost or stolen. Before a jury I was convicted of that. That's despite the fact that if you read the judge's summing up, which you have done, you would think it would be very difficult for a jury to convict on that evidence. He virtually said there was no evidence, which there wasn't. How could there be if the thing never happened?

SR I guess - and it is just a guess - that the nature of the sort of coincidences, there being a cheque or two cheques for the same amount deposited on the same day, that those kinds of coincidences must have added up in the minds of the jury.

**O'CONNOR** I do not know what had added up in their minds but I know this: that I never stole any money from Bond, ever. And I am one fellow that ought to know. I would say also that the jury didn't take very much notice of the directions from the judge.

SR What about the jury? When you were in court did you notice anything of the demeanour of the jury?

**O'CONNOR** No, not at all. I did have two people come back who were on the initial panel for the selection of the jury who signed statutory declarations that before going in a number of them were discussing the fact that it was connected with WA Inc and bad **(for Ray)** luck if they copped it. I have signed declarations, which I think I have shown you.

SR I would like to include the extracts from the judge's summing up that you gave me in the transcript at this stage.[1]

**O'CONNOR** I would like you to do that.

SR Because it is relevant, you having brought it up...

**O'CONNOR** They are very relevant. Everyone that's seen it just wonders how the decision came about. But, I feel that - and I probably shouldn't say it - if anyone read the full summing up of the judge's directions it would be very difficult to convict.

SR What about the way the case was handled? Was it the Director of Public Prosecutions or the police that dealt with the case?

**O'CONNOR** The Director of Public Prosecutions.

SR Do you have any views on his role?

**O'CONNOR** Put it this way, it's very difficult for a fellow with limited finances to beat them. See, they have computers in court linked back to their office where they can get any information through at any time. You're battling on there with a.... Let me say this: they had all my documentation and refused to give me access to it there at one stage. On the last day in the court, I brought this to the judge's notice and they gave us the lunch hour to have a look at the cash books. They had my cash books and everything and I was unable to get these back. You would think in a form of natural justice...I still have not got them back today; they still have them and have refused to give them to me until today. You'd think that you would be able to get proper access.

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[1]See end of transcript.

I have written confirmation here from the Department of Public Prosecutions that I couldn't have them. When the judge found this out on the last day of my trial they told me that I could have a look at them over the lunch hour and the judge directed them to give them to me over that period.

We had them for a couple of hours. We were able to find another $17 500 from the same source that had gone through around that time. I mean, you really need your cheque butts and all those things to go through them because how in the hell can anyone remember what they did 12 years ago?

SR How did you feel when the jury verdict came in?

**O'CONNOR** It didn't hit me initially. When I went to gaol the next day, the first few weeks I was extremely angry because, as I said to you, I didn't believe you could be gaoled for something you didn't do. But after a couple of weeks I realised that the people I was hurting were myself and my family so I settled down and started working there to help others **in prison**, which I did with members of the Aboriginal community, members who had difficulties themselves, appeals, applications, parole, all that sort of thing. I did about 300-odd letters while I was there assisting these people, and in doing so learnt a lot about their life and the problems that they had encountered.

END OF TAPE EIGHT SIDE A

SR What was it like, that experience first of all of being taken into the gaol knowing that you had been convicted and sentenced?

**O'CONNOR** Very tough but also not knowing what was likely to happen to me, because you hear all sorts of stories about the gaols. I was the former Minister for Police who had introduced a lot of legislation that people were there for. You wonder what is likely to happen to you. May I say, I was treated quite fairly and well in there by all of the inmates, I never had a problem.

SR What about the warders and prison staff?

**O'CONNOR** No, not a problem there either, with one exception. There was one exception of a chap who tried to be a bit smart and was extremely rude. He should have been taken out and given a course in human relations before they let him go back in there again, but the rest of them were quite good.

SR How did you cope with the routine of prison and the lack of stimulation? I mean you had come from a background, as you have described, of working 80 hours a week.

**O'CONNOR** I had also been in the army during World War II, and prison in some ways was not unlike that. Therefore, the conditions I was able to cope with all right. After the first two weeks I was getting grumpy with myself and everyone else and that's when I started doing work. I wrote up a diary of everything that happened while I was in prison, of all the various people who had come to me, the details of their crimes and how many more they had committed they hadn't been convicted for, the drug runs that were going on within the prison and all that sort of thing. I recorded all of those. Then I worked in the library; I was running the library at the finish. I was also manager of the football team, so between them all I kept myself pretty busy.

SR I'll go through some of those in more detail. Maybe we can start with the one about drugs in prison. What was your experience of drugs in prison?

**O'CONNOR** The first night I was there I was in a room with about 12 young people, some were smoking drugs half of the night. You could smell it all around the place. There were certain people in there who brought drugs in or had friends or family bringing them in. Some of them were placed outside the prison where someone knew were to pick them up and would pick them up, because it was pretty open up there, there were no fences around the prison.

SR Is this at Wooroloo?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. There was even a case of one chap who had a tremendously bad back and he had to get three pills a day, very strong. Because they were so strong, they would make him take them in front of them and drink a glass of water to down it. He'd put it in the side of his mouth, bring it out, dry it out and sell it for 20 bucks a time. There are all these sorts of things, all the capers that went on. I saw things smuggled in and smuggled out of the prison.

SR Smuggled out as well? What sorts of things?

**O'CONNOR** For instance, one chap came down to me one day with some stuff he wanted to get out. He said, "I have made three cushions" and in the middle of the cushions he put the stuff he wanted smuggled out. He put them in plastic bags and blew the plastic bags up so that it wouldn't rattle around. He made the cushions over the top of that. They have a place where they sell certain goods and give the money back to orphanages and places like that or to the children of disadvantaged prisoners. When they went out his girlfriend bought them and took them and put them in her car. Just as simple as that.

SR What sorts of things would someone want to smuggle out of prison?

**O'CONNOR** You can find you're restricted about what you can say about it. There's a sort of code of ethics that and I am obliged to abide by.

SR You were with the football team. What was that?

**O'CONNOR** [laughs] We had some funny times there. I can recollect one day I had 34 on the training list. There were 16 who couldn't go out because they had been caught with bad piss tests. In other words, they'd had drugs in the prison. If that happens they are precluded from going out on any visits or anything of that nature. So, I was the nineteenth man. We had things like that. There were some very humorous times there apart from anything else.

SR Can you give some examples of funny things that happened in gaol?

**O'CONNOR** One chap came to me one day and "Mr O'Connor, I want your help." I said, "What's the problem?" He said, "I've got a charge, I've got to go to court." I said, "What have you been convicted of?" He said, "I have been riding a pushbike without a helmet." I said, "That is not a very serious offence. How much longer have you got to go?" He said, "Three months." I said, "Go in and plead guilty and ask for a concurrent sentence, then you won't get any additional time and you'll be out within three months." He said, "That's very good, thank you very much." As he was walking away he said, "Oh Mr O'Connor, by the way, when I got caught for riding a pushbike without a helmet, I was on a stolen pushbike." [Laughter]

A number of these sort of things that occurred, many that I can't relate, but there were some very humorous instances up there.

SR What about the support of friends and family?

**O'CONNOR** Wonderful, couldn't have been better. My wife and family organised a roster so that I had the maximum number of people there every visit right through the whole of the six months I was there. They were absolutely remarkable. My wife was there every weekend. Some of the family were there and then they'd organise other people to come in. So anyone who wanted to see me would ring home and they'd be rostered. It was really great. You really find out who your friends and family are, or what they are like.

SR How important is it for someone in prison to have those sorts of visits?

**O'CONNOR** Imperative. It's pitiful to see some people there who have been there for, say, six months and have not had a visitor. They are there eating their heart out. There are even married people without their family coming to see them and things such as this bear in mind some have difficulties, they're short of money, they haven't got a vehicle. Lots of people do not realise this and this is why some people go over the fence, because they get so desperate from the lack of [contact]. You'd see them go along, and they'll stand up near the fence hoping one day that someone will come along. Something should be done to organise it so that these people have visitors, even if they don't know them.

SR What were some of the things you were able to help prisoners with while you were in prison?

**O'CONNOR** In many cases I helped them with bankruptcy, filling out and arranging for their documentation; some with divorces; some with appeals against sentences; some in getting their probation pushed along; some who had difficulties internally, I helped them draw up a case for themselves. There were many varied ways in which I was able to help them. Some of them in connection with their sports and that sort of thing. I had a pretty busy day up there from time to time, as I say. When I got back to my room of a night there would often be three or four people come in to see me. Someone would say, "Look, you have done this for someone, can you do this for me?" I am also a typist, I can type, so some of them made up poems and songs and that sort of thing. I used to type them out for them and get them photostated and things such as that. There were many ways in which we were able to help.

SR What about other prisoners who were in there for crimes they didn't commit, was that something you came across while you were in?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, I did a study on that. I assessed that there were around four per cent of people in Wooroloo that were there for crimes they did not commit. If that related to the whole of the community in Western Australia - and the prison officers that I spoke to said to me they thought it was closer to 6 per cent - that means there are currently 80-odd people in gaol for crimes they did not commit. I had one there, a chap got 10 years for an offence and he came to me and said, "Look, Mr O'Connor, I did not commit that offence." He convinced me. He had a language problem, so it was difficult for him to put his story over. But eventually the people he was supposed to have conspired with in connection with some of these crimes came up there and I approached them and had a talk with them. They assured me they didn't know him before he was charged. When I said, "Why didn't you let him off the hook?" they said, "How could we? We were pleading innocent ourselves." That chap had his property and money confiscated. He ruined his life totally. He had a young family and he was only about 38 then. In my opinion he has done time for a crime he had nothing to do with. Very sad to see that happen. It absolutely ruins a person's life.

SR Going back to the issue of the support you had from outside the prison, what about support from former colleagues?

**O'CONNOR** Well, Phil Lockyer was tremendous. He was there at all times for anything I wanted and visited me, picked me up when I came out of gaol. He was great. There were several of the other former members. Let me say this, in general, the Liberal Party I was pretty disappointed with. They ran for cover when I was charged. According to information I had it was because they did not want to be linked with WA Inc. But quite frankly, if I did steal $25 000 from Bond, what link has that got with WA Inc? None at all. With the Liberal Party I was terribly disappointed. I thought they that they showed a lack of loyalty when I have always been loyal to them and still am.

SR Have you retained your membership of the party?

**O'CONNOR** No, no I haven't. But I have helped a number of friends of mine in the Liberal Party who still stand; I have still supported them.

SR When did you leave the party?

**O'CONNOR** I couldn't tell you the year, but I never renewed my membership after about 1988 or somewhere around that time.

SR Any particular reason?

**O'CONNOR** No, I suppose I shifted and I never got notification from them. That would be the only reason of any money being due. That was that.

SR On your release from prison, what did you then do, what happened next?

**O'CONNOR** When I was released I got back to rearranging my life with my family and friends, trying to make arrangements for me to continue to do a little work so that I could have some income, because most of what I had arranged or got through superannuation had already gone, or all of it had gone.

SR Had gone on what?

**O'CONNOR** On court costs, solicitors and those sort of things. For instance, the $25 000 that I never got, once I was convicted of that there was a $40 000 back tax bill on it. So that was another one. On top of that, when I resigned, as the former Premier I was given $25 000 to run an office so that I could see the electors who came to me. They still come to me today. But this was so I could see electors and satisfy them or carry on with work that I had to do. What I did with that, when I set up Ray O'Connor consultancy, I brought my secretary from Parliament House and gave her a job there because she knew all the political work. I did it all through that office and paid the money directly in there. Because I didn't pay it into my own account and paid it into there, that was another $40 000 tax. So, you know, those things are fairly hefty.

SR What is your situation now - it's been some time since you have been out of gaol?

**O'CONNOR** In what way?

SR Well, I notice for example you are moving house at the moment.

**O'CONNOR** We are going into a smaller and cheaper place so that we can survive there.

SR One of the things that has struck me in coming to your home to record these interviews is the beautiful furniture you have. I noticed reference to it in one of the old newspapers, I think it was talking about a previous house actually as being lavishly furnished. I do not know about lavish, but it is very high quality - the chairs.... Are you asset wealthy in that sense?

**O'CONNOR** No, as a matter of fact, you take the dining room suite out there, that came out of the property I had at Mandalay in the Swan. That came out of the property of John Septimus Roe, the first Surveyor General of Western Australia. Apart from that, over the 40 years we have accumulated some antiques. When we had the money to do it we bought them and some of them were fairly cheap at that time. We have now had to sell some of those and have done over the last week or two.

SR Do you see yourself retiring from all active employment?

**O'CONNOR** No, once we get moved and settled in properly, I'll go on working again. I have a few people that contact me from time to time and I do a little bit of work for them here and there, and I will continue to do that. I think that once you stop you start to look for a hole in the ground. I'm not ready for that.

SR There is one other topic that I missed on the way through that I really would like to cover with you if we can today.

**O'CONNOR** Go ahead.

SR That's in relation to the America's Cup. You had a very significant role there in organising activity in Western Australia. Can you discuss that with us?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, when the America's Cup came on there was the indication that there was going to be a tremendous number of tourists coming to Western Australia, and it was going over a number of weeks, the Cup. If you were watching it every day it would be a lot like watching grass grow a little. I thought that in the interests of the State that what we ought to do was to arrange some international events. So I got together with all the sporting bodies and we had thirty international events on during that time through which event 750 000 people attended, which is a large number in this State.

We had everything. In athletics we had something like seven world champions here at the one time. There was Stephen Cram, the English miler who was the world champion; you had Ben Johnson, who was the sprint champion; you had the world shotput champion; we had the polevault champion, and things such as that. We had the best in the world in squash; we had a marathon with representatives from most major countries; we had the cycling events that went right through the country centres, including Spain, France, Italy, Germany, England and so on; and we had swimming events. It was a major operation. We did it so that each day those who wanted to go and watch the yacht racing could watch it, but there were other things for them if they didn't want to watch it every day. Generally speaking, it received a lot of support, which would indicate so with 750 000 people seeing it.

SR What was involved in your part in organising those kinds of events?

**O'CONNOR** Total arrangement in connection with getting the athletes here, which is a major job, in trying to arrange the financing of it, and in going overseas. We even had a contract signed up with Don King to have the world boxing title here.

SR What happened with that?

**O'CONNOR** We arranged this 18 months before the event and we had it for the world champion and the number one contender in the contract, because I didn't think you could write it any other way at the time. It had to be the world champion and the number one contender at the time the cup was on.

What Don tried to give us was the IBF champion. Spinks was the world champion in my book and I thought he should have been the one. He tried to give us Tyson and Burbick, which when they got into the ring only lasted a minute, so we were lucky we didn't proceed on that basis. We had kickboxing championships and all that sort of thing. We brought the first glass cage out here for squash, where it was played inside a container. All those sort of things occurred. We brought Hawthorn over, who were the Victorian champions, to play Subiaco, who were the Western Australian champions in football. I think it was a three point victory to Hawthorn. It was a great game. I think we had 25 000 people at that event.

SR Is that whole period something you look back on with satisfaction?

**O'CONNOR** Yes. Financially it didn't pan out any good, but it was certainly satisfactory from the State's point of view. It was something that gave the people of this State the opportunity of seeing some of the best athletes in the world in their own country.

SR What went wrong financially?

**O'CONNOR** We weren't able to get sufficient sponsorship to cover it all. The government did come in and give us some financial help towards it in the long-term.

SR To what the extent was it a government sponsored activity from the start and to what extent was it intended to be independent?

**O'CONNOR** Yes, we did get substantial private sponsorship but we got some from Government also. For instance, the Quit campaign, that was when it was first started up. We were the first to introduce it in this State to any extent. They were a major sponsor for about $250 000, so that was government assistance.

SR Sorry to take you back to this again, but in relation to the court appearances, court conviction and so on, there is a question that I was asked to put and that was: do you think you were treated differently by prosecutors and the courts because of the fact that you had been Premier?

**O'CONNOR** Absolutely. I believe that at that stage there was some pleasure derived from certain people in falling a tall poppy. I don't think there was any doubt. The fact that they wanted to talk to me regarding immunity - if I could dob someone else in - I think is indicative of itself of what the position was.

SR What was your actual reaction to that? I mean were there people you could have dobbed in for various things?

**O'CONNOR** No, but it was an indication they didn't think it was me, wasn't it? Otherwise, why would they offer?

SR Were there particular people who wanted to bring down those tall poppies or was it a general thing?

**O'CONNOR** Put it this way, you take it to a royal commission, I don't think it's possible for the commissioners to do all the work involved. For instance, I was talking to one of the officers one day and I said to him, "I am going to do this letter and send to the commissioner." He said, "There is no point in that. You might as well give it to us, we are the royal commission." I said, "To hell with that." So, I sent the letter to the commission and I got a reply back from that fellow. I think that the amount the royal commission had to do in total was a fair bit for the commissioners to handle. I think they probably accepted the recommendations of a few of their understudies or a few of their people, some of whom I felt were egoists in the extreme and just wanted to get a conviction and would use anything they could. That's how I felt about it, and I think that is unfortunate.

SR We turn now to an overall reflection, looking back now on your career in politics and what has happened since then. What are your feelings about the State of Western Australia and the way that the State has treated you?

**O'CONNOR** I think I've been treated pretty poorly. I worked very hard for this State for a long period of time. Everything that I earned went in the royal commission and the court hearings after that. I was the only one of Parliament who was not reimbursed one cent. I'm not saying that governments should pay 100 per cent of all these sorts of expenses. As I said, I went and paid the lot myself. One day when the list of the $12 million came up of those who had got the money, a fellow said, "Your name was not obvious by its absence." The fact that you tried to do the right thing by the State and the people in the long-term often doesn't do you any good. So, a bit of bitterness, yes.

SR What about your reflections on the better days, the time up until you served as Premier and then Leader of the Opposition?

**O'CONNOR** I enjoyed them; I enjoyed the work I did. Let me say, I worked very hard in those days, Stuart. The average person doesn't realise how hard it is to work as a minister. I had 18 years in the ministry and while I enjoyed them I worked to the maximum of my capacity right through that time. Therefore, I didn't have time with my family, which I regret today. I would rather have put a little bit more time into them in view of the way I have been treated in the long term.

SR Are there any other things you'd like to cover before we conclude the interview today?

**O'CONNOR** No, I think you've covered everything. If there is anything you have forgotten later on, come back to me.

SR Ray O'Connor, thank you very much.

**O'CONNOR** A pleasure Stuart, thank you.

END OF TAPE EIGHT SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

# DID RAY O'CONNOR GET A RAW DEAL?
# YOU BE THE JUDGE!

Ray O'Connor was convicted of stealing $25,000.00 from Bond Co. Bond Co did not report a cheque stolen or missing, nor did they lay a charge.

**Excerpts from Official Court Proceedings Transcript**
**Judge Healy's Summations and Address to Jury**
**Trial of R J O'Connor - 17 February 1995**

Page T8/2

....So there is no evidence to that cheque. There can't be. There is no longer existing any evidence as to what the deposit slip said in relation to that cheque. There is nothing on the face of the cheque itself to say what account it went in to....

Page T11/2

....Any lies that Mr O'Connor, if he did tell any lies and I would suggest to you that he did not.... I would think you should be very reluctant and slow to be able to draw any inference that Mr O'Connor is guilty because he told lies.

Page T12/2

....Now I have said that Mr O'Connor does not have to prove his innocence. It is for the Crown to prove his guilt beyond reasonable doubt. The Crown have no evidence from Mr Walsh and Mr Beckwith who are now deceased as to what discussions they had with Mr O'Connor.

Page T12/3

There is no evidence as to what happened to the National Australia Bank Cheque drawn by Bond Corporation. We don't know positively that that was the cheque attached to Mr Buckley's memo. There is no evidence of that cheque coming to Mr O'Connor's possession. Nobody said they saw the cheque handed to Mr O'Connor and Mr O'Connor has denied it. There is no evidence when the cheque was banked.

You must find beyond reasonable doubt that Mr O'Connor was responsible for paying that cheque into the account and there is no Crown evidence pointing to that.

Page T13/1

There was no need for Mr O'Connor to steal $25,000.00 to pay his income tax assessment because he had made the necessary financial arrangements with his bank. There is no evidence that the cheque was banked on April 19 and if the cheque was for a campaign account, nobody ever checked the Labour Party accounts to see if it was deposited there.

Page T13/1

I just stress again to you that the burden of providing this charge is upon the Crown beyond reasonable doubt. It is not for Mr O'Connor to prove his innocence or to prove some other source of the cheque. You must bear in mind the fact that he is presumed to be innocent and given the benefit of the doubt in drawing conclusions from inference available from the circumstantial evidence.

END OF JUDGE HEALY'S SUMMATION