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Transcript of an interview with

Mr. David Black (AM)

STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA - ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

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INTERVIEWER: Anne Yardley

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INTRODUCTION

In 2018, Emeritus Professor David Black AM retired as Chairperson of the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee and as Parliamentary Fellow (History) to the Parliament of Western Australia after a 34 year involvement. Professor Black joined the committee in 1984 while he was Senior Lecturer in History and Politics at Curtin University. He and colleague Dr Harry Phillips were initially tasked with producing a multi-author history of the Parliament which resulted in the 1991 publication of *The House on the Hill: A History of the Parliament of Western Australia 1832-1990*.

David Black was born on 4 July 1936, one of three sons of Edward Black, a musician and music teacher and his wife Bessie (née Bockelberg). His interest in politics came at an early age when as a child he would listen to parliamentary radio broadcasts. In later years he would become a regular contributor on radio and television providing political analysis on West Australian elections and political history generally.

David Black was educated at Claremont Primary School, Perth Modern School and the University of Western Australia following which he embarked on a teaching career. Professor Black was a member of the Western Australian Education Authority's Social and Cultural Studies Curriculum from 1992 to 1995.

As an historian, David Black would go on to write extensively about John Curtin and in 1998 was the Foundation Historical Consultant to the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library at Curtin University. His writing and editorial contributions on books and articles on West Australian political history is extensive and a bibliography¹ is included here. In recognition of his contribution to the university and the community, Curtin University awarded him the honours of Emeritus Professor and Honorary Doctorate of Letters in 2008.

¹ <https://jcpml.library.curtin.edu.au/about/staff/historical-consultant/>

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Professor Black was awarded the Order of Australia in 2010 'for service to education and to the social sciences, particularly through the promotion and preservation of the political and parliamentary history of West Australia.'

Emeritus Professor David Black was interviewed by Anne Yardley during August and September 2018 for the Parliamentary History Project of the Parliament of Western Australia and the State Library of Western Australia -J S Batty Library of West Australian History.

DavidBlack_1

Ms Anne Yardley: This is the first in a series of interviews with Emeritus Professor David Black, AM, who was Parliamentary Fellow, history, at the Parliament of Western Australia. This was a position he held from 1982 until his recent retirement in 2018. These interviews are for the Parliamentary History Project and we're sitting in David's home in Leederville. Today is 14 August 2018 and the interviewer is me, Anne Yardley.

David, let's start right at the beginning: where and when were you born?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I was born on 4 July 1936, and I was born in Subiaco. The hospital in which I was born, was the Florence Hospital; I understand from what my mother told me, a disease swept through the premises and the hospital closed shortly after I was born. Therefore, I've never seen the place where I was born, but it is in the heart of the usual Subiaco area where large numbers of Western Australians were born.

Ms Anne Yardley: Who were your parents and what did they do?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: My father, Edward William Black, was a musician—I suppose that's the best way I can describe him. He was a particularly prolific and capable pianist. He did a huge amount of music teaching, he could play not only the piano well, but also violin and other instruments, and he therefore participated frequently in an orchestra and he also wrote an occasional song. In truth, he was a musician in the broadest and widest sense of the term. My mother was Bessie Sultana Black [née Bockelberg]. She hated the name "Sultana", which the name of a ship which had brought to Australia one of the early ancestors on her side—she was a very capable student, won several scholarships and graduated from university. She was particularly strong in mathematics, and very interested in history, which obviously related to me. Because her father had left the family very early on, there were a lot of strained relationships within the family. My mother used to say that she got married so that she would never have to work again and that, as far as she was concerned, marriage was a full-time job therefore she could pursue her interests while in the same period of time have a secure and basically comfortable existence. When you remember that in the years leading to when I

was born included the worst years of the Great Depression, you would understand that security in marriage was a very important factor for her.

Ms Anne Yardley: From what you've said it does sound as though it was a happy marriage. You've talked of it being a harmonious family life that you had. What made it harmonious? Is that how you would describe it—a good marriage?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Oh, it was a very good marriage indeed. As far as my parents were concerned their marriage to each other and their life with each other was their full and complete life. My father worked very hard. He was professionally committed to what he was doing. My mother put a great deal of emphasis on bringing up the family, but as far as I was concerned a conflict or row between them was extremely rare, and the little episode, which is always my measure of this, is that on one of the rare occasions when they had a particularly vigorous argument going on, it turned out the argument was because one of them had not replied to correspondence from the other one; and it turned out that I came along and produced the missing correspondence, which I had never posted, and said "Do you think this discussion has anything to do with this?" That incident stands out in my mind particularly, and also the other time when there was a furious row—a very rare row—and my mother grabbed this music and tore it up. It turned out that my father needed it for a performance that night, and the two of them spent the rest of the afternoon working together to put it back so that it would be all available. As far as I was concerned, marriage provided the security, the basis of their companionship. Even though they were eight years apart, they were ideally suited to each other, and my mother never fully recovered when my father died in his late 60s. Life was always that bit short from that time on.

Ms Anne Yardley: You're the eldest of three boys—who are your brothers?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I had two brothers: Ronald Edward and Peter John. It was a classic case where the middle child, Ron, was determined to outdo me. He was bigger than me. He knew about having girlfriends before I even knew such a thing was possible, and he supported different football teams from me and was always—you know, he was going to do what I did, but a little bit better than I'd done it. On the other hand, my younger brother simply did what I wanted. He'd support the same teams as me and when I was studying at university, when the results were pinned up, he would go up there and find them out for me and come back and tell

me. He and I clicked, I suppose you could say, from all sorts of points of view, and even though he's lived for years and years now in the United States and I haven't seen much of him at all, I've been told that he never got over the fact that he couldn't come back to live in Australia, and one of the main reasons he wanted to come back to Australia was to be where I was. He was extremely bright but he had a major hearing loss because of measles when he was three years old. He learned how to—by lip reading, he got to about seven or eight before anyone knew he had a problem. But the rest of his life, it was always an issue. Although he was extremely bright, when he was effectively in private enterprise, the hearing problem was an issue and he could not function as well in a sort of personal one-to-one way than otherwise would have been the case.

Ms Anne Yardley: Where was home? Where did you grow up?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: From the time I was four until I got married my official home I'd have to say was in Claremont, although we were on the border of Claremont and Nedlands. My mother initially took me to Nedlands school, except they wouldn't take me because we lived the street on the wrong side, so I finished up going to the Claremont Primary School. I would have gone on to the Claremont High School except that I got the scholarship to Modern School. As far as I was concerned, Claremont–Nedlands, whichever way you look at them, that was where I was brought up. It was an area which was relatively recently settled where we were. It's an area now that people think has been there for a long time, but in our day it was relatively new and there were lots of people with children there. It was such a friendly and atmospheric place. I remember at one stage I got interested in horse racing and for about three or four years I actually ran the local Melbourne Cup sweep and I went up and down the street to people's houses and took their money and distributed the prize money when it was all over. It was the sort of area where you could do that. It was comfortable, secure; there was no threat or anything. The major difference is that we were the only family where the scholarship system of the Modern School actually impacted. The other people I knew in the street either went to private schools or they stayed in the government system with something like Perth Boys, but one of my two brothers and I both got scholarships for Modern School and went there for five years. My other brother was also there for the last two years of his secondary education.

It was a comfortable existence and neighbours were an important part of our life. One neighbour in particular I spent a lot of time talking to was a man called Neil Traylen, and Neil in fact became the head of the teachers' college. When I left school teaching and went into university, he was actually quite put out. I remember he argued with me and told me I should stay in the education department and that's where my future lay. It was the sort of area where a lot of us knew each other, where there were boys my age. There were not many girls involved, but since we were a family of boys anyway that wasn't really an issue. Just the occasional girl was part of our life, but otherwise all the people I knew there were boys and their parents. It was just, to me, a secure, predictable, comfortable existence with parents who were enormously fond of each other, whose ideas on things I tended to agree with and so, as far as I was concerned, all that side of things, I have no complaints at all. My daughter, in fact, has argued with me that I was never fully prepared for life because I was too close to my parents and you accordingly weren't aware of the kinds of issues that people normally face.

Ms Anne Yardley: You were particularly close to your mother. Why was that do you think?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, my father wasn't there a lot of the time because he was either teaching the piano in the city where he had an office, and sometimes he would go off to the country with various musical events. One of my most vivid memories was the occasion when he was away for a couple of weeks and he came back and my younger brother Peter saw him with his suitcase and said, "Dad, are you going away somewhere?" He was really terribly put out that he'd spent nearly two weeks there and no-one noticed the difference. But from my perspective, I could pursue the interests I wanted to. I could listen to the radio—very unusual in that I listened to Parliament quite early in my life really; I'm not quite sure when, but I know I was listening to it and all those kinds of things. I could just do these sorts of things. I could spend time pursuing whatever interest I wanted to. So from all that point, everything was predictable. I went to Modern School. Some of the teachers there were even the same people who had been teaching my mother when she was at the school.

Ms Anne Yardley: Politically where was your family and was it important in your life? Was it something that was discussed at dinner tables?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: We didn't discuss it a lot. I was very interested in the issues, and I spoke to my father from time to time about them, but it was because I prompted the interest, not because they were setting the agenda. Listening to Parliament on the radio was something that I started to do myself, so I was very aware—acutely aware—of the political issues really from the last year of the war on. It was the final year of the war, I remember reading the paper each day and seeing how far the Russians were advancing from the east and how far the Americans were advancing from the west and this kind of thing. But then I was also aware of the arguments that were beginning to take place within Australia. Not so much during the war, but certainly after the war, the whole Communist Party issue started to surge and bank nationalisation² became a huge issue at one stage, on which I was on the government side, which was certainly not the case of most of the students at Claremont Primary School, where I went—they were very much the other side. I think I was aware that in a lot of those kinds of issues, where we lived in Nedlands, the Liberal Party always won. The Labor Party never won, and so I was in that sense on the minority side but it was a side that my parents would be on and so therefore I didn't see myself as anyone terribly rebellious or something. At the time, I was very empathetic to people like Chifley, whereas I could see as the years went by, that I began to see where things had gone badly wrong for him. At the time, I was on his side.

Ms Anne Yardley: Your father was a Labor man. Where did that come from?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: His father. His father was a railway worker. As I said, if you didn't vote Labor and if you didn't support Subiaco in the football, you should be shot. They never had a lot of money, and that's one of the interesting parts. Part of the feature of my life, whether it be in my own parents or whether it be my grandparents, was the strength of the women. My mother's mother was left—her husband left them very early—having to bring the family up, and she started taking in clothes and repairing them. She finished up with a dressmaking salon in the heart of the city, right in the heart of Hay Street, and did extremely well. She was determined that she wanted the family to stay together, but while my mother got married, my mother's brother, my uncle, stayed with her, and she actually in fact

² The 1949 Federal election was fought over Labor's plans to increase the role of government in the running of Australia's economy. The Chifley government was determined to nationalise the private banking industry and went to the 1949 election on that platform. <https://www.chifley.org.au/ben-chifley-bank-nationalisation/>

sacrificed her really profitable business to take school shops and things like that to try and find something for her son to do. So, in her case, the woman was the driving force; the husband had left long ago and her son never really developed anything of any great initiative. He was in the Army at one stage and I thought he had a significant Army career. I found that in the Army he actually became what they call a batman. His job was to make sure the officer had the right clothes every day; he was not at all distinguished.

While on the other side, my grandfather was a railway guard. My grandmother taught music, and when she died, she owned numerous properties. We never could work out how she was able to do that, so she must have been extremely shrewd. When my brother Ron tried to find out how she made the money, she said, “Oh, well, Ron, you need to know about second mortgages.”

My thoughts on this is that I’m very fond of my father; I thought my father was a lovely person, but the dynamic people—the people who did things, the people who had the ideas—were the women. I think that became more ingrained in my system than I realised and later on in years I actually spent quite a bit of time writing about women going into politics. Some of my very closest friends, a number of them, are women married to other people, but remained very good friends of mine.

Ms Anne Yardley: That is interesting and we’ll mention your book, *Making a Difference*, on women politicians. I’m interested, though, in some of the things you were hearing on radio when you were quite young. So the bank nationalisation was 1949 roughly, I think, wasn’t it?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The 1949 election was when Chifley lost, but right through the second half of the 40s bank nationalisation was a very big issue at the time.

Ms Anne Yardley: What else were you listening to that was informing you in your political ideas?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That’s an interesting question because I listened to all the standard shows of the time: *Dad and Dave*, *Martin’s Corner*, *The Search for the Golden Boomerang*, so a lot of the time on radio was simply—*Australia’s Amateur Hour*. There were all kinds of things. Radio was the entertaining medium as far as we were concerned.

Ms Anne Yardley: It was, although I was still thinking about listening to Parliament or current affairs; for instance, you were hearing postwar about Churchill and his loss in the 1945 postwar election. That affected you, didn't it?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: At the time, I was taken aback; that's the way I describe it. In fact, all I remember as the years went by is that, from time to time, it stayed with me that it was like that. I would see things like the various television programs and I'd start to think about what actually was going on. It was when I saw an episode of *Upstairs Downstairs* and this particular episode was about the 1926 general strike, this made me aware of the difference between the workers within the family, depending on whether they took sides with their own fellow workers or whether they took sides with their employers, and considered they had an obligation to their employers. I realised that the reason that Churchill was swept out of office, despite the war and everything else, was to do with the actual position of the working class. When I came to study more about politics, I realised that England had a long period with the Depression and there hadn't really been an election for the Labour Party in all that time to show where they were. Therefore, when they won in 1945, they didn't just win; they had a huge win though it didn't last long; they were out of office within six years. But I was used to the Labor Party, because of the communist issue and other things like that, always being the one on the outer—the one who was fighting the system constantly—that the comfortable world in which I lived was really the world of the other side, but my empathy was with the Labor Party.

The one person I didn't really comprehend in that era was the role of Curtin. I was taken to John Curtin's funeral by my grandmother, who never voted Labor in her life but she took me to the funeral; but I never fully comprehended the role that Curtin played until much later. I think one of the revelations of my academic life was that I became really involved in the life and career of Curtin, and the establishment of the prime ministerial library was a major event in my life. So it helped to fill a gap until I met Curtin's family—I met Curtin's daughter and all the rest—but that's significant later. But in my childhood, Curtin was just a name. I was more aware of Chifley, probably because of the fights he was having over bank nationalisation.

The other thing I strongly remembered was the whole communist business and the idea that you could be legally declared, you know, a communist. That's why at the

time I took note of this, but as the years went by, it became stronger and stronger, in my opinion, that one of the more extraordinary events in Australian history, which I really wanted to know more about, was how the Australian people came to refuse to ban the Communist Party. That particular referendum³ in the middle of the McCarthy period became quite very significant to me. At the same time, I didn't go to the other extremes. I know that later, when I was in university and later on—I'll come back to this—a large number of my colleagues who were teaching sociology were Marxists, and I was never remotely in that group. So while I was more towards the left, I was a long way from the real left.

Ms Anne Yardley: What were some of the realisations then that you had about that 1951 referendum?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It just seemed to me that in the world in which I lived there were so many people who had simply made up their minds on these things: there was one side, like the bank nationalisation, one side was simply seen as having it all wrong; they simply couldn't figure out where they were going. I was interested in these issues, and I just thought that people who tried to find out what was happening and how to make it work and what we can learn from history—I find it quite interesting that I was quite attracted to that and yet at the same time what really got me involved in history in the first place was English royalty, and kings and queens. In the controversies which are going on at this very time that I am talking to you now, one of the interesting things that we're finding is that an increasing number of people—people I know—were more centre left than they were centre right. An increasing number of them, because of various events, including what's happening in the United States, have suddenly come to appreciate that the role of royalty is actually more significant than they realised—the stabilising effect that it has of not interfering too strongly. I think I can see now where I would fit in that. I was leaning towards the left, but I was very much in that traditional basis on which society works—I don't want to challenge society; I certainly don't want to get involved in any of the Marxist stuff that was raging around me. That came a bit later, but even when I was at school and all the rest, I didn't want to be that sort of anti-left group that was developing.

³ The 1951 Referendum asked Australians to vote on the following question: 'Do you approve of the propose law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled "Constitution Alteration (Powers to Deal with Communists and Communism) 1951"?' Voters narrowly rejected the proposal.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1031461X.2012.760638>

Ms Anne Yardley: And yet you supported the right for people in Australia to be communists and to be freely communist?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, because I thought that the whole principle of them not being somehow mattered. I'm just wondering whether this may have been one of the things that came from my parents, that you appreciated the qualities of things. For example, the books that I read—there were nearly 40 books all about one boy—what they call the “William” books, written by a lady. I only discovered years later a lady, Richmal Crompton, had written them. I read every William book there was over and over and over. William was towards the right politically. One of the episodes that they had, there was a communist and there were various others, and William was the good, solid, straight-down-the-middle conservative, and girls, of course, were no part of their world; it was a boy's world. It's funny. I think of that now and then I think of Harry Potter, and I realise that we're in a much more sophisticated world than we were then. William did not develop anything. He was who he was. The books were written in the Depression; the books were written in the 20s; the books were written in the 40s; the books were written in the 50s—William is the same each time; the society doesn't change. Whereas, in Harry Potter there's an evolution process; it's much more sophisticated. My thoughts back how are in a way it was almost a slightly simplistic world and that's the world I belonged to, in which the parents were comfortable, important figures that you had in life. I was certainly not well to the left, but nor was I well to the right. I was sort of either of these in a way and I think that may have come a bit from my father, who was a Labor man and yet who lived a very conservative lifestyle.

Ms Anne Yardley: In a conservative suburb.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: In a conservative suburb, and I thought really that probably sums up my outlook on the world at large—conservative values, family, parents, no drugs, none of that sort of thing. You don't take any extremes; everything is in a kind of moderate position and you live in a moderately comfortable society. My parents had a mortgage but that mortgage was always the same. For some reason, they never seemed to pay it off and it never seemed to matter. So, I accepted the world that I was in but was aware of the extremes, and I was resentful of the extremes from either end. I didn't want either the left or the right to take over; I just wanted a kind of overall, smooth, relationship involving people. And personal

values became very important in a way and yet in a very quiet way. A crucial part of my upbringing was nonviolence. Never did my father lay a finger on anybody. He was absolutely non violent—that was a total given.

Funnily enough, the more I think back on him now, I didn't see a lot of my father—my mother, I saw a lot of, and, of course, they could help at certain times when it really mattered. When I first started lecturing, my father gave me a copy of the notes he did for some of the lectures that he was doing and things like that. The absolute classic was when I was doing the Junior. It was the night before the Junior trigonometry exam. There were two sorts of problems: what they call heights and distances, where you had to calculate how tall something was by the angles that they were, and that was part of the whole thing. But there was also other sorts of what they called identities, like algebraic equations, and you had to solve them. The night before the Junior I was floundering around trying to do this, and my mother, who majored in mathematics among other things, said to me, "What are you doing?" "Algebra." And she said, "You're doing the heights and distances problems? Why don't you do the identities because you don't have to get it right. If it solves, it's right; whereas, if you do heights and distances, you don't know whether the answer you've got is correct or not." I said, "No, the teacher said don't do that." She said, "Well, I'm telling you that's what you should do." This is very rare for her to be talking to me like this. So what happened is I did that, and except for history the best mark I got in the Junior was trigonometry. I realised that my mother was very insightful and yet she didn't sort of push things. That really sums up a huge amount of things. I was supported and allowed to be various things, but I was never made or forced or pushed or anything. Everything—they were there, they were supportive, they backed me up. I had no grievances.

Ms Anne Yardley: Is this the way you've attempted to lead your life? Is this how you've approached life?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, personal relationships and friendships really, really matter a huge amount. The things that most matter, I suppose I came to realise, are just there; they are intrinsic in what goes on. And, of course, in the process I'm extremely ill-informed on numbers of things. I mean, the classic of that, which only became apparent to me in the last two or three years, has been homosexuality. In my mid-20s I would have been totally unaware that any man would ever want to be involved with any other man. It was not part of my world. I didn't see that world.

As soon as I did, my natural empathies in the end were to those people who were different and that they should be allowed to be different, but that was not something that was part of my upbringing. It's one of the things I found with society. I was extraordinarily ill-informed in a number of respects. At the same time, I was extremely well-informed on other things, like, for example, the make-up of the political system, the parliamentary structure, the House of Representatives, who was in power, who'd been in power, who wouldn't be. Kings and queens, I was aware of their significance. I knew all the different Georges. I knew how a Prime Minister came to be. One of the things I still, if I was talking to students now, would say, "You realise that the first Prime Minister we had—Walpole—was the Prime Minister because the king couldn't speak a word of English and you needed somebody who could link from the cabinet to the king and back again." Those kinds of things I knew all about, as the basis of the system. That equipped me for what eventually happened, that I would teach history and politics. Politics was something I had thought about a great deal, I took sides, but in a fairly moderate sort of way.

Ms Anne Yardley: Your very perceptive grandmother said something about you too, about what your future would be?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: According to my mother, my grandmother's great thing in life was that she was furious with my mother for getting married and breaking up the family. My grandmother, according to my mother, was effectively trying to preempt to take me over and make me. She spent a great deal of time with me, talking to me and so on. But the one thing, the remark that I'll never [forget]—she said, "David, one day you'll either be Prime Minister of Australia or a professor of history." Years later I thought about that, because she was not well-informed. I realised what she gave me was time—her person. I suppose, really, that's one of the things that became one of my things in life, is that having people's time, companionship, being with them, is the starting point. The political issues matter, but political issues should be in their place as well.

Ms Anne Yardley: We wandered off a bit. Let's go back to school for you, to high school.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: What was the experience of Perth Modern for you, and at what point did you think that teaching might be something that you would do?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well take the teaching one first, because this is simply blunt expediency. When I got into fourth year, the education department were falling over themselves, desperately short of teachers. So a man called Dick Buchanan, who was a football commentator at one stage but was actually an education department person, he came around persuading us all—trying to persuade us—that school teaching would be a great occupation to take up. He suggested to the girls, for example—I'll never forget this—that if you become a schoolteacher, a wealthy farmer will probably find you and you'll be right. When I reached the age of 16, fourth year, I was informed that my parents would be given money if I would guarantee that I would go to teachers' college.

So, to be quite honest, I went for teaching because it would make life easier for my parents; it sounded like a secure, comfortable existence. I was keen on being a lawyer, but I realised that people who are in law families seemed to be rather better off than my parents and there was a kind of social demarcation. So it just seemed a sensible, logical thing to do that. It wasn't that I was committed to actually teaching; it was almost, in a way, my parents would have a nice set-up. There'd be no question, and that meant they could probably help me, and that's what happened when I was in university. The fees were paid and then my parents gave me some money to live on as well. I feel that I found my way into teaching because that was just the way the community was structured at the time, and who knows what might have happened if it had been different. But it just seemed very comfortable. We were informed that if you were fortunate, you might actually, if you did become a teacher, get somewhere reasonably near home and not have to go too far away, because we were informed that everybody had to do country service first.

It so happened that when I did become a teacher that I started in Northam High School and then Bunbury. I have a feeling, looking back now, that my parents—my father—knew the right people at the time and that the way could be smoothed. But the whole idea of teaching, it wasn't something that I'd ever quite stopped to think about. So I think it is important in looking at Western Australia, that if you were in that period, coming out of the Second World War, when they were desperately short of teachers, that this was a clear-cut way to go. They were

desperately in need of teachers, and men were always an asset. Lots of women finished up doing teaching, but getting men who were committing themselves to teaching was always the issue.

Ms Anne Yardley: What about your experience of teachers at Perth Modern? Were there mentors there? Were there people who you looked up to?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Now, when we come to my experience of teachers, let me take them in sequence. The first few years of school I had nice teachers, pleasant teachers. I have some pleasant memories of one or two stories that were read to me—I can't even think of the names of them now. But teachers were, you know, they were nice and I didn't get into too much strife. Then in two of the last three years at Claremont Primary School a lady called Nancy Richards appeared, and I was in her class. We were in what were called the Terman class. The Terman class was an experimental one about education, where the students were given more things to do themselves and in which the direct supervision by the teacher was less. I discovered years and years later that Nancy Richards had been doing this at Nedlands school with a man called Morrison. I can't remember his first name, but we called him Gandy Morrison. I discovered that Morrison was asked to go to Claremont school and do the same thing. He said that he would do it providing he could take with him Nancy Richards and a lady called Rita Coops, who was a tall, rather severe-looking woman but a fabulous teacher.

Anyway, the net result of this, in—let me think—the fourth standard, I think, I was in Nancy Richards' class, and that became one of the memorable parts of my entire life. It is the highlight of my entire educational existence. The teacher's job was to get us self-motivated to do as much as possible. We did a lot of mathematics and things; we did them from books where the teacher just left us to do it. Nancy Richards had devised the particular scheme, which I talk about to everybody even to this day, where everyone in the class each week had to submit a question about anything, put it in the box and we drew one out that someone else had set and we reported to the class the next week what the answer was. When I asked her years later why she did that, she said, "Because I wanted you to learn, to want to know and how to find out. I don't care what it is you're knowing or finding out; I want you to know and to find out." She also organised the class to put on little concerts so we could raise money and we could then have curtains in the prefabs that we were using. So I suddenly acquired this lady who just motivated me to want to know and

how to find out. Then in the final year, the scholarship year, I had Rita Coops, who was severe, demanding—I was terrified of her—but in a way was the same. Nancy Richards was the softer face of this. Nancy Richards went on to become the first woman superintendent in the whole history of the education department, I might add. Those three years, I was one of eight students who got a scholarship to Mod.

The teaching when I was at Mod figures very little in any of this. They had people who had been there for years and years and years; they're nothing particularly dynamic, nothing particularly exciting. I didn't have any history teachers at all who really inspired me at Modern School. I had an English teacher, Norm Kirkham, who was a good family friend of ours, and he was good. I still remember him saying, "I'm not making you submit any assignment, but any assignment you do, I'll mark it properly and well." I had that sort of thing. So when I think of Modern School, it was a co-educational school that wasn't, where girls were treated very differently from boys. For a girl to get into the main science class was a real struggle. The headmaster was as remote as they come. There were none of those things there. The thing I loved about Perth Modern School was it had its history, which I knew about, and all the people who were there wanted to do well. So I sort of feel that where I found my way was the way I found my way, and where I could get someone who was just—[voices in the background; doors slamming]. When I could get someone who was really supportive, then that's where I went. That's what I was looking for all the time. My mother, of course, was a classic one in that respect. She bought books that she thought I would like, and she bought them and encouraged me to read. So I sort of feel that it wasn't that people said or did things; it was that they inspired me to want to do things.

Ms Anne Yardley: What about UWA? You went to UWA to do politics—history, wasn't it?—and then your Dip. Ed. What was that experience for you?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I wanted to do history and I also wanted to do political history, and there was very little political history. The only political history units there were the ones that I concentrated on. Again, the subjects themselves in the main inspired me rather than the lecturers. I didn't have the same experience as my daughter. The first week that she was at university, she had a history lecture from a man called Richard Bosworth. As far as she was concerned, that lecturer established her for history for all time. I was different; I'd brought it with me, and I picked up along the way various things from time to time—and people like

Professor Alexander, there were times when they said and did things that got me interested. I always quote Professor Alexander to this day about the king who abdicated. Professor Alexander's argument was that the king who abdicated was a genuine social reformer, and the Conservative government were determined to get rid of him, and, thank goodness for them, he got involved with a divorcee and they could get rid of him. My father had the same view. Now, subsequently, the king who abdicated became a Nazi supporter, apparently. My father's argument was that that happened later, and that he was originally empathetic to Hitler because of what he was doing for the working classes. What's that show that both America and Australia have done about —

Ms Anne Yardley: *The Crown?*

Prof. DAVID BLACK: *The Crown*, yes—no, not *The Crown*, no; the one that goes back one earlier than that about the parliamentary figures. I can't think of it now —

Ms Anne Yardley: No, we might have to think about that and add that in later.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: We might have to think of what it is, because there's an American version and there's a British version.

Ms Anne Yardley: *House of Cards?*

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes. In the British version, the middle episode is of an empathetic king who is tripping around trying to support the working class, and he was told in no uncertain terms, in the program, that you can't do that. That's not the role of the monarchy. The monarchy cannot play a social role in that respect. The monarchy's role is to sustain the system, and the man who took the part was the same man from *Foyle's War*. Those kind of experiences and things, I came to learn that history is my way of actually assessing what really is taking place—what the actual values of the society are and so on—and history and politics are inextricably mixed together. Politics is important, but you need to have it in a proper historical context, and to me the two things became inseparable. They always were. I always did history, but whenever there was a politics side, that's what I did. I think that was better for me than if there had been an actual politics degree, because then the history side was there as well. Whilst I was leaning towards left rather than right, it was the monarchy that got me into history in the first place and

they're real people, and that's what I came to love later on when I became involved in Parliament—the real people. Of course, the classic one was Phillip Pandal, who was a politician but for me he was a real person. He was passionately keen on history. He was almost the equivalent of me in some respects.

Ms Anne Yardley: We'll be talking about Phillip Pandal later, but let's go back—you finished your degree at UWA, and then what was the process to become a teacher?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I finished the main degree in three years, in which after the first year I only did history and English. That was all I did; I didn't do a range of issues at all.

Ms Anne Yardley: So, David, what subjects were you doing at university for your undergrad degree?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: In the first year, I did history, as you'd expect. I did English, which was always my backup because there was no politics in those days, and then I did psychology because I thought it might be useful. I didn't find it particularly useful at all, but nevertheless—and I say very quickly, because we can come back to this, that psychology interested me because I actually went to a psychologist to deal with emotional issues at one stage, but I found psychology at university wasn't anything to do with that. Then the other subject I did was French, and I finished up getting a B pass in French—French novels that we did I read them all in English and wrote the answers in French. So thereafter I only did history, and I am trying to think—the remaining few things I did, I think I did one unit of English and the rest was history. I then went on and did honours in history, but the honours I did was on politics, on the Collier government in Western Australia. I'll be quite honest, I was not that good at organising things and I didn't actually get first-class honours. I only got second-class honours because I got somehow bogged down with things that I was doing, and yet when people were talking to me, they thought I was going to be an obvious first-class honours student, but I wasn't. I think that that's something which followed through in life; that I never actually did and completed the—I did a master's degree, only after a lot of messing around, and I never did the PhD at all.

Ms Anne Yardley: You were also doing music though, weren't you?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I was doing an MSA in piano, which I actually got my MSA in, I think, it was either the first or second year at university. Music was one of the three subjects I got a distinction for in the leaving. I went on to learn the piano for several years after that, and then when I was forced to go into the Army for a short time, I was able to join the Army band and I stayed as a volunteer for several years because I loved the music side.

My recollection is that I somehow—I knew what it is I wanted to say or do, but it never seemed to quite come out the way that it should. So the result is that I was always talked about as a potential first-class honours person, but I didn't actually get first-class honours. I was talking about a potential PhD, which I never actually did. It's interesting, in the end my supervisor at university, Brian De Garis, gave me the lead and he said, "You can either do a PhD or", he said, "You can do a couple of chapters for the history that we're going to write about Western Australian political history", and I agreed to do that instead. The result of this is then I was given the opportunity to go to Ann Arbor university, and you needed a PhD or equivalent. I found that what happened in my life is that in the end I was treated as if I had a PhD, even though I never did. My own assessment of my situation is that I was a product of the time in which I was in; you certainly couldn't do that now. Now, the actual—the letters themselves—was what mattered, but in the time that I was there, the openings were coming out. So I see myself as a product of the immediate postwar years, when all sorts of opportunities came and if you could have the right people encouraging you and working with you, then it was possible to get somewhere. That really, I think, set the pattern of the life that followed; that I was able to do one thing at a time because the person I was working with accepted that this is the way it would go. So when I decided I wanted to write the history of the Parliament later on, if the right people supported me, then the opportunities came.

Ms Anne Yardley: You have a huge list of publications to your name and I'm wondering whether that experience of writing instead of doing a PhD set you on that path?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I think it set me on the path that what I was writing about was what I was doing. It was not the question of acquiring letters after my name; it was that what I was doing was I was writing about or talking about that which I

wanted to write about or talk about, and I think that that in the end became my whole career. Whether it's in terms of lecturing or whether it's in terms of publications, it is that which I was fascinated by—that which interested me—is where the focus was, and by focusing on that rather than the sort of the actual specified, you know, products, I think it meant that I had a kind of career which was very fulfilling and is not likely to be repeated a lot around the place. I think now the structures are such that this is nowhere near as feasible.

Ms Anne Yardley: What about teaching? How did you feel about teaching when you did go out into the world of teaching?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I was not sure how it would work; I was edgy at first. In the end, I was given opportunities; again, I think this is what made a difference. In my first couple of years, I was given low-ranking classes and I was really struggling. At Northam Senior High School, the art master at the end of the year had a cartoon for each person, and my cartoon was someone tied to the stake with a whole lot of people circling around them because I had the lowest first year class—the least capable first year class—and also the trickiest and most undisciplined one, which is a little bit higher, and hardly any experience with the bright ones. But then at the Bunbury high school, I was given the experience with the bright students and with a senior master who gave me upper school teaching, and from there on I just seemed to get opportunities. When I went to Mt Lawley, I got this opportunity, and before I knew where I was, I was seconded into the education department, getting the opportunity to write about things that interested me and fascinated me.

Ms Anne Yardley: What was your role in the education department when you went to head office?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I was a curriculum officer. I remember, for example, I was instructed to write the life story of Abraham Lincoln, to be used in an education department publication—to this day, Lincoln is my number one political hero, which I wrote about at the time. But also I was involved in helping to devise various curriculum things, and I became an advisory teacher at one point and then toured round the state talking to teachers about teaching. So very quickly—there was a man called David Mossenson, for example, who became director general of education; a very active historian—people like him simply gave me things to do. I feel that I was one of these people who as soon as someone identified me as

someone who would do things, that they created the opportunities, and this is what the curriculum branch did for me. It gave me all sorts of options, and I think when the opportunity for a job in the university sector came, that that's where it came from. So it was a world in which if the right people backed you at the right moment, at the right time, then I found it was feasible to get somewhere, and things just happened. Teaching was something which I didn't assume would work out well, and yet in the end, it was the best part of the university life. If I went back to university tomorrow, the number one thing I want to do is to give lectures, talk to people. I found that I myself was inspired by individual people, and I'm the same. It's what individual people said to me; the things they pointed out to me were the things that came to matter, rather than the formal structures. I think that really summed up my life: I was in at the early stages with a lot of things when you didn't have to follow the strict rules that were later followed.

Ms Anne Yardley: You worked in the early stages of, as it was then, WAIT, before it was Curtin University. How did that come about? Your brother was instrumental in that, wasn't he?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: My brother rang me up. He had got a job there the year before. My brother had had a very unpleasant experience trying to be at Duntroon military college, and so he was determined to get somewhere in the world and he was making rapid progress in his field of surveying and hydrology and things of that sort. He rang me and said, "Look, there's a job being advertised here for someone to teach history who's interested in politics, and that sounds like you. Why don't you apply?" I did apply, and I discovered that the reason that I got the job ahead of more qualified people than me was because of my experience in teaching at a time when WAIT wanted to be a teaching institution. It wanted to be a place that gave a priority to teaching, which the traditional university did not do. Curtin University has become a traditional university like any other, but when I was there, teaching they saw as the number one thing that they did differently from a traditional university. I think from that point of view, I was very fortunate and it just worked, if you can find the right things to teach. Interestingly, apart from Australian politics and things which you'd expect me to teach, the unit I taught every single year I was there and one aspect which became a passionate part of my existence was to do with social welfare for social workers and the whole idea of the English workhouse system and how that was replaced by what happened in England after the Second World War.

Ms Anne Yardley: Why did that have appeal for you?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I came to believe in it, I suppose, and it seemed to work with the students. So for some reason, they kept asking me to do it every year. Obviously, it wasn't something that the people were falling over themselves to do, and it just became that way, and the personal values involved and all the rest really started to matter. It's why now in later life, shows like *Call the Midwife*, is what I taught about. I found, in teaching social workers, that I'm teaching something that matters; it actually has a meaning. That's really, I think what happened with me and history in the end; that is, like the life of Curtin came to matter because of the person he was. One of the things I always prize myself is that I was asked to go to America, and I spoke on several occasions during General MacArthur Week in Wisconsin, and the reason I was speaking in General MacArthur Week was about MacArthur's role with Curtin, and it was the personal interaction between them.

So I think that was the point in the end, that I sort of thought about things, I thought about people, and I was fortunate enough to get the opportunity to use these thoughts in a professional capacity, and that's why everything that I ever did was to some extent politics and ultimately history.

Ms Anne Yardley: Just to finish up today, backtrack a tiny bit. How difficult was that decision to leave the education department and go to this new institution of WAIT?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, it was a decision I discussed with Neil Traylen, who was the former director, and he was strongly suggesting, "Look, you stay in the field. You're buying into something you don't know about." It just seemed to me, "Well, I'll apply and see what happens", and the fact I got the job was important and the other thing that was important is that I stuck to it then, because there was an advertisement for a senior lecturer in the area where I was a lecturer and my boss at WAIT told me that I was guaranteed to get the job and I didn't, and I was beaten by a man who came from Czechoslovakia. I was quite shattered at the time and I thought, where am I now? But I stuck at it, and when I retired from Curtin University, I was a full professor and the man who beat me in that job was still where he was when he retired. So in the end it was one of these things.

DAVID BLACK INTERVIEW

It was a risk, it seemed to go wrong, but it came right. It's my kind of perception on life that you're just where you are, you don't know what may happen or which way things will go, and I just regard my life as one of those things. A lot of the time I didn't achieve what I thought I was going to achieve, but in the end the ball bounced in the right direction at the right time and ultimately it's being passionately keen on what it is that you're doing that counts. Anything that was a combination of history and politics was, in the end, me. It needed the political dimension to it, but it needed to be historical, and just to be a political scientist, no, never.

Ms Anne Yardley: Good place to stop for today.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes; thank you.

[End of DavidBlack_1]

[DavidBlack_2]

Ms Anne Yardley: This is another interview with Emeritus Professor David Black, AM. It's for the parliamentary history project, and we're at David's house in Leederville. Today is 21 August 2018, and the interviewer is me, Anne Yardley.

Last time we spoke, you had begun your lecturing role at Curtin. You said that you found your forte in lecturing. What was it about lecturing that appealed to you?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Thinking back now, I would say that it was the opportunity to talk about the subject and the issues that had always fascinated me. From very early I had decided that if there is any one line of thought that really mattered to me, it was history. That came initially through my introduction to English history, to kings and queens and that kind of thing, but it then gradually spread across. When I received the various appointments later on, increasingly I became involved with Australian history, which was not originally part of my historical [education] at all. To this day, I realise that the role of the Indigenous Australians was not something I ever really became centrally linked to because of the way I had come to politics was through the English origins. I was fascinated by history and I was fascinated by politics and those two things went together. I just found that opportunity in a lecture class to talk about things that you consider matter, the ideas that matter, the people that matter—not because I am fully convinced before I started off what happened but, rather, the other way around—that as I lectured, I began to discover what it was that I particularly wanted to focus on. I think my success as a lecturer is because I was myself exploring and finding my way and I was taking the class with me, particularly the brighter ones. I found that tutorials were not always all that successful because people had not done, in my opinion, sufficient and adequate work, but in the lectures I had the opportunity to really say what it is that I felt, what it is I believed, what I thought that mattered, or what were the things. One of the responses is that you get the students who do react and those students stand out all the way through, I think. I think what particularly appealed to me about teaching and about lecturing is that I was exploring, myself, in the process the ideas of what really mattered. In the process of doing that, I became inspired and I think therefore that spilt across.

Ms Anne Yardley: What was it that was inspiring you, then, in particular?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I was inspired by what individuals were able to achieve and particular things that happened, and, of course, there are the individual ones. For example, one book that I read from cover to cover about three times was the diary which was kept by Captain Robert Scott. That became, and to this day remains, a fascination of mine. One of my very best friends and I are still both equally fascinated by this. The role of the individual and the way I thought about it was brought home to me recently by my own son. He said, "You realise that what really fascinates you about Captain Scott is the diary and the personal side of this, and you should realise as a historian that some of this could well be close to fiction. It is not specifically validated historically." But that did not matter. Amundsen was far more effective than Scott was, but Scott is the one that fascinated me. It was the story, the ideals, the interaction with people. I just found that that is what history was about. It was about kings, it was about queens, it was about Prime Ministers, it was about individuals, it was about empires. I became fascinated as a student myself with the whole evolution of the British Empire and how the British slowly unloaded the empire, and it led to my introducing the phrase in my lectures that Australia, as far as Britain was concerned, was like the child who would not leave home, insistent that Britain still owed it all sorts of responsibilities. That whole theme fascinated me. It's why to this day I regard the number one moment I link with Prime Minister John Curtin was when, straight after the Japanese attack on the Americans, Curtin said that "Britain can look after itself. We turn to the United States for help." That whole process and that kind of way of finding meaning in events, both through individuals and so on, I thought this was my opportunity in lectures to talk about the things that I was passionate about and I believed in.

I suspect that the people I succeeded with was because they became equally passionate about those same issues. Lecturing was a form of teaching, but more than that it's gathering people around you who hopefully are being inspired by you. The greatest compliment paid to me was by one person who worked with me very closely for years and years. This person was studying history externally and decided to come for a few weeks to hear some lectures. She told me that settled her career as a historian for the rest of her life. I thought my enthusiasm was sufficient that it got me involved, it linked me up with people like Phil Pental, who was a passionate historian, and WAIT gave them the opportunity to do that, to talk about the personal achievements, the triumphs and so on. It is a thing which is part of the community at large. I am seeing it now with Netflix and things like *The Crown*. It's pursuing the same episode.

Ms Anne Yardley: Is this what you mean when you said you find the power of thoughts and ideas fascinating?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It's what individuals think, do, are able to say; the kind of thoughts that came in, say, the diary of Captain Scott. It's a spillover into another field with music because one of my great fascinations in life is classical music. The way in which it can stir you up musically and give a real point of passion as a real point of inspiration, equally that's what history is about. Whether it is being expressed in a musical form or whatever it is, to me what history is, is telling a story, and it's telling a story about people, it's telling a story about how people relate to each other, it's telling a story about love, it's telling stories about disastrous treatments and so on. I was fortunate in the sense that I was given the opportunity at a school level first, but then at a more broadly based level, just to talk about the very subject that most inspired me.

Ms Anne Yardley: I am not quite sure we'd call this a passion, but you became interested in WA elections and you became a commentator. So —

Prof. DAVID BLACK: You see, another extraordinary mixture is my passion for statistics. From very early on, I kept statistics. The Melbourne Football Club, which I became a passionate supporter of, for years and years and years, I had a list of every player who played in every position each year in each match. I did this passionately for several years and for no other reason. At the same time, I also read *Hansard* and had records of *Hansard* and made notes of who made speeches and who didn't. The statistical side was always a huge part of it because the statistics tell a story. You're not doing a mathematical thing, trying to work out what the mathematical answer is; you're telling a story with statistics, and the swings and the way in which a certain party can suddenly get massive support and then that support goes away. To this day, I can always quote John Curtin, who in 1940 won by a few hundred votes in a seat, and in 1943 he won by 23 000 votes in the same seat. That was of course the interaction of the war and so on. So the statistics are fascinating in themselves but they're also telling stories. Statistics are not just dry figures. There's not a mathematical pattern; it's the pattern of the story that is being told by this.

The story of Scott and the statistics—where he went, what days he went and how long he took; there he was 11 miles from safety when he died. I find these things double up. They're statistical, and elections did that. You can tell a story. You are talking about individual people and you're talking about members coming and going, losing their seats. You're talking about swings, but those things are not only statistically fascinating but they are about actual people. They're about actual events that take place. I can then be inspired by other means, as I was inspired when I saw Gough Whitlam walking through the campus in 1974 with hordes of students following him. I thought: when would I have imagined someone of that age would have inspired such passion? These things crisscross. I regard myself as a historian who wants to tell a story all the time. There are elements of the story that are highly factual, but there are also elements of the story which are purely inspirational.

Ms Anne Yardley: You said, a little while ago that your careers have crisscrossed. Let's have a look at some of those different career paths that have crisscrossed or maybe run in parallel to each other. You began to be a political commentator. How did that come about and what were you doing, and who were some of the people who you found really fascinating, politically?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I suppose I will have to stop and think about this because it took me three or four years from when it was first suggested that I should do election commentaries on elections to actually do them. I was very edgy and thinking: what am I taking on? Am I taking on something which is very demanding?. I suppose the period when I really got moving was also the period in which Gough Whitlam emerged. But thinking back now Curtin's career, later as a historian, fascinated me. I spent a great deal of time doing political commentaries about the politicians of the day, but I also became totally fascinated with Curtin's career, even though when most of it had taken place, I was much younger—I mean in the 1920s and 1930s when he established the position. So these things spilled across from one thing to the other. The people of the day who I'm talking about in commentaries, I crisscross with my longer term perception of who are the creators, who are the people who have really made a difference, and they're sort of muddled together. The statistical side I find has its own total fascination. In a way, I feel that my whole career is like this; there are crisscrossing elements that at particular points of time one thing takes from another.

For example, one aspect, which all of a sudden I became very involved in, was the position of women in politics, and that was because I met two or three people in everyday life, women who were extraordinarily clever, and yet were not necessarily treated like that. There was an occasion when I was on a committee formed by Malcolm McCusker; he was actually the one in charge of it, and it was the one which led to the Constitutional Centre starting up. Working for that committee was a lady who I had met briefly—a public servant—and she was hitched to that committee. I had enormous respect for her capacity. Malcolm McCusker, who I have a great deal of time for and a great deal of admiration for, nevertheless was a bit inclined to treat her as a side person to the thing. She developed this little story where she used to call him “Frank” [chuckles], and this was her way of saying he’s only one of us really after all. This person has become one of my best friends in my whole life, and it made me realise that, as my mother had earlier on, the role of women was something that actually needed much more care and attention. In later years, that’s when Harry Phillips and I actually devoted our time to writing a book about the part played by women members. It crisscrossed in other ways, because in the church, for example, I felt that women were always struggling and fighting for their position. So I suppose—this is the thing—my interest in politics and elections was statistical, but I was also passionate about particular individuals, and these things crisscross with me all the time.

Ms Anne Yardley: In your role as an historian, in one sense, you’re looking back to people like Curtin —

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That’s right.

Ms Anne Yardley: — but in the other you’re involved with what’s currently happening politically on the ground. So looking at, say, that period through the 70s and early 80s, when you were at WAIT and then Curtin, what political events really stand out for you that you recall commentating on?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Now, let me think [pause].

Ms Anne Yardley: Are there any particular elections?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: When I think back now, to me, Western Australian politics, where I was initially based the system was in a sense very one-sided, and I

became well aware of that. The Labor Party was always, to my mind, in a sense the underdog, and at the same time the issues that the Labor Party became involved in were the ones that really got me fascinated. For example, of all the things that have happened—the number one time to me was when the Australian people, by referendum, voted no and refused to ban the Communist Party. I was absolutely outraged by the fact that the onus of proof that you were not a communist would have been placed upon people. So those kind of things first got me.

At the same time, the Ben Chifleys of this world, I saw them as ultimately not exactly inept but politically they were always going to be—and the society that I lived in, in Australia was, whether it was Western Australia with Charles Court or whether it was federally with Robert Menzies, going to be dominated from the right. Therefore, I suppose what got me involved was because in the period in which I became increasingly involved, politics no longer became dominated by the right—that it was dominated by the other side—and I found that when I went to university and when I went to Curtin and I was actually teaching there, I was not in with the left wing either because they were all semi-Marxists and I was not a semi-Marxist. So I regarded myself as, you know, not extreme on the left, but I was a person who wanted there to be a broader set of views than [those of] Menzies and Charlie Court.

It gave me the opportunity to statistically talk about these things at a period when it did change and the changes were taking place. While I was not—never was—a passionate admirer of Brian Burke, for example, at the same time, I was delighted that there had been a change of ruling. I was frustrated then, and to this day I still am, by the fact that the Legislative Council of Western Australia is so passionately lopsided and does not divide things around. So these things crisscrossed as I went from one place to another, but I regard therefore politically—Australia became more genuinely a place for doing things. I suppose if you look for an individual, it would be Gough Whitlam. He wasn't the only one by any stretch of the imagination, but it was the end of the complete domination of—well, and the speech that I used to think about that Menzies had made, "I did but see her passing by and yet I love her till I die." I had great time for British royalty in their way, but not to that extent. I still regard as Curtin's greatest moment when he produced a New Year's message [in 1942] and said Britain can look after itself and we'll turn to America for help.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's look at the institution that you were working in, which was WAIT, and as it became, Curtin. Did it affect you much, this change between WAIT to Curtin?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The actual change from WAIT to Curtin, it didn't really affect me a great deal, I don't think. What did affect me a great deal was the decision that when it became Curtin University, that there was going to be a considerable stress on John Curtin himself, and the establishment of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library and things of that kind were what made a difference to me. In the institution itself, I was still teaching Australian history, the way I had been before, and I was still teaching social workers, as I had every year, and the whole idea of the English workhouse system and getting away from that. But the thing that made a big difference was when it was decided that Curtin should become a university and took on the name of Curtin, they did more than take on a name, and that was the really significant thing from my point of view.

The decision was then made to establish what they then called the prime ministerial library—I'm not even sure if it's still called that anymore—but the fact that it was something which the Americans had started with the idea of sort of presidential libraries, and the thing that made a difference was to have John Curtin as Prime Minister. I became the historical consultant to that body. It then meant that I met the Curtin family. I shall never forget when John Curtin's daughter came out one day when I was talking to her and gave me a huge pile of personal papers and said, "I want you to look after these now; I don't want to keep them here." I was panic-stricken and I rushed to the Curtin Library and handed them all over to them. This Thursday, in a couple of days now, I'm going to meet one of the people who worked in the John Curtin library there and I'm collecting all the various information, and I'm catching up on that part of my life—so the part that really became a huge part of my time for that was working on that, and writing books. I started by writing one called *In His Own Words*, which dealt with a series of speeches and other things that Curtin wrote. But I went from there to other issues on some of the personal relationships that Curtin had had with various people.

Ms Anne Yardley: He did with his letter-writing to his wife?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: His letter-writing, yes, definitely, and I'm trying to think of the name of—the man that the university is named after.

Ms Anne Yardley: Murdoch?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Murdoch, yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: Walter Murdoch.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes. Curtin worked very closely with Walter Murdoch in the 1920s and had Murdoch running classes for trade unionists—Curtin wanted trade unionists to be educated—so that side of things got me very much involved.

Ms Anne Yardley: How involved were you with what the library would have on its shelves, if at all?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I was involved in writing about the things that they were collecting information for. For example, I actually worked on [phone rings]. Just one moment [pause].

Ms Anne Yardley: So your involvement with the library was more in the publications that you were editing or writing?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The one that I was just going to say, for example, I analysed the Fremantle federal electorate all the way through, so I helped to write the story on the Fremantle electorate, which was the one which ultimately enabled Curtin to play his part in the way that he did. I can't think of her name now—there was a lady who was the member for Fremantle for a while, a federal member⁴—and she helped to get this particular project underway. So I did things like that. I worked on letters that Curtin had written to people. I worked on the part that he played in these things—the fact that he represented the Fremantle electorate. So, in a sense, Curtin's own role and the part that he was playing was the aspect that I focused on.

That led to one of the most interesting things that happened to me when—a few years ago now—I was invited to the United States for the General MacArthur Week. Now General MacArthur politically is as different from Curtin as you could possibly get, and yet I had the opportunity to go and speak at this symposium

⁴ Melissa Parke, Federal Member for Fremantle 2007-2016

because Curtin and MacArthur, by necessity, worked together through World War II. I became very much involved with all that kind of thing, so I became the historian for the university. I didn't write the history of the university itself; what I did was the story about the man after whom they were named and the role he played.

I think one of the things which emerges from all this is that I had crisscrossing roles all the time. I was teaching students and teaching them certain standard courses, but I was also at the same time involved in the John Curtin Centre when it was established. At the same time, the parliamentary history, which I had started back in the 1980s, which was published in 1990 —

Ms Anne Yardley: This was the centenary history of Parliament?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Eighteen ninety was the centenary of Western Australia becoming self-governing. Western Australia was the last of the Australian states to have its own Constitution. It was still, in a sense, under British control until then. It was that, which on the particular day when I was talking to Phil Pental, that I said I was interested in. "Why don't we do a history of that?", and that's where the encouragement came from. So what happens is that as I am pursuing a particular job, being paid to do certain things and so on, certain things happen. The fact that WAIT turned itself into Curtin university, that created a whole set of things. The fact that they created a prime ministerial centre gave rise to a whole set of contacts, and these aspects crisscrossed and sat alongside of each other.

Ms Anne Yardley: Tell me about the influence of Phillip Pental in getting you into Parliament.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The thing that Phil Pental did initially was he gave me the intro to Speaker Ian Thompson; who was interested in what we were talking about. But that really wouldn't have gone all that far except the state government changed, the Labor Party came into power and I was able to keep the impetus going, because although Phil was a Liberal, he was perfectly happy to work with various Labor people as well. However, the two people who made the real difference to the major part of my career in the end, were the parliamentary clerks. It started with a man called Bruce Okely. Bruce Okely—how do I describe him? His parliamentary career began as a messenger boy. He worked his way slowly up the parliamentary system at the same time his life had interacted with mine in another way because

he also belonged to a body called the Guild of Young Artists, to which I and my wife-to-be belonged. The Guild of Young Artists was an organisation of young people, under 35, who gave a series of concerts during the year in which they played to each other—pianists, artists, speeches and things like that. Bruce Okely was very much interested in what they called barbershop quartets, and he was involved in this kind of thing as well. So we had this kind of initial relationship through music.

As the Clerk in the Parliament, Bruce became passionately interested in the idea of parliamentary history. Now that was important in itself. I've told a story, so I think it's all right to tell it now. As I probably said to you already, Bruce was the one who when we got the money for the parliamentary history project—we actually got the money physically— he immediately invested it in term deposits and made a substantial amount of extra money, all of which was spent on our project. He was doing this, and the book was finally published and we had a ceremony and the Duke of Edinburgh came here and all the rest in 1990, but somehow Bruce said to me, "Oh, we're going to go on, keeping the history going." They had already started the oral history program—the very program that you are now participating in. Ronda Jamieson was recruited as the first of these. Then Bruce decided, for various reasons, to leave parliament. He retired prematurely, and he admitted later that it was a premature decision, but in the process of doing that his replacement, a man called Peter McHugh, had come in quite young, in the 1980s. Peter McHugh took up the cudgels. I think Peter felt that what I was doing and what the parliamentary history was—and then we got Harry involved as well—what we were doing was actually enlarging and giving Parliament a broader vision and a role than just what Parliament normally did. I think this was the point: I had the backing of parliamentary staff who decided for Parliament to do these historical things and to write a history. Eventually, we actually wrote a history of the PHAC itself—how it was created and so on. It meant that the project which started in the 80s, and was a one-off project, just went on.

Ms Anne Yardley: But what was your brief really? To record the history of what?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The Parliament—the history of the Parliament itself.

Ms Anne Yardley: In the sense that it has become ongoing, what is that brief now in terms of how you choose people to be part of the oral history project? What do you choose to collect?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The oral history project itself developed on two lines. The initial interviews were with politicians—significant politicians. But from quite early on the idea was to focus on key staff at Parliament itself—for example, they're very anxious to get an interview with the first woman Hansard reporter, because Parliament for several decades was a male-only establishment. One of the stories they all tell is that there were no toilets for women at one stage, and even for the first woman member, there was no toilet in the building and this kind of thing. So the oral history program broadened itself out to what it is now, where it deals with people who worked in Parliament itself in various senior roles and people who had significant parliamentary careers. In some cases, careers were short term—someone who wasn't part of it for long and what effect did that have. So the more I'm talking to you, it makes me realise that these things weave in and out and they're there for different reasons at different times.

There was a period when Phil Pandal was there when we produced three or four things in succession, which we wouldn't have done if he hadn't been there. Again, for example, the one we did about the occupations of MPs, what sorts of backgrounds they had and so on. The one about from house to house was told—the move from Government House to Parliament House. Phil Pandal was very much the driving force of that.

Ms Anne Yardley: Is this because he was an amateur historian, really?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Oh yes, absolutely. He was a passionate amateur historian, and he was someone—let's be honest—who the political world didn't treat well. What happened in the end is he held the seat of South Perth for years and years and years, not the endorsed Liberal candidate, and if they did endorse a candidate, that candidate would be beaten and so, in the end, they didn't bother. Elizabeth Constable was another parallel case of that, where she held a safe Liberal seat for years and years and years, was included in Liberal Party cabinets—Phil himself was not included in cabinets. So they were the sorts of people—there still are—and they're particularly more likely to be women in many cases than men.

But what had happened, in effect, is that the sorts of things that I was doing—in the end, things were created to match it, rather than the other way around. They created a position of parliamentary fellow. It wasn't a position that I aspired to get; it was the name that they gave to me for what I was already doing. In other words, what happened individually was then given an official label, and until very recently that was it. We were there sort of by definition.

Ms Anne Yardley: In those early days what was the relationship between your work at Curtin and your work with Parliament? How did those two organisations work together to allow you to do what you were doing?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Let me try to get this clear. I started at WAIT in 1968. For the first 10 or 12 years, that's where I was; I was at WAIT. I didn't have anything to do with the Parliament at all. My role with the Parliament developed in bits and pieces, but really firmly established by about 1984, leading to the publication of the history in 1990. Increasingly, from 1984 on, the two aspects of my life became linked, and I don't quite know how it occurred, but the idea was that it was thought that I could spend more time working for the Parliament if the Parliament gave some of its money to then WAIT and subsequently Curtin, and that would enable the jobs to continue. It slowly developed in that form.

I don't know how long it lasted and, of course, I retired from Curtin in 2001 anyway, and thereafter Parliament made its own decision. What they then did was they said, "Well, we'll give you effectively an honorarium." I mean, we were not on the books in one sense at all; in fact, actually, no tax was taken out at source. We were issued with—what's that thing businesspeople have?

Ms Anne Yardley: An ABN.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, an ABN. We worked by an ABN. We simply had to give them an ABN number and they paid, and the fact we'd given them an ABN number, as far as they were concerned, meant that they had met the requirements of the taxation system. It was our responsibility to declare the income which we had received. So a system was evolved just for us.

Ms Anne Yardley: How did you divide your time then between the two institutions, between WAIT/Curtin and then Parliament, or were you just extremely busy?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, I was extremely busy because in my last decade at WAIT—at Curtin—I was still teaching classes all the way through until I retired. In 2001, Tom Stannage, who by that stage actually had a job with us, said to me that I would be offered a full professorship if I took retirement, which is what I did. So until that time, I was doing both. At Curtin I was doing a heck of a lot more, not only just teaching the history classes, but in the prime ministerial library—the actual establishment of the prime ministerial library and various things I wrote for them.

Ms Anne Yardley: Your career path through WAIT and then Curtin—I know you said you missed out on becoming senior lecturer, I think it was, first time around?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That's correct.

Ms Anne Yardley: But, nonetheless, you were head of the school of social sciences.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Eventually.

Ms Anne Yardley: Well, yes—from 1982 through, would that have been? I also have got it down here that you were involved with Curtin's Hayman Theatre Company? What were you doing with that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I wasn't actually doing anything with them. My daughter was quite keen on this, and Curtin put on various productions and I actually went to two or three of those with her. That's all that was. I'm just trying think [pause].

The first time they advertised the senior lecturer I didn't get the grant. Subsequently, and eventually, several years later, I was appointed the head of school for a couple of years, and I also got various kinds of promotions. These things happened alongside of each other. I suppose the answer to what you've just said is that I must have been extremely busy, and the fact that Parliament providing what they did meant I didn't have as many classes to take, particularly tutorials. For example, Betty Carter, who was the wife of a former deputy principal of Wesley College, became my tutor. The social history course, year after year after year, I gave the lectures and she took all the tutorials. So, increasingly, that's what

happens. Different aspects of my job were done by different people, but I was advancing on several fronts at the same time.

Ms Anne Yardley: You were and included in that was doing commentary for elections.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: And the election commentary, yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's look at some of those elections in the 1980s—any that stand out for you, and why, for instance Sir Charles Court?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Sir Charles Court became highly significant in my view of the world and what was happening. I came to know him, up to a point, and at one stage, I was actually going to be one of the writers of his life story. It was with a lady called Deborah Gare; we were going to do that at one stage, but in the end, for various reasons, that didn't happen and Ronda Jamieson, who I worked with, took over the whole thing.

Sir Charles Court was, for me, a highly significant figure. Firstly, I was always fascinated with what I considered accidents in history. In 1950, the seat of Nedlands was being held by an extremely aged man in his 80s—I can't think of his name now. He announced that he was going to retire and a man called Cyril Bird, who had a very, very active firm, decided that he was going to retire from his business and was going to go into politics and be the member for Nedlands. At the last minute, the ageing member in his 80s said, no, no, he didn't want to leave, he was going to stay after all, and he contested the seat against Cyril Bird. A young university student David Grayden also contested the seat, and in the crisscrossing that occurred, David Grayden won the seat, but he was not an endorsed Liberal. Three years later, in the seat of Nedlands, the issue came up. Cyril Bird said, "Blow that!" After what happened last time, he wouldn't have a bar of it. David Grayden ran and two Liberals were endorsed, including Charles Court. In a tight finish, with the help of some Labor preferences as it turned out, Charles Court won the seat and Grayden lost it. That became for me, historically, one of the extraordinary things that happened. If Cyril Bird had been allowed to win the 1950 seat, would Sir Charles Court have ever, ever entered state Parliament at all?

As it was, he had an enormous career—you know, huge consequence—and it's not exaggerating to say the history of Western Australia was transformed to some extent, particularly with the relationship he developed with Japan. They were the kinds of things that stood out for me—that Court was not the Premier for most of the time that he was influential. He became the Premier in the end, but he worked with David Brand; he allowed him to be. I was fascinated by that kind of career; that somebody could be so influential, so important, and yet they were perfectly prepared not to be the Premier, providing that he could be doing the things that he wanted to do. Each week he used to meet with a group of his colleagues and worked out this is what is going to happen for the next week and so on. What I am trying to say is that my fascination with politics came with particular people.

I thought Bob Hawke was another one whose capacity to straddle between Labor and Liberal—ardent Labor man, unionist from way back, but the sort of person who several Liberals that I knew said he was by the far the most effective Prime Minister at the time, much more so than Malcolm Fraser and people like that. I suppose what stands out to me are these individuals who came to be so significant at the time, and also those like Alan Carpenter, who in my opinion took a situation and made a real mess of it and, of course, the Colin Barnetts of this world, who spent so many years in Parliament. So, my interest in elections was both statistical—that was very strong—but also I was fascinated by the individuals who particularly performed the dominant roles, who were able to survive, and the Phil Pendants, Elizabeth Constables. Politics is a real activity, involving real people in real situations.

Ms Anne Yardley: I think we might follow that up another time with a bit more detail on some of the people that have certainly made their mark on you.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes.

[End of DavidBlack_2]

DavidBlack_3

Ms Anne Yardley: This is another interview with Emeritus Professor David Black for the parliamentary history project. We're at David's home in Leederville. Today is Tuesday, 28 August 2018, and the interviewer is me, Anne Yardley.

David, last time we spoke, you finished with the words, "Politics is an activity, involving real people in real situations." What I would like to do is look at those people in politics who have been most influential. I know that you will name John Curtin as a standout politician. Let's start with him. How do you evaluate his legacy?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, obviously, I was given reasons to focus on Curtin in a way that would be much more the case than perhaps any other job I was doing. When Curtin University was created, WAIT turned itself into a university and made the decision to be named after Curtin, this led to not only a name change but it led to the establishment of what effectively was the first prime ministerial library that Australia has had. There have been attempts to create similar ones of Hawke and others since, but the establishment of a prime ministerial library is an American aspect in a way—Lyndon Johnson and people like that, the same thing. It gave me the opportunity as a historian to really focus on Curtin and I was able to focus not only on the things that people would know about, but also on the private personal papers and so on, and the start of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library was an enormous help to that. As a result of that, my awareness of and concepts to do with Curtin straddled both ordinary everyday life, the everyday issues that politicians face, but also faces enormous national consequences.

Curtin became Prime Minister in what I have to call accidental fashion. A man who wins his own seat by a few hundred votes in 1940; his party loses very, very narrowly; and almost by accident, because of a by-election forced by someone being killed in an air crash—an air crash that should never have happened—Curtin is made Prime Minister overnight when the government of the day falls. This had not occurred before, and certainly hasn't occurred since, that there has actually been a complete change [in government] from one side to the other by a vote in the house. At the very same time that all this happened, within a few weeks the Japanese bomb at Pearl Harbor and Curtin, as Prime Minister, Australia, for the first and only time ever, declared war itself directly. In the case of Germany, for

example, we were at war with Germany because the British had already declared war. Then Curtin faced what is regarded as one of the gravest crises, with the Japanese pressurising Australia, and Curtin's New Year message after Pearl Harbor that Australia look to the United States, that Britain would have to manage and it would be able to and that the United States was to be our link. In that sense he completely transformed the history of Australia permanently. But also the government, in running the economy at the time, made also huge substantial changes, including, for example, the Commonwealth took over all income tax. This has made an enormous difference. Some of the other aspects that happened enabled the Labor government after the war to get a referendum through, which is a very rare achievement. That referendum gave them the power to establish Medicare and all sorts of issues of that kind.

So the Curtin government was what you might call a courageous government; a government of great consequence in international affairs, as far as Australia was concerned, but also massively important also to the history of the country. Yet my personal involvement in this was not only at that elevated level, but it was also in writing my own accounts, *In His Own Words*, a book about the speeches that he made; others about letters that he had received and written to various people, to young girls and so on, and there was no sort of sexual allusion or anything of that kind in it. Curtin became the person who in a sense I became aware of head and shoulders above everything else. Since that time, obviously, I have seen Prime Ministers come and go and I have seen Premiers come and go, and they each have different impacts in different ways, but Curtin will always be, both because of the work situation that I focus so much on him, but also the massively important role that he played. It was a role not only important at the time in winning the war, but it was important in the long-term history of Australia.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's look at some people who might be slightly lesser figures for you [chuckles]—the WA Premiers. You talked a little bit about Sir Charles Court last week, but let's go through those Premiers that were around during your professional life—John Tonkin, for example, who came in in 1971 to 1974. How do you evaluate him as a Premier?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Tonkin, of course, is extraordinary in the statistical side of things in that no-one has ever spent so long in Parliament waiting to become Premier—I mean decades.

Ms Anne Yardley: All-up, he was there 43 years, wasn't he?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That's right. It was a very long period of time indeed [and frequently in opposition]. And in 1971 his party won government very narrowly. Overnight, they had a majority of one seat and then the Speaker died and the Labor government of John Tonkin was without the majority in the Legislative Assembly and it left Sir Charles Court. That may well have been the end of it. In fact, for one reason or another, that did not occur and the Tonkin government survived until the 1974 election when it was swept out of office anyway because of the problems that Gough Whitlam was encountering already by that stage. So Tonkin was really very late in the piece. From the outset, he had all sorts of difficulties. He lost office in 74 and the Labor Party disappeared again.

This was a period when, after there had been a Labor government in the 1950s, we had politics completely dominated by Sir Charles Court, even though for much of the time he wasn't Premier. One of the most extraordinary things about Sir Charles Court is that he was so perfectly content to have David Brand as the Premier for 12 years because Court knew that he could do all the things that he really wanted to do anyway. I gather there used to be a meeting every Sunday night with Sir Charles Court and various key persons and they effectively ran the show. David Brand was popular with the public and he was the Premier in between. Later, Sir Charles became Premier in his own right and those periods were possibly rather more controversial.

Ms Anne Yardley: What made them controversial?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, for a start, Sir Charles was not a great one about parliamentary governance. Parliament was a necessary part of the system but it was not something that he really ever focused on. As far as he was concerned, the real decisions were made in government by the Premier and so on. David Brand had let him do it and he found that various ministers irritated him considerably. Des O'Neil, who was a deputy of his, was the man that I believe he would have liked to have been his successor, but O'Neil decided to leave politics, and Ray O'Connor, who succeeded Sir Charles, Sir Charles said to me personally that the only reason Ray O'Connor became Premier is because he promised everybody something and he couldn't give them most of anything.

As far as he was concerned, the North West Shelf was a huge driving issue and there were also the enormous difficulties of handling the Aboriginal question. One of the features about Sir Charles is that all sorts of quite dedicated Liberals were strongly opposed to Sir Charles' approach on this. In fact the man that I make my comparisons with, with Sir Charles Court is Malcolm Fraser. Fraser is a person who is thought of, because of the Whitlam affair, as an extremely conservative man but in fact he was not an extremely conservative man at all. The role he played in opposing apartheid and his attitude to the position of Aborigines, I use him as contrasting Court, but yet Court was enormously important in Western Australian history. His impact was huge. There are certain people—Stirling, who actually established Western Australia in the first place; John Forrest at the beginning of the 1890s, the first Premier; and Sir Charles—I regard them as kind of the super people of politics. Sir Charles personally, you could become very irritated by; he's almost blind to certain things. He was not a great parliamentarian at all, but he was the driving force in Western Australian history.

Ms Anne Yardley: He was indeed for a long time. How did Ray O'Connor fare as his successor?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Not very well at all, and very short lived. Of course in the immediate aftermath of that, there were various difficulties. The Brian Burke era left Ray O'Connor and the Liberal Party in all sorts of strife. As someone once said, when Brian Burke was around, the Liberal leaders were standing there, looking ahead of them and suddenly they found that on their right-hand side was Brian Burke. In other words, he made links and established links with the economically powerful, and the photograph which appeared of them in *The West Australian* standing on the beachfront was one of those memorable moments that described the 1980s. Ray O'Connor just got completely buried in that sort of thing.

There are some very interesting sidelines to that. One of my favourite little stories, which I liked telling people and still do, is: who is the last Liberal Premier, or the last Liberal leader in Western Australia, since Sir Charles Court never to have been divorced? And the answer is that there aren't any, whereas in the Labor Party, you had Brian Burke, who was married for years and years and years to the same person, and still is. So these kinds of quirks of history always appeal to me, which is part of my maths statistics, I suppose.

Of the Premiers, Richard Court did extraordinarily well after what didn't look terribly promising, but of course in the process he kept out of power my close colleague Phil Pandal, the man who I'd worked so closely with. I suppose, from my perspective, the benefit of that was that then Phil focused so much effort on parliamentary history, and I was able to work with him, and he had a huge amount to do with my being able to establish the parliamentary history project in the first place. There's this particular interview project that's now going on and so on and so on. Richard Court managed quite well. Then there was the Colin Barnett story, which only just now we're in a position to really start fully assessing. Colin Barnett was one of these people who looked like the obvious leader and yet things kept going wrong. The famous canal project was the more spectacular one. On the other hand, the blunders by his own opponents, in particular Alan Carpenter, enabled him to be Premier for years and years and years, and then also contributed to one of the worst defeats that the conservative parties have ever suffered.

After Sir Charles, it's been a mixed story, and the same thing on the Labor Party side. No-one has yet really emerged as the Brian Burke of now. Brian Burke, however controversial he was, was a highly significant and dominating figure. The nearest to that probably was Geoff Gallop, who was working in that direction but then he had personal situations which made him decide to leave politics early. Then Alan Carpenter disastrously lost an election, which kept Labor out of office for years and years and years. Western Australian politics tends to be that the people who do become important stand out massively compared to everyone else.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's look at Geoff Gallop because he was an unlikely politician in a lot of ways—wasn't he?—an academic turned politician. How do you evaluate him, coming in as he did after the Burke era?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: My feeling was that he was a thoughtful and an intelligent Premier; he could see which way things would go. One of the things that the Labor Party did in the 1950s, for example, with Perth Modern School was they decided that this was an elite structure and that we don't want government schools which are elite; we want to go by sort of the English schools for everyone, and that we want good government schools to be for everyone and not elite. Then, of course, the result of this was the Modern School became an ordinary school, before, for a

while, becoming a specialist music school. It was the period of Gallop that they realised that if the Labor Party wanted to really promote ideals, having a strong government school academically was the way to go. Then in more recent times, one of his successors actually said the reason Labor turned Modern School back into a selective school was because we wanted the best school there is to be a government school. I think that became clear as crystal before and I think it is clear as crystal now. I see Geoff Gallop as one of the ones who brought the party to this idea, that far from academia being something that should be—and should want schools for everybody; on the other hand, the best schools there are, should in the last resort, be government schools.

That is one of the controversies, I think, from that time on, because in more recent times, people like Carmen Lawrence have said to me that the best education system in the world, as far as she was concerned, are in places like Finland where the best schools are everywhere and you do not have what you might call elite government schools instead of elite private schools—you have neither; you have totally across the board. But Carmen Lawrence was not, for a number of reasons, terribly successful in politics. She made a significant blunder, an episode involving Richard Court in which her version of events has been doubted by lots of people ever since, and the result is that one of the most highly capable—she was a brilliant scholar—had the makings of an excellent Premier but in fact never worked out that way. She went into federal politics and that was not an enormous success either. So, I see Geoff Gallop as someone who, while he was there, took the Labor Party in some of the right directions, but then for a time, the Labor Party found itself back in the wilderness for various reasons and only now are we in a position to see how they will go.

It's interesting, my own perspective on elections has increasingly become that what the electors are most capable of doing is to reject the governments they don't want, rather than choosing the ones they do. So, which way things are going to go from here on in, I find it very difficult to predict. But I think the one thing that I see over and over again, and we saw it very recently in the recent state election, is that when the government loses the confidence of people, it can be swept aside with great gusto.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's go back to Carmen Lawrence. This is the Penny Easton affair, I think, that you're are talking about there.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: Did she make a terrible mistake in all of that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Oh, yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: Could she have rectified that situation?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Without wanting to say too much about a person who I have a great deal of respect for, a friend of mine who knew the workings of what was going on said that everybody in Carmen Lawrence's own departments and so on were convinced that in the Penny Easton affair she had in fact known what was going and she had in fact played a part in it. There has been an interview project with her, which hasn't got too far yet, and I personally think it's a great pity that we can't get to a point of evaluating what Carmen Lawrence actually stood for and what she was trying to do, and that this one, it would have to be called, a serious error of judgement has clouded the whole situation. That is in a sense what I think that my lesson of studying politics has taught me—that it's very easy, even for highly successful people who really know what they're doing, if something goes wrong, if they make a wrong decision, then that's the end of them. The British Prime Minister who decided to run the Brexit poll, for example, I think was a very good Prime Minister indeed.

Ms Anne Yardley: David Cameron.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes. But he was ruined by this decision, and I've been informed that what he should have done—and he could have done—was to say that the only reason Brexit would be regarded as carried was if a majority of the actual electorate voted for it, not the majority who turned up. If he'd used that criteria, as he did with the Scottish referendum, he wouldn't have got it in. It's possible for a politician—and of course the classic one of all, one of the politicians who I thought was one of the most brilliant politicians I can ever, ever recall is a man called Tony Blair, and his election victory in 1997 was one of the worst defeats the Conservatives have suffered in the entire history of the Conservative Party. What happened, he got involved in Iraq and that was that. So politics is that sort of game, that no matter how capable you are, if you make the mistake—and Brian

Burke, we come back to him, there's a classic there. To this day there are still arguments about whether he really committed some of the offences he's supposed to have done, but there's no doubt at all that his whole position, various reasons to do with his relationship with Ireland and various things to do with finances, crashed in flames. Politics is far more a story of those who have great capacities and it's all crumbling around them, than the other way round.

Robert Menzies was an extraordinary success. I think the story of Menzies tells us more about Australia at the time and politics than it even tells us about Menzies—that we were in that period the kind of society which was not, sort of, questioning. We didn't want the Communist Party. The Australian people refused to ban the Communist Party, but they didn't want the Communist Party and so the Liberals won election after election after election. In that sort of context, it's possible for someone to stay there even when they make serious errors. I think, for example, in the Suez crisis in 1956, Menzies backed the British against the Americans, which was a disastrous decision and which his foreign ministers tried to—but it didn't bring his government down. It very nearly did, but he survived. So, politics is one of those things in which even highly capable leaders can perish. That's the lesson that I've learnt over all the years that I've been following it.

Ms Anne Yardley: What about less capable politicians? I'm talking here about Alan Carpenter—less capable than say a Sir Robert Menzies. He came in after Geoff Gallop, but he made a tactical error, did he not, in calling that election?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Oh, yes. He made all sorts of tactical errors: the way he played around with the superannuation system for politicians; various things that he was doing about facilities which people had within Parliament itself—they were there—but the decision with the election and the campaign which was run. A friend of mine talked about that campaign. The Liberal Party had various pictorial images of things that they stood for, and he said there were no pictorial images from the Labor Party and, yet, if 30 people had voted differently in one seat, the Labor Party, in my opinion, would have been able to form a government at the time. That cost them years and years and years in the wilderness. So he was a man who, you would have thought from his background, would have been highly capable of working out the way to handle these things. He was a man whose subsequent career, business wise, has gone very successfully, yet he made significant errors.

Perhaps the conclusion that one can draw from all of this is that politics is a very difficult game to play, but my overwhelming conclusion now, as I've said to several people, is it started in 1945 when Winston Churchill was defeated in an election after he'd led his country successfully through the war, and after extraordinary achievements like Dunkirk and other things of that sort. As I say, if you want a specific example, the 1933 state election when the Labor Party was swept into power because of the Great Depression but strongly opposed to the notion of secession. In the 1933 election, the Mitchell government, coming out of the Great Depression, is defending a disastrous economic position. At the same time, they are strongly in favour of secession, right. They believe that Western Australia is being badly treated and it ought to have secession. The electors agreed with them and massively voted for secession, but in the state election, which was on the same day, the Mitchell government was annihilated and Mitchell himself lost his own seat—the only Premier who's ever been defeated in his own seat. And there's a story about Western Australian politics, of course. Phil Collier, his opponent, then appointed him Lieutenant-Governor of the state because there was no superannuation and he was afraid that his friend Mitchell would suffer. In other words, the people overwhelmingly voted for secession and overwhelmingly defeated the government which wanted this and voted with the party which didn't want it and which made sure it didn't happen. What that says is the electorate can organise itself to defeat that which they don't want. That's what they did with Churchill in 1945; the working class felt that they had been badly treated. In other words, the whole issue of elections—this happened in the most recent state election, the Barnett government was swept out of power. It was not a massive vote for the Labor Party, though Labor got a massive vote; it was a massive vote to throw out the government.

So, this is what would lead to my other conclusion from this—that it's very difficult to be a Prime Minister or a Premier and over a period of time to maintain support. You can be the centre of attention, but it is very difficult. The exceptions have been in highly conservative periods. The Robert Menzies or Sir Charles Courts who could last for election after election after election, it's in the very conservative phase of politics where the central role that government is playing is developing the economy. The people who make the really interesting social changes, who change the nature of Australian society like, for example, the position of women in society and all this, these are the Gough Whitlams of the world who do that. Robert Menzies and Charles Court, what they're associated with more than anything else

is keeping the society intact, secure and blocking off the things which—and occasionally they get it wrong, like when they supported the Vietnam War. There are occasions and they get found out. For the most part, the Menzies and Courts of this world have been able to last a considerable time. It's perhaps interesting now that this is much more difficult to do, and I think what's been happening in the last—we had Hawke and Howard who were highly, what we'd call, successful and stable Prime Ministers. I think it's going to be harder and harder to emulate that now.

Ms Anne Yardley: What is the role of the 24-hour media cycle, news cycle and social media? How does that play into this inability for governments to have any longevity?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, it cuts across all kinds of things. You might think that everyone is heading in a particular direction and then, all of a sudden, you find from social media that a particular way of looking at it is suddenly becoming the in-way, and people who think that they're going with the majority, find suddenly that things are moving in a different direction altogether. I think it makes it hard for politicians, but also makes it hard for ordinary people to really know just where things are. The example in most recent times is Donald Trump in America. I think the average person doesn't know kind of what criteria to use in the end and what sources to use to decide what's really going on. That's why you get those, on the one hand, who suggest that someone like him is actually doing good for the American economy no matter what's happening, against those who say what's happening to children being massacred and guns being provided for people to protect children in schools and all this sort of thing. You don't know which of these aspects is the real world there. Obamacare—for example, in my own family—members of my own family who are strongly in favour of what they heard about Obamacare couldn't understand certain Americans they met who decided that it was all taking away their rights; it was quite the reverse. I think it's hard for ordinary people to know some of the time just what's going on. One of the features of Australian politics—what I personally regard as a very desirable feature—is that at least in Australian politics everyone not only can vote but is legally required to vote. One American politician who came across to see us, I remember him talking about the difference in Australia is that you have to take some notice of all the levels of society, whereas in America, to a certain extent, there are people you can almost ignore because

you think they probably won't vote anyway, whereas in Australia, they're all supposed to vote. The result is that does make a difference.

Ms Anne Yardley: How important is that, compulsory voting, do you believe in a fair outcome?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I think personally it's one of the more desirable features of Australian politics. I think Australian politics is having trouble at times sort of adopting various American and British aspects, and the way they relate to each other and the recent events in Canberra and all this kind of thing. I think compulsory voting does mean that at some point people for the most part are forced to make some sort of thought or decision about what they're going to do, and that the politicians, on the other hand, cannot totally ignore certain sections of the populace. It was the American politician who said that. I remember him saying to our group when he came to Curtin that we can't ignore whole sections quite in the way that we can in America.

Ms Anne Yardley: Hypothetical question: How would Sir Robert Menzies have managed in an era of the 24-hour news cycle and social media? Would he have survived as Prime Minister as long as he did, do you believe?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I suppose the first thing is that I still find it extraordinary that he was able to survive in quite the way he did. The fact that he got it so wrong early in the Second World War, you would have thought there was no way in the world that he could possibly have re-emerged, and the fact that he was able to do that says that it was a very different society than we have now, I suspect, in the first place.

I think the other thing which complicates the issue enormously in Australian history for that period of time is the question of communism. I regard the period in the 1940s, 50s, the "red menace" was of huge consequence, and Menzies had that kind of negative always on his side. The ultimate culmination of that was the Vietnam War, which was specifically designed to prevent communist China emerging as the powerful force. The failure of the Vietnam War created a completely different world. Menzies in that world, after what we saw in Vietnam and the way it impacted on domestic politics, that's one of the more intriguing things I found in politics; the way in which what happened in America actually had

significant impacts in Australia as well and it was tied in with social issues and so on.

I think my lifetime has seen a huge change; for example, colleagues of mine at UWA when they were planning Australian history courses, one of the things that they said was, “We’re going to do certain courses in which we’re simply going to take one thing that happened in Australia and use that as the premise for our course.” One of the things, for example, the arrival of the first rabbits and the impact that this had. The one that really made me stop and think, and I thought what a huge difference, was the coming of the contraceptive pill. Their argument was that from the 1960s on, the changing position of women and that is, sitting where I am now, one of the most extraordinary things that women’s position in society has been to such a significant extent expanded and yet not able to break the political—the Margaret Thatcher of this world. The story about her was that unlike various other women who had all sorts of difficulties in politics, she had no difficulty because she was really a man anyway. In that sort of crude way, she had the same aggressive, forthright, not allowing anyone to slide off the thing; she was able to succeed. Women are finding it extremely difficult. In various parts of the world, they’ve had some degrees of success; in countries like Ireland, it’s been quite surprising. Australia is still extraordinarily slow, and I think that’s where society has changed. The role of women in the society itself and the part that they play has changed—churches have women bishops and all this sort of thing now—but the fact is that politics is proving to be extremely difficult and we’re a long way from having women Prime Ministers. We’ve had one woman Prime Minister so far, and she had a—her life was made hell, to put it mildly, from the time she was in politics.

Ms Anne Yardley: Why is it so difficult for women in Australian politics, do you believe?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It seems as though it’s something about Australian society; I can’t see anything else. It’s one that is not easy for me personally to follow because my whole attitude of life, from the time when I was opposed to equal pay because I thought that the husband would have to look after the children and so on, to I found that over the years I became an enormous supporter of this. Harry Phillips and I wrote books about women politicians, and we have very strongly—some of my very best friends are women and I think the role they’re able to play now in society. I also bought a copy of a book that was one of the finalists for the

Booker Prize, which was *The Testament of Mary*, and the message of the book is that instead of the crucifixion what we should be talking about is the impact it had on Mary. The conclusion that they reached, what happened to Christ, in the eyes of Mary, wasn't worth it; it should never have been like that. Now, the church is still a pretty resistant part of society in this respect. I mean there are women bishops now, but I still think that churches still tend to have a sort of male—or the women who play a role there are doing it within the context of that world. I think that perhaps reflects parts of society. On the other hand, Australian society is changing, albeit slowly, as with same-sex marriage. It says something about Australian politics that women have not been able to break in in the way you would think, even though in society, their role in the church and things like that are significantly better than it was.

Ms Anne Yardley: Looking at women in WA politics, they have come a long way in some senses, because I think when you were first involved with the Parliament there were no toilets, for example, for women politicians.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Oh, yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: So, some progress has been made.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, but this is progress from an enormously backward position. While I've been in Parliament, there've been changes. I mean, the first woman Chief Hansard Reporter occurred during my time. Now, women are highly significant. Lots of those sorts of positions are held by women; there are men as well. The clerks, for example. The Clerk of the Legislative Council is a man and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is a woman. In those kind of senses, I think things have moved on and there are more and more women politicians, but they have not been able to actually achieve the leadership role that you would have thought. As far as Australian politics is concerned, we seem to be further than ever away at the moment. Great Britain, for example, they had Margaret Thatcher in the past, but they have a woman Prime Minister now. America, on the other hand, I think has a long, long way to go. Really, in the recent presidential election, a woman actually had the majority of the votes, but the fact is that her whole position was so closely linked going over the time with her husband that you can't quite see her as forging a new path anyway. In fact, it was almost that the Democrats were trying to run Bill Clinton under another name.

Ms Anne Yardley: What do you think needs to happen in Australian and WA politics for women to be able to comfortably achieve those leadership roles? What changes would have to take place?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The first problem is you've got to find the right person, because blazing those trails takes something. As I say, Margaret Thatcher was the initial one who could blaze the trail because of the personality she had. It's now possible for a woman not as strident in the way she was to do that. I think probably you need a strong contender who can somehow take control and in a sense earn the long-term right. I would have thought that society is open to change, but at the same time I find Australian society very difficult to predict. The trouble with Australian society is that it has very distinct groups within it. Australia is a society which has a high percentage of people who are born overseas. I think that does make a difference to society because it means there are segments of society who are very happy with the fact that this is the case and there are segments of society who feel that's not the way that it ought to be at all. In other words, there are those elements that think that the society, the way we are moving, is not the way that we should be moving. But then I realised that at every level, whether you're talking about politics or whatever else you're talking about, there are advances in certain directions and things in others. The person who convinced me—the result of his work in social work—that problems like alcohol are nowhere near the problem that they used to be, that problems like smoking are nowhere near the problem that they used to be and that problems like drugs are enormously important and worse than they used to be. In other words, society seems to be getting somewhere in dealing with some issues—cigarettes and things of that sort—but the drugs are making it far, far worse. It's a very, very complex issue.

I'm just surprised that Australia has not been able to perhaps make the progress that a country like England has, because England is pretty conservative. The fact is that there's nothing abnormal at the present time about having a woman leader and we've got Germany where one of the most successful leaders of modern times has been a woman. In some cases things have gone a bit wrong, like in Burma, but on the whole, you would think that we would go somewhere. But it's going to take the right person at the right moment to make the breakthrough and so far we're a long way away from that.

Ms Anne Yardley: Before we move away from the Premiers, let's just look at our current Premier, Mark McGowan. You've made the point that it was more the Barnett government's failure to win again, rather than a vote for Labor, but, nonetheless, how do you perceive Mark McGowan as a Premier?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: In my own family I've got some people who are quite enthusiastic about politics, and they're not necessarily on the same side as each other, but their general conclusion about Mark McGowan is that he seems a perfectly sensible and intelligent leader. In other words, they're not full of massive admiration that this is the man who's going to do all sorts of things; on the other hand, they say he's highly capable, extremely articulate and able to put thoughts together, and has a strong link to various elements of the union movement—and that, of course, has some people not as excited about it as others. But I think the general feeling is that he's an experienced politician, he's been around for some considerable time, he's learnt lessons over the time he's been there and therefore, from that point of view, he's an intelligent and more than adequate Premier.

Ms Anne Yardley: What do we need then in a Premier? Do we need a great leader or do we need competency?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: To bring about big change you need something inspirational. If you really want society as a whole to move, you need someone who at their best is like a Gough Whitlam. My enduring image of Gough Whitlam is walking through the university grounds and long lines of students following him. There was an issue—free tertiary education—but he inspired people. That we need inspiration would be something. Unfortunately, it's very hard to find and I think in society now it's more and more difficult because with the social media and the individuals and so on, you can easily start to get crossed messages just when you think you're getting somewhere with that. So I think having a leader who could actually inspire, and my personal view is the ultimate leader has to have his or her heart in the right place. That is why my own personal hero in all of politics anywhere is Abraham Lincoln, because he led his country through a civil war and then tried to bring the sides together after the war, and was not able to do so. That, I think, sums up politics: that the people who really might be able to do this, if we could find them, we just have to hope to goodness that they're allowed to be. I think the United States is one of those places where occasionally they have and they've made some progress. The fact that they got to the point eventually that Obama could

actually be elected President at all was I think highly successful. On the other hand, the legacies of it mean it's still very difficult to change society and it's very hard to avoid fresh opposition building up on different fronts. You have the kind of poor whites in America who would have voted for the Democrats in the past starting to vote Republican because they don't want Afro-Americans pushing them around. It seems to me that these kind of changes are very hard to get and that only occasionally you'll get leaders who are able to. I mean, the Chancellor of Germany, for example, who's been doing a great job from that point of view, she's been welcoming people, but, on the other hand, that leads to a negative reaction.

Ms Anne Yardley: To take you up on something you said a little earlier about conservative governments lasting longer; is that our natural position? Is Australia naturally a conservative country, politically?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: No. In various ways it's become that now. The issue that I cite, for example, is the English workhouse system. I spent a lot of time when I was teaching, teaching about the English workhouse system and about how if there was poverty, that boys and girls could be thrown into the workhouse, the Oliver Twists of this world. It was a long, hard fight, really it was only after World War II, and the National Health Service, for one thing, in Britain, they finally broke through from that.

Australia, on the other hand, did not ever really develop anything of that kind. We had an age pension linked to income levels and things of this kind relatively early, and to a certain extent—I always assume that's part of the testimony to the strength of the trade union movement from quite early on—in that respect I think Australia has tended to be somewhat more progressive. On the other hand, in the longer term, the trade union movement can be seen as, in fact, a negative slowing down part of the system and that private enterprise, which is seen—and there are those critics who argue with me, for example, that the Labor Party should really be the party of the small business people, that the small business people, if they are lower income earners, then why are they not part of the Labor Party in that instance? So I think Australia has its own record which on some fronts is actually good. I found that Australia struggled to establish same-sex marriage. New Zealand, Britain, Canada could all do it easier than we could. Part of that was from the conservatives on the right but also part of that was also from the Irish Catholic legacy of the Labor side, so Australia has a mixed record. On the whole, I think it is a very free society

in which to live. I had a colleague who came from Czechoslovakia and one of his friends came to our place as well, and he said, “You don’t realise what a wonderful country you have here. You have one of the few little pieces of paradise left in the world.” I think Australia in a sense is insulated; it’s a protected society and in the long run we can keep people out if we so wish, and we still do. We still do it and, yet, at the same time we are socially quite a reforming place. So I think our message is mixed, and the degree to which I’m confused is because the message is confused.

Ms Anne Yardley: I think a great part of the country is confused this week. I can’t go today without asking what you think of what has been happening in Canberra for the last week, where we have seen a Prime Minister dumped—extraordinary events. What does this say about us as a country?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I’m not sure what it says about the country or what it says about the people who’re actually involved in politics.

Ms Anne Yardley: The politics more likely—yes, the government.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I think it suggests that essentially Australia is a society which has been able to achieve quite a bit of change but there’s a fundamentally strong conservative side still there at the same time. Australia is the sort of society which if you can come to it and you’re thrilled to be there, you then want to make sure it stays the way that it is, and doesn’t start heading off in some sort of different direction. I think it’s those who, if things are not working out quite well, all of a sudden they don’t want to buy into issues.

The classic case, of course, is Malcolm Turnbull. One of his massive concerns is what is happening with the climate—what’s happening with climate change and all the rest. I think what Australian politics is showing is that being devoted to those kinds of causes is not going to get you very far in a hurry, and this is what happened to him. The example I quote to everybody is that a good friend of mine said that the best speech he’s ever heard on climate change was made by Turnbull and that Turnbull’s capacity to achieve what he wanted to on climate change while he was Prime Minister was close to zero.

Ms Anne Yardley: What I probably should more correctly have said was: what does this say about politics in Australia rather than Australian society, because there seems to be a disconnect between what the society is thinking in terms of the federal government and what the federal politicians seem to think in terms of the events of last week, in particular?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I'm not sure of the answer to this except to say that it seems to me that politicians in the end almost seem to be playing their own game. They are in a role where there are possible achievements. One of the examples that I quote about politics is the example of the Greens. The Greens, to my opinion, exhibit what politics needs and doesn't have; that is, that you have people who are elected as the Greens into Parliament. They know that they will never achieve any substantial position; they will never be ministers of the Crown; they won't be this, they won't be that. Why are they there? To pursue that in which they believe, that which is their cause. In my perspective, large numbers of people who are politicians, whatever other motivations they have, it's a job, and if we get into it, we want to keep it, and if we can be promoted, we want that to happen. To me, that's what happens, and that's what happened with the Turnbull thing in the end. You had those who wanted to achieve the status, the role, the promotions, all that goes with success, and the sorts of politicians who are only there for the causes they believe in are few and far between and it's not going to get them anywhere. They've got to be terribly dedicated. Why do you go into politics if you are a Green and you're never going to be a cabinet minister? What are you there for? Presumably, you know—I don't want to single them out too much but they provide to me the example that that's what I see. And if they're a woman, they're in the same position as women anywhere, that they need a husband who will support them and who will back them up being there in the first place.

So I think, unfortunately, what happened in Canberra is just an exhibit of society itself. Turnbull, who doesn't have economic issues to deal with—in a sense, doesn't need promotions, for wealth reasons—is presumably trying to pursue that which he believes in, but in a society where, what's for the most part, it is not for the people doing that for those reasons. The result is that you have a Prime Minister who says not a lot for much of the time about that which he most believes in.

Ms Anne Yardley: That's probably a really good spot to finish for today [chuckles].
[End of DavidBlack_3]

DavidBlack_4

Ms Anne Yardley: This is another interview with Emeritus Professor David Black for the parliamentary history project, and we're at David's home in Leederville. Today is Tuesday, 4 September 2018, and the interviewer is me, Anne Yardley.

David, you've mentioned parallel careers, and before we get on to the Parliamentary History Committee again, I would like to look at your work on election commentary. How did this come about and when did it start?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: From the best of my memory, it started towards the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. I know that the first time that I was actually given the opportunity to appear in election night coverage, I would have been doing so in collaboration with my university professor, Prof. Fred Alexander. As it turned out, I was still very apprehensive and I was wary, and in the end I backed off. So I didn't take part in that particular election, but thereafter I felt I had really missed a great opportunity and from that time on—and, of course, it was a particularly exciting period of time because not only were there big changes in Western Australia after the 12-year Brand–Court government, but it was also the period when Gough Whitlam emerged on the federal scene. So my real awareness of these kind of things and my direct contribution to what was taking place comes at the end of the 1960s, beginning of the 1970s, and that I regard as one of the more dramatic periods in Australian history.

Ms Anne Yardley: What skills did you have that were identified by, say, the ABC to say, "Well, this is the man we should be talking to"?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I would think that in the days before computers my contribution was somewhat equivalent to the Antony Green⁵ one. I didn't have the great pile of computing equipment that he's had, but what I did is that I had been passionately interested in the statistical side of politics for a very long time. I'd been keeping my own records since the 1940s, and therefore the names to me were second nature. There was an equivalent person to me who didn't become very prominent in public—a man called Jeremy Buxton—but he did the same kind of

⁵ Antony Green is the ABC's election analyst responsible for the content of their election website including editorial responsibility for the site's data analysis. He has worked for the ABC since 1989. <https://www.abc.net.au/elections/antonygreen.htm>

thing for the Liberal Party, and I used to talk to him at times about it. We were both passionately interested in statistics. The difference is that he was not the sort of person who really related to the media, whereas because of my school teaching and other experiences like that, I found talking and explaining what was going on relatively straightforward.

In the period from well into the 1970s of Sir Charles Court and Gough Whitlam, it was a very exciting time. Bob Hawke emerged. In his case it was fascinating to me because he came from the same school—Perth Modern School—that I had been to. So this became a natural outgrowth of something that I'd been passionately interested in all my life. I found that I was able—as Jeremy Buxton was with the Liberal Party—to advise on which seats were likely to be won and which seats were likely to be lost. One Labor member, for example—I think she was the member for Wanneroo at the time; I can't remember her name—but I actually heard the quote that she had made with me, when I said on the radio, or on television I think it was, I said that it all depends on Wanneroo, and she said, "Oh, I went and got a huge drink after that." The fact that I had said it was all dependent on Wanneroo really quite alarmed her. So I developed into a position where for a while I was almost a kind of guru, but this was in pre-computer days.

Ms Anne Yardley: So what was the process? How did you become a guru? What were your research techniques? What did you have at your fingertips if you're sitting in the tally room or the studio?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I just kept lists of members, I kept lists of seats, and I did this so often that it became second nature to me. I'd done the same thing for other things like sporting records. I became a passionate supporter of the Melbourne Football Club, and I had comprehensive and detailed lists of who played in the team in which year. An election was a natural outgrowth from this. My experience as a schoolteacher enabled me in university life to be a lecturer, but it also meant that speaking publicly was something that I could do quite normally and naturally. So it seemed to me a number of things rolled together, and, as I say, the absolutely crucial feature of all this is that this is the pre-computer days. The transition away from me was to the Antony Greens who had massive computer equipment. I myself, in my own university studies, had increasingly become aware of computers and what they would do, and when I started work in Parliament later on, the computer became the basis of everything I did. But in the earlier days, that was the

period when I really became established in political commentary, and that is what gave me the public profile and became an important part of my life.

Ms Anne Yardley: So there you are on election day and the polls have closed and you're sitting at the television desk. How much of it is a calculated assessment, how much of it is science and how much of it is making an educated guess or a bit of a gamble as to how it's going to go—how this seat is going to go, for example?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: There's no question at all that it was very easy to be misled. I know my colleague Harry Phillips and I—there was one time when Geoffrey Bolton⁶, who also did quite a bit of these kinds of things, announced very early in the evening what was going to happen, and it proved in fact to be quite different from what he said. Harry and I prided ourselves that we did not rush in where angels fear to tread, that we would watch very carefully. If we suggested this was the trend, that's what the trend would be. I think therefore it's a sense of what's taking place—the extent to which there is a change taking place and how sweeping that change would be. Basically, it was something I just kept doing until the arrival of comprehensive computer programs that meant that I became relatively passé.

Ms Anne Yardley: Are there some memorable moments where you absolutely got it right against predictions, that you can think of?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I know that I became aware in various conversations that I'd had of what might happen, even with elections in which I didn't specifically do a great deal. One I particularly think of, for example, I think it was 1993 when Paul Keating was leading the Labor Party. The general feeling around the place was that the Labor Party had no chance. The Liberal leader had come out with this really comprehensive new program, which, by the way, in the longer run did become an issue. I can well remember that apart from election night, I actually took part in a weekly summary of what was happening, and I can remember distinctly as the feeling began to emerge from me and from the people I was talking with as well, because they had other experts from the eastern states who were involved in some of the conversations I had, and I remember thinking, "After all, I think Keating is actually going to win this election." That was something that we did not expect

⁶ Professor Geoffrey Bolton, AO (1931-2015) was an Australian historian, academic and writer. He was Chancellor of Murdoch University 2002-2006
<https://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/honour-roll/?view=fullView&recipientID=1430>

could possibly happen. They're the ones that stand out to me. Certainly in 2001, when I was sitting next to Graham Kierath and his own seat is dwindling away and I can see the reports coming in, they are increasingly telling me that's what's going to happen.

I suppose later on, in a much, much later stage, the Alan Carpenter election in 2008, where the closeness of the vote was something that I became aware of. I remember on election night I realised that if a few dozen people had voted differently in one of the metropolitan seats, that Alan Carpenter would have won the election. He fell one seat short, and that was a disaster for the party concerned; it put them eight years in the wilderness. So my feelings were that I always had, based on my own sense of what was taking place, based on my own sense of the trends, which way they were going and the way things were looking—that even pre-computers it was possible to get the feel of it. I'm not so convinced that even now they know that much more than was the case then. Antony Green now is not only a computer person, but he has seen so many elections that he can see the trends and he can see which way they're moving. I think that's the whole art; that you've seen it happen.

Ms Anne Yardley: One of your very early elections that you commented on was the 1972 federal election that brought Gough Whitlam into power. What was the mood like then?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: This was a mood of change. The standout for me was what happened after the election. Immediately—within I think it was only hours, or perhaps it was days—Whitlam swore in the two senior ministers. A cabinet of two was created almost immediately, and instantly certain things took place. The most dramatic of these was the release of the people who had been incarcerated because they had refused to join military services. As a historian, I still tell people to this day that only once in Australian history ever have Australians been conscripted to fight north of the equator, and that was Vietnam. Whitlam ended that within hours of actually winning the election. It was that bulldozing, that this is a completely new and strikingly different era and these sorts of things, and it adds up to the story that what happened in Vietnam was of huge consequence. It transformed Australian society, and the massive influx of Asian people, which had already been started before, became that much more intense.

The Whitlam election stays in my mind because it was so historical, and then the way in which it all fell apart, and then the way, in turn, Hawke brought the Labor Party back. It was an extremely significant and dramatic period of time and my awareness of the statistics was enormously valuable, but it made the whole thing real. I like to feel that in the days before computers came that there was the sense and awareness that I had of these things because of year after year after year of following them. Just as I was passionately interested in certain sporting statistics, so I was passionately interested in election statistics.

Ms Anne Yardley: Looking closer to home at a WA election—I think this was 1977—you caught the ire of the then opposition leader. What were you doing and what did he say to you?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, all I remember very clearly is that “If David Black stopped playing around with those figures and pencil and paper and had a look at what’s really happening, he would know that we’re going to win this election”, because I’d been saying that there was no doubt whatever that Charles Court was going to be comfortably returned. This irritated remark, it had personal ramifications, because my mother, who inherited from my father the fact that she always supported the Labor Party, tore off her car the “Vote for Labor” sticker, she was so annoyed with him. But I felt that my great moment was when Kirwan Ward, in the *Daily News* and on the back page, quoted me as suffering from the one of the most famous areas of all time—that the messenger is usually blamed for the bad news he brings.

But the Labor Party’s search for leadership was a big feature of my memories of the time. The striking success of Brian Burke—I always used the quotation which I had picked up from somewhere, from one of the Liberal Party somewhere, that in the Burke era, “They came round behind us, appeared on our right-hand side, and won the election.” I think that, I understood, was really why Burke had been able to do what he’d done given that in a sense he had invaded the same ground, which is a bonus. Instead of fighting that kind of traditional election at the election, he said, “We can run the economy better than you can.” In that sense, he was strikingly successful, and when Sir Charles decided to leave, the Liberals didn’t really have a proper ready-made replacement. The Burke victory—and I can still remember Bill Hassell, who became the Liberal Party leader in that era. He said,

“I have to confess that with Brian Burke leading the party, there’s no way that we can beat them.”

The story of Burke I particularly remember was when there was an election gathering somewhere in one of the constituencies south of the river, and Brian Burke was being—there was criticism of the various things that were being done. I remember Brian Burke at the meeting went to the man who was making the strongest criticisms, and said, “Now, Fred, what’s the problem? What’s causing you the issue? Just explain to me what it is that’s bothering you.” Within five minutes Burke had this man eating out of his hand. He confronted people, went directly to them. In his heyday, he was highly successful and a leader who took the Labor Party in a different direction. Obviously, all sorts of things went wrong and haywire and there were longstanding ramifications about all this kind of thing, but Burke’s influence was enormous. For example, there was one junior minister—I can’t think who he was, and this was after Burke had been forcefully moved aside—and someone said to the new Labor leader, “Are you going to include this particular person in the ministry?” “Oh no”, he said, “If I had him in there, I’d have Brian there.” So, to me, that was a real standout period and the Whitlam period—these were all years of great change because you have to recall that my upbringing was the Menzies era, in which you had the longest sustained prime ministerial position we’ve ever had, and it seemed as though nothing was ever going to change.

Ms Anne Yardley: Just going back to Burke for a second, how damaging was WA Inc to Labor, WA Labor?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It was very damaging at the time. The argument was that they were manipulating things and they were almost breaking the law in some cases. There was the big march, demanding that—in the Dowding administration, before it fell, there was this: they planned a big march down in the city. That was one of the strongest periods of pressure ever for the Legislative Council to simply throw out a government. One of the things that never happens is that no Legislative Council in Western Australian history has ever denied supply and brought a government down. But in that period—89 and 90 and so on—there were the marches on Parliament. It was in this atmosphere that I was helping to produce the parliamentary history. So the parliamentary history emerged in a period when there was huge pressure on Legislative Councillors and the Labor government, that they had effectively broken the law, it was argued. WA Inc was something which

completely should not be tolerated. My strong memories of that period is that in Parliament we maintained the structure that, in fact, Legislative Councils do not, and that was the sort of arguments that were used. In the end, interestingly, they did back off and so no-one was prepared to go that far.

Ms Anne Yardley: You've said once that history is both a science and an art and I wonder what you mean by that.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I'm not quite sure of the context in which I would have made that remark, but thinking back on it now, what to me makes sense is that it's something that you have a feel for. I would go by the statistics and I would go by the numbers, but I'd also go by the atmosphere, the feel, which way it's going to go, and I would find that normally when this was the case, that the statistical things that appeared tended to back up what you had done anyway. It's only very occasionally that when the way things were going was in one direction, something went a different direction. The election that Keating won in the 1990s was one where somehow the way things seemed to be going slowly turned around, but that is extremely unusual. Normally, the trend that becomes apparent becomes real, and very early on you can have the feeling—it may only be small indications somewhere, but those indications tell you which way the things lie.

In the end, an election is a community reaction and so you're picking this up because of what people talk about, how people react and so on. Now, of course, people have their own—they access on computers themselves, but that wasn't the case in my time. But in my time, you could have the feeling of what people were talking about, which way things were going. Politics in that sense was based on a degree of scientific precision, but it was based very much on the kind of feelings. I always had the feeling when I was studying history, for example, that studying English literature was also critical because the feelings of the way people reacted, the way they moved, told you a great deal about what was going to happen statistically.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's look at another of your parallel careers and the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee. We mentioned it a bit before, but let's look at it in some detail now. The establishment of it: why was it set up?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Now, the Parliamentary History Committee is an interesting one because the way that Parliament House is run and the way that Parliament itself functions has undergone a considerable change during my career there. There is no doubt that what we now have is very different from what we had when I first came in the 1980s. The Parliament now is organised in three clear groups. There's the Legislative Assembly, there's the Legislative Council and then there's the Parliament itself. There are really, in a sense, three heads. There's the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, who is the political head, and there's the Clerk, who actually runs the Legislative Assembly staff. The position of Clerk—and one of the things I learnt very early on—is a very low sounding term of great importance. In things like *A Christmas Carol* and all these sorts of stories and others, the word “clerk” can have such a multitude of meanings. But in the days when the parliamentary history got underway, you had the Assembly and you had the Council; these were the two dominant bodies. The Clerks were crucial figures, and it so happens, for whatever reason, that the Clerk of the Legislative Council was Laurie Marquet—a very energetic man who had very strong views on all sorts of things—but he was not specifically interested in the history side, apart from keeping certain records. On the other hand, for whatever reason, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Bruce Okely, who was passionately interested in classical music. The Legislative Assembly became the driving force of the process. So the Parliament supported me and got this underway, but it was really the Legislative Assembly that did this. It was one of the houses of Parliament, and it was the Clerk there. Interestingly, Bruce Okely, who was the Clerk and who provided much of the impetus for the parliamentary history, when he suddenly decided to resign, relatively quite young—he claimed that the late-night sittings put him off, but whatever it was, he left—the man who replaced him, Peter McHugh, had only recently come from the eastern states. Peter, for whatever reason, took up the cause with the same [chimes].

Ms Anne Yardley: [Chuckles] We might pause that for a second [pause].

Prof. DAVID BLACK: What happened is that the matter was first brought up with Speaker Thompson from the Liberal Party, and then the Labor Party was elected to power and Arthur Tonkin, who had been a history marker with me, was in quite a key position. But it wasn't the support of the politicians that mattered; it was the support of the parliamentary officials. In particular, Bruce Okely, for whatever reason, he'd been a driving force for the Legislative Assembly. He'd had a lot to do

with getting the Parliamentary Library built up. Bruce was the one who became a driving force. Somehow—I don't know how—they were able to create what they called the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee, and it was decided that this is the way that it would be done.

The chairs of this committee would be the President of the Council and the Speaker of the Assembly—they would be the chair—but then there would be certain ordinary members on it. Sorry, I've got that wrong. The chairman of the committee when it was established was me—yes—and the committee would include the Speaker and the President of the Legislative Council. It would include the Clerks, but the Clerk of the Council was not terribly interested; the Clerk of the Assembly was. So, the parliamentary structure itself set this up. Something which I can say now, even though it would appear to be breaking the law almost, was that the method which the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly used the grant which we were given towards the parliamentary history, he actually invested the money on a term account, earning a substantial degree of extra interest, all of which was spent on the parliamentary history, and something which now would be totally ultra vires of rules and laws.

So somehow or other, I'm not sure where the driving force came from, except that I suspect the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, for whatever reason, was a massive supporter. Of course, Phillip Pandal had been the one who launched the idea, but it was not the house of Parliament that he was involved with which was the key one; it was the Legislative Assembly. Somehow the producing of the history, which was done—and the history was launched in 1990 and the Duke of Edinburgh was there when it was launched—for some reason or other it was decided that the history committee would remain in existence and go on working. One of the things we'd already started on, and which is relevant to this very moment now, was the idea of the oral history. From the mid-80s on, when we first used Ronda Jamieson, the idea was that we would interview key figures from the political side, but also key figures from within the working side—Hansard, the Chief Hansard Reporter and things of that kind—so it was the staffing. It was the Legislative Assembly which was the driving force. The Legislative Council Clerk was not all that interested and involved. The Parliamentary History Committee included both houses, but it was actually the Assembly which was the driving force. That remained the case for a very long period of time.

It's only in much more recent years now—I was originally the chair—that the committee in the end turned into a situation where the actual chairs were the Presiding Officers, and the Parliament increasingly itself officially became responsible. But for many of the years, I was the person responsible. One of the crucial features was the huge support we got from the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Peter McHugh. He was the Clerk for 20 years. He had only come to Parliament quite recently when we started the project. He was one of the driving forces behind it and he decided this is something that Parliament should do. I remember later on he got me to write an actual history of the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee at one point. I don't quite know where this is now; it's somewhere in the records. So, it was the support of the key parliamentary officials that made this whole thing work at all.

Ms Anne Yardley: What was your actual brief? What were you tasked to do?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The original brief was to write the history of the establishment of Western Australia as a sovereign state with its own Constitution. All the other states had done this much earlier and in Western Australia, effectively what happened in 1890 was the actual establishment of the Constitution of Western Australia. One of the features which I point out to students is that within 11 years of becoming an independent entity, that independent entity disappeared because it became part of the Federation. And the speed at which Australia moved from 1890 to 1901, as I tell many students when we're talking about this, the speed at which we got from the—what was the name of that famous speech which was made? I can't think now. I can never think of his name⁷. The article that was written about "the crimson thread of kinship flows through us all", that article appeared only 10 or 11 years before Federation was achieved. In other words, from the time that they talked about having an Australian Federation, rather than a series of separate states—Western Australia just having become a separate state—Western Australia lost its status as a completely separate entity within 11 years, and the speed at which this occurred. All this took place in the 1890s while I was working at the Parliament.

⁷ Sir Henry Parkes. In a speech to a Federation Conference banquet in 1890, Henry Parkes coined the term crimson thread of kinship to describe the ties that bound the Australian colonies.

<http://foundation1901.org.au/the-crimson-thread-speech/>

Ms Anne Yardley: And this became the publication *The House on the Hill*?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: *The House on the Hill* was about the actual launching of the Constitution in 1890 when Western Australia was still a separate entity under the British. The point I would make is that only 11 years later that status altered when the Western Australian Parliament became one of a number of Parliaments in the Federation. The Proclamation Day, which was a celebration of this, was a very short-lived holiday. It was swamped, and, of course, 26 January has emerged. So this was a period of not only when were we working on the parliamentary history of Western Australia at the time, but it was a major period of development within Australia itself. One of the issues as a historian which has always fascinated me is what really should be Australia's national day. The experience that I have seen now is that the really big change was the one in 1901—what happened on 1 January 1901. What happened in 1890 was rounding off part of the story, but it was not the real arrival. It seemed at the time that it was the major event. The way it was celebrated, for example, there was the man who came from England to be the Governor, he travelled by train up from Albany to Perth and stopped at one station after another during the night and all this thing, and this huge event. So Proclamation Day was a huge event, which I was heavily involved in documenting, and yet within 10 or 11 years it had been totally upstaged by the creation of the Federation.

Ms Anne Yardley: So what date do you believe should be our national day?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, technically the real national day is 1 January. The trouble is 1 January doesn't work all that easily and well, because you think, "So what? This is the beginning of the year." But we don't have anything really—I mean, the ideal national day is the sort of one the Germans have where East and West Germany, which had been split, were reunited, and the day on which they were reunited was a genuine national event. The Americans technically don't have a national day in that sense, but they have Independence Day for a start, and that is a strikingly obvious one. On the other hand, things like Anzac Day—and one of my personal things about Anzac Day is that the name itself includes reference to New Zealand but nobody ever talks about New Zealand when we talk about Anzac Day. I cannot recall any Anzac Day where there's any real feature made of the fact that New Zealanders were involved in it.

So the time that I was doing the parliamentary history on was the time of great constitutional change and development, and we have these things [developing] alongside each other. It was the commitment of the parliamentary staff, particularly the Legislative Assembly, that we decided that this history program would remain intact, and eventually the term emerged of what we call “parliamentary fellows”; in other words, people like Harry Phillips and I were given a specific role that fitted in with this. It became nonpartisan, particularly because there was a Labor government at the time when all this was done, but one of the driving forces was Phillip Pandal. The Labor Party managed to get a person from their party, John Cowdell, to actually be the President of the Legislative Council.

Ms Anne Yardley: How important was it for you and Harry Phillips to be made parliamentary fellows? What did it actually do for the role that you were doing?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, somewhere, somehow, I discovered that we had produced this history—the history book in its own right—with a whole lot of different people writing different chapters. Harry Phillips wrote quite a substantial chapter in it himself. But what we discovered is that we had produced this book, full stop. It had been launched—that’s it—but the parliamentary history project was to continue. We were to go on interviewing people. We were to go on studying and finding out more about parliamentary history. Phillip Pandal, who was overlooked for the ministry, became in the end an independent entity and he became a crucial part of this as well. Ultimately, this happened because the parliamentary officials, and most of all because of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly—Bruce Okely, firstly, when he was there, and then Peter McHugh—they gave it the necessary backing and the power.

This has all changed in the last few years and Parliament is now much more traditional in structure. But to Harry and me, it meant that we had an ongoing role, and as both of us were nearing retirement from university anyway, then we could surge ahead with what we were doing. Of course, in my case, what Harry didn’t have and what I had which was particularly valuable, is that in the period that we were writing the history, first and foremost, the Parliament funded it to the extent that they were willing to pay for some of the costs of my classes being run at WAIT so that I would have time to work on the parliamentary history.

I don't know whether I should say this in an interview or not, but when I raise the issue sometimes of why did Peter McHugh in particular give me so much support at the time, one of my relations said it was reflected glory; that they felt that what we were doing was being done really well and that this would give this Parliament [the ability to] be a frontrunner. I think it's fair enough to say that our Parliament was a frontrunner. It put a lot more into its history program than probably any of the other Australian Parliaments have done. This, the interview program, is just one of the really large examples, but also all the numerous other books that we've produced. Phillip Pandal had a lot to do with that as well. We had a book on the occupations of MPs over the years. Harry Phillips and I have done two books on women politicians and things of that kind. Our Parliament was particularly active, and in the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, which is an Australia-wide thing, Western Australia plays a significant role. Jobs which the Parliaments had been doing anyway were given to me and the most significant of those was the *Parliamentary Handbook*.

Ms Anne Yardley: We'll come back to that because I really want to ask you where your ongoing budget came from. I know you've talked a little bit about that initial investment.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It came from the Legislative Assembly budget, but they persuaded the Council to make a contribution as well.

Ms Anne Yardley: So there's a commitment by the Parliament to continue with this process?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That's right, yes. The Parliament did that and they found a budget for that. After Harry and I both retired, that's when the idea of some kind of stipend appeared. We were not on the parliamentary staff in one sense; we actually made contracts with the Parliament. So it was a unique structure that effectively we billed the Parliament for what we were doing, the Parliament paid us, and then it was our business to arrange with the taxation department and to tell them what we'd been doing. That situation lasted for a very long time. It was only in the last four or five years, perhaps even less—I'm not sure—that what had become an ad hoc arrangement, after the Clerk retired, turned into a contractual arrangement. For the first time, we were actually put on contracts and, in the end, it was when these contracts were terminated that the parliamentary history finished. So,

Parliament simply just evolved. It's quite an extraordinary story really when you stop to think about it. To this day, I am never quite clear how what was going to be producing one book in 1990 for one purpose turned into an ongoing process, including, as you're aware now, the oral history program. We must be close to 100 people who have been interviewed by this and the cost of all this has been met by the Parliament.

Ms Anne Yardley: You just mentioned your *Western Australian Parliamentary Handbook*. I know that's something that you're very proud of.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: What's the importance of the publication?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It means that, unlike most Parliaments, you can find out specific details about virtually everyone who has been an MP—for example, their dates of birth and whether they are now deceased. The Western Australian Parliament is way ahead of most on that. The Commonwealth Parliament is now, of course, but for a lot of Parliaments, it's still very hard to find out the full details of people, when certain people were born, and particularly if they have died, and if that has been pursued or what. One of the jobs that related to this was where Geoffrey Bolton played a big part. Geoffrey Bolton, working with a couple of colleagues, started the biographical register. The unique feature about that, which, sadly, is not happening now, because the Library has taken over the biographical register, but it doesn't do what we used to do and I used to do and Geoffrey Bolton, which is to find out what happens to members after they were members, and chasing this up and finding out that it's all very well that they're elected at a certain time and all the rest, but what about after they leave politics. What about Graham Kierath, for example? Where is he? What's he doing? That's one thing that I tried to keep up until, eventually, it became too much for me and then the Library took over. The Library keeps the records up to a certain point, but it does not chase around to see whether certain people are still alive, except that one person in the Library staff reads the local death notices. So from time to time, they pick up that someone's died, but changes of job, what sort of things that they did. That in turn, we've tried to deal with the biographical register; for example, interviewing a couple of people who only served one term in Parliament and what happened then.

Ms Anne Yardley: For the *Parliamentary Handbook* and for the biographical register, how were you collecting the information about their background—people's background? What research went into that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: A lot of it was contacting them, finding out where they were. Occasionally, we even ran advertisements in the press, asking certain people if anyone knew how to get in touch with a certain person, to do that. I suppose "ad hoc" is the best way of describing it. Of course, the Library tried to take this over and do it systematically, except that the extent of the task was so great that the Library would not pursue the question of what happened to people subsequently, whereas that had been to me part of it, because it has got to be seen that the work that I was doing linked up with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* in some respects, and some of the people that were investigated, of course, were parliamentary figures, and therefore these overlapped. There was this intermingling of different things, which I found was actually quite significant. As I was just saying to you, it's still part of my life. Tonight I'm going to an evening meal with people who are still writing this for the Australian National University.

The biographical register and Geoffrey Bolton's role overlapped. Geoffrey Bolton was for years and years and years the local chair of the committee that did the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, so the work that was done there linked in with the work that I was doing, and, increasingly, I took over some of the things that Geoffrey Bolton had done, particularly the biographical register. He started it and it was something that I did for several years myself.

Ms Anne Yardley: What about your collaboration with Harry Phillips? I think the first book you did was the *Making a Difference—A Frontier of Firsts: Women in the Western Australian Parliament*. I think that might have been your first collaboration?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I don't know whether it would be, because there were the books we did with Phillip Pental; the three of us did. Harry Phillips was originally a student of mine. I'm not quite sure where and how, but he became involved in various aspects of parliamentary education, whereas I was an historian, Harry was always in the political field—the field of politics. One of the things, an example, that I did for years and years and years, which we've not talked much about at all, is that I was for several years the chief examiner of modern history at what we called

the TEE level. Harry, on the other hand, was involved with the politics course; I was involved with the history course. In that sense, he became the more political arm of that.

The two of us served together on various things, including the Constitutional Centre. In fact, it was only yesterday that I was talking with a former colleague of mine who was on the original Constitutional Committee. Richard Court established a committee to investigate the whole question of the role of the Governor. The ultimate result of that—Malcolm McCusker was the chair—was establishing what's called the Constitutional Centre, which functions very close to Parliament, and whose future role is being assessed at this very time. So I'm not quite sure what the initial steps were, but Harry Phillips very quickly became the counterpart with me, and Phil Pandal was there as well. Effectively, the three of us became responsible for such things as the book on the occupations that members had had in Parliament. For each of these things, the funding ultimately came from Parliament, from the Legislative Assembly working in collaboration with the other houses.

Ms Anne Yardley: Who was suggesting the ideas for the publications—for example, the book on women in Parliament? Was this something that you and Harry would take to the committee, or the Clerk would suggest to you?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, the women in Parliament was our idea, definitely. We worked on that. The book on the occupations of MPs and the book on house to house, Phil Pandal was probably the original driving force of that. So it was one of these things that whichever one of us came up with it, we would all work on it together.

Ms Anne Yardley: The *Parliamentary Handbook*, I do want to ask you how often it's updated, and what that process is.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Every Parliament. Basically, each *Parliamentary Handbook* is produced after an election. What it does is it rounds off the entries of people who are no longer in Parliament and introduces the entries for the new ones. The *Parliamentary Handbook*, the one that I was just recently involved in, for each person who had been in the previous *Parliamentary Handbook* but wasn't going to be in this one, there was a section rounding off their career, so that if you put the

Parliamentary Handbooks together, you would have the complete career of this person, whether they are still alive or dead. The only other Parliament in Australia which did this in the main was the national Parliament—the commonwealth Parliament in Canberra. They also did effectively the same thing. You can find out the date of birth and death of everyone who's been in the commonwealth Parliament. Other states have been much more haphazard in this respect, but Western Australia and the national Parliament are the two where—the twenty-fourth edition, which has just come out, to the best we know, if any of the former members of Parliament have died, it has got a date for it. That is the best we know with people reading the death notices in things like *The West* and chasing up and looking up the cemetery records. So the idea of the *Parliamentary Handbooks* are that they should, in sequence, cover everybody. It also has some what I might call chatty parts, in which it talks a little bit about how the Parliament was established, the role of the Governor and those who have held the various Governor's positions; they are all a part of it.

I know that when I arrived, John Mandy, who was the Deputy Clerk, more or less told me that this was now my job, and that he would help but I would be the one who chased this up. So these different aspects of the job just developed, and everything worked on the same basis until very recently, when the Parliament was reorganised and there is the Council, the Assembly, but also the administration side. Those three sides became equal partners, and from that time on, the world began to change, whereas for much of my time it was a Legislative Assembly project. The Legislative Council played its bit, but it was really run by the Assembly.

Ms Anne Yardley: You've mentioned the oral history project, which we are part of now. How unusual is that in terms of other Parliaments?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I seriously doubt whether any other Parliament has anything, except for the Commonwealth Parliament. For example, a biography has been produced for everyone who served in the Senate at some point. I did a couple of these, and Harry has done several of these. I know he did a couple on some of the more interesting and controversial figures. The Commonwealth Parliament is the equivalent of us in this respect. The other one that overlaps is the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, where there are a lot of people who are not politicians but are as significant as politicians. Their life story is told also.

Ms Anne Yardley: What's the importance of the interviews, of the oral history part of it rather than just written documents? How do you see the significance of it?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I suppose one of the points of it to me is that what it means to be a politician varies considerably from certain people to other people. I think it's telling a story from another side altogether. Keeping the statistical records is all very well and fine, but there are the issues of how and why people become involved in things. In more recent times, for example, we are not only interviewing people of great prominence or significance, but the interviews, for example, with someone who has only been an MP for one term and what happened to them; the interviews with those who were amongst the first women to work in the building—the differences. The idea was to tell a story not only of politicians, but of all those who worked in the building; the connections that they established and so on. In the program, we have at the moment, we have a couple of interviews with non-politicians, so it's the Parliament in its own self.

Ms Anne Yardley: Now that you and Harry have left—retired as parliamentary fellows—where do you see the future of the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That is something I really am unsure about. To me, the project evolved in a sort of unusual and relatively unique way. With, for example, the sorts of investigations Harry is doing now, he is completing a substantial task on the role of parliamentary committees, what those committees have done and how much impact that they made. For example, the reports the parliamentary committees produce; how significant are they? I would imagine that in the years to come, one of the ones that will be of great interest will be the one about the right to die, which is going on at the present time; what the ultimate consequence of that is, whether changes are produced, how the changes came to be produced and so on. It seems to me that that whole side of what Parliament does and the way Parliament itself functions, that's probably an issue that Harry has been more directly involved with than I have. My interest was originally electoral. My interest originally was very much from the role that I have played in each election and identifying the members who had been there much longer than others and all this kind of thing, whereas I think what Harry has been working on much more and what I'm curious about is the actual functioning of parliamentary committees and parliamentary reports: how significant are they? In the end, the parliamentary

process becomes one of the questions that there is a lot of discussion about and there are a lot of concerns about as to what the parliamentary process is, where it's going and so on. So the line that the future will take is very difficult to see.

The role that we played was essentially about—I suppose, ultimately, it was about the function of Parliament, but it's also about the people who are in Parliament. That's where the oral history comes in; the different experiences of people who were there for a short time, a long time, had years and years and years of building up, and people who flashed in and out, so to speak.

Ms Anne Yardley: How important do you personally find the work of the committee and the history that you have collected and the publications that you've done?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, I feel that it's a world that is changing all the time, and I don't want to lose track of the world that was. I suppose there's increasing—how do I put it?—concern as to what exactly the role of the Parliament really is. In the little attempts that I have had to try and explain the system to people, I say, "Now, what is it that Parliament actually does?" I say, "The word itself—'Parliament'—one thing it's about is talking, and therefore clearly what is said and done. On the other hand, Parliament is also a legislative body; it is a body which makes laws." I think the combination of this is extraordinary and complex. In Australia, it's particularly complex because the Australian system is so much an amalgam of other systems. In my attempts to teach people about it, this is one of the issues that I find that is not easy to explain—you have the American system, you have the British system, you have the Australian system. They all have certain features of commonality, but they've also got strikingly different features. What the future is going to do with all this, who knows?

So, for me the work of the Parliamentary History Committee is a whole phase of life that has been recorded—it's there to begin with—and the interviews with people give a whole range of views which we don't normally get. What is said in Parliament is what is said in Parliament, and even that is not exactly what's said in Parliament. What Hansard records is what Hansard interprets, and not every single sentence, every single syllable, that's uttered finds its way into the records. It seems to me that Parliament is one of those things; it's so easy for things to be destroyed, as we are finding in places like the Middle East where priceless buildings can be wiped out and so on. So, as a person who is passionately keen on history, to me the work

of the Parliamentary History Committee has ensured that a whole lot of angles of what actually happened have been preserved. What will go on being preserved and how it will be done is as much in the air as how Parliament itself will function. I'm sure many of us are unsure in the modern world exactly how Parliament does function now, and the process by which Prime Ministers become Prime Ministers, how has that changed, what's happening to that.

So the parliamentary history project is one of these issues which evolved because particular people in a particular place at a particular time were willing to put a lot of time, effort and money into what takes place, but, ultimately, it is simply to preserve a record of what took place, what kind of people were involved, what they did.

Ms Anne Yardley: That's probably a very good place to stop for now.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, yes.

[End of DavidBlack_4]

DavidBlack_5

Ms Anne Yardley: This is a further interview with Emeritus Professor David Black. It's for the parliamentary history project and we are at David's home in Leederville. Today is Tuesday, 11 September 2018. The interviewer is me, Anne Yardley.

David, we've touched a little bit on the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, but let's talk more about that. It was established in 1998 and you were the foundation historical consultant. Were you at all involved in the planning of the library?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: No, I was not. The role that I had, as far as the university was concerned, to do with John Curtin was the decision to name the university after John Curtin. I took it upon myself, and got permission and support, to actually write my own version, which became *In His Own Words*. At that stage, I was simply a historian working in a university who was providing information and insight into the part played by Curtin and how important Curtin was. What happened, however, was that when the library was being developed, and discussions were being made with me, there were also a lot of discussions taking place about the Curtin house, where Curtin himself had lived and where his daughter was still living at the time. As part of that involvement, various functions and things were set up. Each year, there was an anniversary of the funeral of John Curtin and I would actually be involved with a group of students who would go out and see the grave and then we'd have a breakfast nearby and I would talk about that. That usually included some kind of visit to the house. So I developed, therefore, the capacity and a personal relationship with Elsie Curtin herself. I found that in a way it impacted with me because my own daughter was the one in my family most interested in politics. In Curtin's case, he had a son and a daughter, and his daughter was the one who was fascinated by what he did and his son was far less so. So I developed a tangible relationship with Elsie Curtin. In one of the most memorable moments, she suddenly, after we had been talking, went out and came back into the room carrying a huge pile of papers and books and newspaper cuttings and said, "I want you to have these. I don't want anything to happen to them." I can remember getting in the car and going as fast as I could to the university and handing over these documents to the John Curtin [Prime Ministerial] Library so nothing would happen to them. I became very much involved in the whole concept of Curtin, the Curtin family and its role. For a time, every year there would be a group of students who would go down to the cemetery and I would go down with them. The fact that

I, myself, had been to Curtin's funeral—taken by my grandmother—just all gave it a little something extra.

Then at some point the title “historical consultant” was developed. They had their links with Gough Whitlam and the others, but the notion of the historical consultant—and when Kandy-Jane Henderson was there, I became sort of central, and I would give the vote of thanks at the annual lecture. That role changed a little when Kandy-Jane Henderson left, but at the time I still received considerable support. People like David Wiley, the technician there, and I worked together. I mean, *Friendship is a Sheltering Tree*⁸ was a lot of the work that he did with me, which made that possible. It became a very substantial part of my life. I remember that my emails—the ones backwards and forwards from the John Curtin research centre—were extremely significant as well.

It was only very slowly over time that the situation began to change and I slowly became less and less involved. Although I maintained my total ongoing connection with Parliament, and I continued working at Parliament all the way through, my connection with the John Curtin [Prime Ministerial] Library slowly became less, although it was still there. I was still on their guest list and things of that kind, but that role faded away. I regarded that phase of history—it came and eventually it went; it is still there now but in a minor form—it didn't have a huge lot of impact in some respects. But the fact that I was involved in a trip going to the United States—a person from the United States, a passionate supporter of the General MacArthur family, got to reading about the role that I played, and, as a result of that, I was invited as a guest speaker to come for the whole weekend to Wisconsin—it was the General MacArthur. It was because of the relationship between Curtin and MacArthur and what I was able to tell them about that. I have to say that Kim Beazley, the current Governor of Western Australia, played a major role in that. He actually came especially from Washington and spoke on the last night.

For a time, this became a really major, almost my number one, public activity, with Parliament in the background [chimes] [pause]. But slowly, as time went by, the university itself was broadening out into other areas, and things like the John Curtin [Prime Ministerial] Library became perhaps less significant in the eyes of some,

⁸ David Black's edited collection of former Australian Prime Minister John Curtin's correspondence. It contains introductory background, letters to his wife and various fellow politicians. <https://jcpml.library.curtin.edu.au/about/purchase/publications/>

and, from my point of view, it slowly faded away. Although right to the end, most recently, I was still a guest who was able to attend the most recent lecture. I notice that the lectures themselves now are much more broadly based and far less directed to Curtin. One of the features of the lectures for many years was that numerous members of the Curtin family attended. I think that most recently they were still there but rather fewer. So, from my perspective the John Curtin centre was a major part of my career for a very substantial but definite period. There's a long university involvement before that time. I started work at the university a long time before the centre was established and I continued to have a very active life, but my life was in Parliament, not at the university. I think to this day I still actually technically had an office there, but I don't play the same role I did.

Ms Anne Yardley: You mentioned two books just then—publications. Let's look at those in a little bit of detail: *In His Own Words* was published in 1995, so what was the significance of that publication?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: From my perspective, I thought the university should be associated as quickly as possible with a publication about Curtin, and rather than simply writing what might be called a traditional account by a lecturer, which in fact I have done since—I've tried to write out my own biography of John Curtin—but that particular one, I decided that what I would use is what he himself said. You have to realise that it was not focused hugely or only on his being Prime Minister; it was to do with the whole faith of his life. One of the features I found of Curtin's life was the earlier part, the struggle he had: when he had to give up work at one stage, and, effectively, he suffered a mental breakdown of a quite substantial kind. There was a problem with alcoholism—there's no question about that—and he had considerable personal difficulties. Eventually, part of the reason that he came to Western Australia was that he was transferred by his colleagues who felt that while he was in the eastern states, he was suffering all kinds of problems. While in Perth, he had a chance to start again, fresh, and at the same time to be married, in a different environment, which might get him away from that. His struggle through his life with these kinds of issues was very real. For example, smoking was just one of the more tangible issues that he had.

The fact is that during World War I Curtin was in a bad way. At one stage, he even spent a small number of days in jail to do with his firm opposition to conscription. So, Curtin's life had a particular personal satisfaction and it makes for a great story,

because the culmination of it is that he becomes Prime Minister of Australia and is Prime Minister at an enormously important period of time. One of the features that I stressed with Curtin and the significance he had in the story of Australian history was the fact that when Pearl Harbor took place, he was the one who wrote the New Year's message of the day that said that without any qualms of any kind that Australia looks to the United States for help. Britain can cope and has to cope, but the United States is the one we are with now. To me, one of the major turning points of Australian history took place at that time.

The other thing was John Edwards' book, *Curtin's Gift*, in which he made it clear that as a wartime Prime Minister, Curtin was responsible for, among other things, the fact that the Commonwealth government took over all income tax. That is a huge factor in Australian Federation and the way it works—a striking contrast with the United States. I wrote the book because it was a way of letting him tell the story of what had been a life of extraordinary difficulties, a life in which he had been under huge pressures, and above which in the end he rose triumphant and then, sadly, passed away on the very eve of final success; peace had been achieved with Germany, but not with Japan, when he died. He and Franklin Roosevelt share that together.

Ms Anne Yardley: That's true. Looking at what you said about how he was encouraged to move to WA, how important was that? How much did that set him on the right path? How much of the John Curtin that we think of today is due to the fact that he was over here?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I think it made an enormous difference, from being someone who everything had gone haywire and who'd had to give things away, it gave him a job. He was the editor of the *Westralian Worker*. It was a paid position, and he was working for a cause that he believed in, and living in Western Australia got him away from the difficulties and some of that areas he'd had trouble with. At the same time, I think, in the long run, the fact that he was a Victorian was one of the reasons that he became the Leader of the Labor Party. When Scullin, after the disaster of the Depression, stood down, it was a very tight fight, and what got Curtin over the line was the support of his Victorian colleagues, the ones who had helped him when he went to Perth. If he'd been just a Western Australian by background, I don't think he would've ever become the national leader of the party. He became the national leader because he had the eastern states connections, but he had the

Western Australian links. It's hardly surprising that states like Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania don't in the main, produce the leaders of federal parties.

Ms Anne Yardley: That's a very interesting observation. You also said about John Curtin once that socialism was his religion. So to what extent was he a socialist rather than a Labor man, and how did that affect his popularity?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Of course, he strongly believed in socialism, but, ultimately, he was a trade unionist. He developed his eventual way of ensuring a career was as a union official. One of the striking differences with Curtin is that he was at the same time interested in the educational side of things and he wanted trade unionists to be educated people. His whole background in the end was as a trade unionist—we all stand together; we all fight together where we need to—but education is an enormous part of this. One feature that I was able to stress in some of the things I wrote was that he constantly was arranging for his union colleagues and his trade union members to attend a series of classes ordered by Walter Murdoch, who eventually Murdoch University was named after, and in those classes he felt that trade unionists needed to be educated; they needed to know what the world was about. So he was a passionate union man—everyone stand together, solidarity is everything that matters—but at the same time you needed to be enlightened, you needed to be educated, you needed to be aware of what was going on; otherwise, you were doomed to eventual failure. He passionately lived that path. In this context, the friendship with Walter Murdoch was one of the enduring parts of his life.

Ms Anne Yardley: So John Curtin would've been very proud to have thought a university was named after him.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: There's no question about that at all. I mean he did not have an academic career himself; everything was done going along the way, and his idea was that trade unionists while they were working, were also going to classes and becoming more informed and more educated so they could deal with the world. He also had to deal with huge kinds of issues. The conscription issue was one that caused him a great deal of stress and strain, and the Great Depression. He lost his parliamentary seat in 1931 because of the Great Depression and for three years he had to find a way of living. That's where his working colleagues and the Labor

Party, which eventually became in government in Western Australia, found him a job with the new Commonwealth Grants Commission, which was being set up as a result of the recession. The Grants Commission was created with the idea that places like Western Australia would get more financial help and you wouldn't have a continuation of what happened in the Depression. Until he regained his seat in Parliament, Curtin basically relied upon his union colleagues who found him work and the government found him a position on the Grants Commission. So Curtin's life is very much a case of he was for the party and, in turn, the party and the union movement stood by him when he needed substantial help.

Ms Anne Yardley: The other book you've just mentioned, *Friendship is a Sheltering Tree*, which is very personal—it's his letters. Why did you feel that was significant to write about?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: To be quite frank, I felt because the technicians and others in the John Curtin Centre told me that there were these marvellous letters and that I would be a good one to put them together. I was not the inspiration for the book, but I did a lot of the actual academic presentation of it. But the drive for it, the enthusiasm and the pressure for it came from technicians who were working in the John Curtin Centre. So that was a very interesting one. It was not something which I would've known about without the strong advice and support and enthusiastic backing of the John Curtin Centre staff. It was a side of him that I would've been totally unaware of otherwise. I know in more recent times, when I've met the technician from there, he's expressed his great regret on the way in which the John Curtin Centre is less and less equipped now to take on those kinds of tasks. So that's a book which I am very pleased to have been involved in, but I was not the driving force. *In His Own Words* I was, but not this one. This one was one where I took up the cause with great gusto and I found it very stimulating and quite moving to read that someone like Curtin had had these serious issues at various times.

As I say, my whole approach with Curtin linked back to the fact that my grandmother took me to his funeral. He was someone that I was sort of aware of as a person and it just seemed to me as a Western Australian that he was a marvellous person to write about, and the fact that he turned out to have such an enormously significant career. One of the things that I used to like telling audiences was that in 1940 when the Labor Party narrowly failed to win elections, Curtin almost lost his parliamentary seat—he won by 300 votes. He had lost it before in

the past. In 1943, when the war had been going and Curtin had been Prime Minister and the tide against Japan had started to turn, Curtin won the seat of Fremantle by 23 000 votes. He went from 300 in 1940 to 23 000. Now that was circumstances and so on. That's an event which to this very day still means something to me because Curtin became Prime Minister when the House of Representatives changed its support. What happened in Australia only last week is that the House of Representatives withdrew support from the previous Prime Minister and forced the new one, and guess how Curtin became Prime Minister? It's the first time since 1941 that a federal government has fallen because of a vote in the house.

The Curtin story has particular connections with me because there's the strong personal one and the fact that I attended the funeral. My father was a passionate supporter of Curtin. At the same time, the difficulties he had—what I discovered when I was able to do some historical research is that his coming to Western Australia was a critical phase of his life. It's not just the case that he happens to be the Western Australian who has been Prime Minister; the fact is that he would never have been so in the first place if he hadn't come to Western Australia.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's go back to you now. We've talked about the fact that you've had parallel careers. It looks as though they were achieved effortlessly, but you've said to me that there were obstacles along the way. What kinds of obstacles did you face in your career, moving through?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, one of the first major obstacles was that you have to get promotion; you have to win a job. In the education department, the fact that I was invited to be in the head office of the education department in the first place gave me what seemed like an inside running. When the opportunity came to go to WAIT, I got a job ahead of better qualified people. I seemed to be doing very well for myself. I found the head of school and I had this, particularly encouraging and helpful, and I thought, "I'm really made here. I love teaching. I've got the opportunity to do these things." Then they said, "We're going to make our first appointment of a senior lecturer." The head of my school, who I got on very well with, said, "There's no question that you will get the job." So I applied for the job. Much to my chagrin and deep disappointment, I was defeated for the job by a man of Czechoslovakian origin who had been to the United States. Someone from the Institute of Technology had gone overseas and done the interviewing and he was quite

impressed by what this man was having to say, so he got the job. I had to confront the fact that I had been rejected for a job that I was effectively being guaranteed by the head. I thought, "My career looks as though it's going to nosedive."

One of the things which I personally—I don't mind saying here; I'm even quite proud of now—is that the last thing I did, or thought of doing, was to take it out on him. The man who got the job from me, I actually went with my wife and we met him and his wife when they came, and my wife and his wife became lifelong friends. The result of this was, although it turned out, in my opinion, being honest, I don't think it was a great appointment for the university—he had difficulty lecturing with the language, whereas it was something that I had completely under control. I thought the university would have got a much better deal if I got the job, but, nevertheless, I worked with him. That phase went very well.

Then we moved on down the track and, eventually, they came up with the question of becoming the head of school. Again, there was a strong colleague who was an opponent of mine. To be quite honest, the sociologists who were inclined to be Marxists were more in the centre than I was. I was not in the Marxist group. For a time, it seemed as though I wasn't getting anywhere and I applied to become associate professor and I didn't get the job at first. Nevertheless, I applied again, and one or two people gave me sufficient support that I actually won it. They said, "The reason you've got this is because you are one of the most well-known people in the entire school." I realised that what was happening to me is that because I'd become involved so publicly with elections, I was beginning to develop a very strong second part of my armoury. The result was that, in the end, not only was I appointed the associate professor at that time, but, eventually—and, let's be honest, partly in order to get me to retire—I was made a full professor. In the end, I had setbacks along the way, there were periods, but also one of my proudest things—I have no hesitation in saying this—I've already given you one example of how my wife and the wife of the man who beat me for the job. But there was another member of my staff who also came from overseas. He and I got on quite well but we went overseas and then he had a marriage break-up and eventually retired and left. His wife became also a lifelong, lasting friend of my wife. In fact, she went out with her again last night.

When I think back, not everything went my way by any means. There were a number of things that didn't work out well, but taking each step in the right context

and continuing to try and do that which you can do as well as possible, life has a habit of sorting itself out. In the end, I was given a very reasonable run. When I think back now to the generosity and the way in which the Parliament worked with me, I realised that if I'd had some setbacks along the way, I had some enormous pieces of good fortune and success as well. I'd like to think I made use of them, but the fact is I was very fortunate in many of the opportunities, going back to the education department when I was first transferred to the head office.

Ms Anne Yardley: You were involved with the Premier's Constitutional Committee. What was that work about?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The Constitutional Committee was the period when there were all sorts of stress about whether Australia was becoming a republic, an issue which keeps reappearing from time to time. For whatever reason—and there were a series of reasons—the Richard Court government decided that because of the pressures for a republic they should investigate whether in fact there was a case for Western Australia itself becoming a republic and, instead of having a Governor who represented the Queen, having a Governor who was in his own right. A man called Malcolm McCusker, who I didn't know at the time, a very prominent lawyer, they decided to have him as the chair of a committee and have this committee tour around parts of Western Australia and discuss the implications of Western Australia becoming a republic. Various people were included on this committee. The reason that I found my way there, I can only assume, is because I'd become involved with the Parliament. I'd been working on the history of the Parliament and those kinds of things. But the result is that that particular committee went over various parts of Western Australia—right up in the north, right up in the Kimberley and everywhere else—and we investigated the idea of Western Australia becoming a republic. Malcolm McCusker, I found a very stimulating person to work with. I enjoyed being on the committee and one of my lifelong very best friends was actually secretary to that committee, so it was something about which I got a lot of interest and enjoyment out of.

When we came back from the initial journey, various bodies were involved in further discussions, and this is where Harry Phillips played quite a significant role. He wasn't on the committee. The idea was to establish a constitutional centre in Western Australia. Whether or not we became a republic, the idea was that there would be far, far more knowledge and awareness of the ramifications of what it

would mean. For many, many years the Constitutional Committee was, I think, flourishing because it always got the support of Premiers—people like Geoff Gallop supported it, Colin Barnett supported it and so on—at the time. There's talk now, the committee is struggling for existence because there's a feeling that Parliament itself does a whole lot of education already and there isn't any need for this separate body. No final decision has been made that I know of, but it doesn't seem very likely that the committee will continue. But it was a fascinating body which I enjoyed very much being on. It was one of the things which just kept me involved in the issues of the day and on the sorts of things that we could sell to the public.

The whole idea of the Constitutional Centre was to try to get people the opportunity to talk about some of these issues. In my opinion, it became a little bit run in the end by lawyers, and too many of what were technical legal issues rather than more broadly based ones. I just found, for example, one paper that I was doing with them, I was able to point out the great differences made in Western Australia. I had originally worked at Parliament for Western Australia getting its own Constitution, and Proclamation Day was the day in which we celebrated Western Australia getting its own Constitution. Ten, 11 years after getting its own Constitution, Western Australia became part of the Federation and Proclamation Day faded away and vanished. It doesn't exist anymore. It got mixed up with Labour Day and then went away altogether. The role that the Western Australian Parliament played has always been, from my point of view, of particular significance and interest. Western Australian history has been the kind of thing where certain individuals in the end have become especially prominent and we need to know a great deal more about them and, of course, people like Forrest and Mitchell and others as we go down the track. That is what that particular aspect was about.

Ms Anne Yardley: What about the other things to do with secondary education more particularly, because you were also, on the TEE as it was then, chief examiner?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I had a lot to do for many, many years up until only about 12 months ago and more with what was called for much of its time the TEE—the examinations which students take at the end of their high school careers. From the time that I was, myself, studying for a master's degree at university, I remember Professor Fred Alexander included me in the panel who helped mark—one of the markers who marked the history. Somehow along the track as a result of my

combination and appearance as a schoolteacher and also my role in Parliament, I eventually found myself virtually a regular member of the examining panel. For several years, I was in fact the chief examiner for what was broadly called history and then later was called modern history. I was still a member of the panel setting the paper until the Parliament announced that my contract was going to expire and I didn't know whether I'd have the room that I'd worked from, the facilities, the access to the computers and things like that. At that point, I withdrew for the first time in a very long period of time.

That was a major part. Again, it was the Australian history which was the significant part of what we were doing. I have to say, in all honesty, and I'm very happy to have this recorded for posterity, that I was clearly a product of a system where the First Australians simply didn't loom very large in what we were taught. I was brought up in a family that had strong connections with England. My interest in history became very much through English history in someone. The role that I played in setting exams, there wasn't much that we did which was particularly relevant to those issues of today. I see myself in that sense as representing a particular phase of that history. We were simply given—Professor Alexander and others—the history of Australia was part of the history of the British Empire. The changing nature of the British Empire led to the changing nature of Australian history and the fact that Captain Cook saw what he saw, why did anything happen after that? Because of the American Revolution. The American Revolution created problems for Great Britain and because of Great Britain, they decided to send people out to Australia—convicts and so on. It simply was a fact of life that it was European history that created the Australia we had. The big changes came at the end of the Second World War when we started to bring Asian people in. But it still took a long time before the First Australians started to get the role that they had.

No, I've had a longstanding involvement with secondary education. I love the idea of people teaching history, although increasingly I find that history is being overtaken by politics. People who study history in many cases are far more likely to study Greek or Roman history or something of that kind from the more locally based. Increasingly, politics has become perhaps the preferred option for many, many students. The current modern history, if students do modern history, they may well be doing the Russian Revolution still or the Cold War in Europe and, perhaps a bit more validly now, the Middle East. But Australian history is a line of study perhaps no more than a quarter of the students will do.

Ms Anne Yardley: How would you like history to be taught these days? What should be in the curriculum for, say, high school and university?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, of course, I personally am passionately interested in history itself and particularly political history. When I went to university, there were no units in politics, so I studied history, I did every history unit that had any politics in it. That, I suppose, would still be where I'd start from. To understand the Australian history, you need to understand international relations, you need to understand the connections with Europe, the Asian situation and so on, but you need to also understand the particular facets of the political system that you live in. I think what we're seeing, for example, in the United States at the present time makes it clear that the prime ministerial system and the presidential system are very different systems that produce very different outcomes. When I've had a little bit of opportunity to do a little bit of tutoring, one of the issues that I love talking about is how Australian politics has become known by many people as having the Washminster system; in other words, there are strong American elements, strong British elements and there are Australian elements. If I was teaching, myself, still, I would have a starting point of that. People need to see in perspective what is Australian about what we do and where and how the Australian issues came, but also what was fed into it from the UK in particular, what was fed into it from the USA in particular, by history, by political systems and issues of that kind. That in turn broadens out to the impact of such events as war and the changing population. I could tell personal stories.

I had not previously met an Asian person before I went to university. One of the Asian students from the Colombo Plan invited me back to his flat, along with some other people, and they played a piece of classical music, the Dvořák *New World Symphony*, which is one of the, I think, most glorious pieces of music there is. I learnt this great western music for the first time from an Asian student. I can say how in the modern world, that my own wife, who teaches classical music, almost every pupil she has in classical music has an Asian background. I have lived in a world in which the Asian connection not only brings Asians into Australia, but it brings the west into Asia. When I talk to one after another person, they're all studying western music. This conflicts with my own awareness of China as being, when I was a student, thought of as a place which Europe carved up and dealt with. China is now one of the major powers in the world, but also people who come from China are strongly influenced by western ideals. I just think that if I had the

opportunity, I still think that the starting point of studying something like history is to have someone talk about it, give examples, illustrations and, above all else, demonstrate enthusiasm. Frank Crowley is another person who was passionately determined to convey what it is they wanted to tell you. That's what really matters. For me, the greater use of the internet as a way of acquiring things is all very well. Unfortunately, it deprives the huge value of the personal commitment.

Ms Anne Yardley: In 2010, you received the Order of Australia. How did you feel about that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Of course, it was not so much the receiving of it that really impacted on me straightaway as the fact that I was informed that I had been nominated and that the case was being formed for me to be nominated. My daughter, for one, was involved with this in some way. She came to know about it and she told me that they were working on this at the moment and she wanted to know certain things about me that she could pass on to them.

Ms Anne Yardley: Is she the one who had initiated this, do you believe?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I don't know. I'm not sure exactly who initiated it, but she was certainly one of those involved then in pursuing it. There are various people who went to Constitutional Centre functions who I think—often quite senior lawyers and others who decided that they wanted to know a bit more about people like me. I formed the strong impression when I saw the exact wording of what I received, I'm not even sure of at the moment, but I know that it was to do with the community. In fact, I became a member of the Order of Australia⁹.

Ms Anne Yardley: I've got it here. It says, "For service to education and to the social sciences, particularly through the promotion and preservation of the political and parliamentary history of Western Australia".

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, the promotion and preservation. I think of it myself—the preservation and so on. In fact, I'm writing things. But the promotion one I think is the key one. Whether I was a schoolteacher or whether I was lecturing or what I was doing, or being quoted in the press, I was actually promoting the causes I was

⁹ In the 2010 Australia Day Honours, David Black was appointed Member of the Order of Australia (AM)

talking about. People were aware of them. Yesterday, I attended a meeting of a group of men who meet regularly. At least half of the men that I spoke to were aware of who I was. Now, they were not exactly aware of what I did, where I came from or anything like that, but they knew that I talked about politics and they remembered me talking about politics or talking about history or something of that kind. I feel that the reason I got the award that I did was because I was actually promoting the causes that I was talking about, and talking about a cause is a particularly big way of promoting it.

So I don't think that I received an Order of Australia because of my great academic achievements. I think even things like the parliamentary history, important as they were, were important but not the whole story. The story was the community impact, the involvement, constantly promoting the causes that I was talking about. To me that's why I got the Order of Australia. I like to think that I was in a slightly different category from the people who got it with me, on the same day—people like George Cash. They got it because they were promoting causes, but also because they were in extremely high significant roles—that they were the secretary of something, whatever particular role they had mattered. In my case, it wasn't the particular role that I had, it was just what I did. The same with Harry Phillips. I think we really got into the same category. It was community involvement, educational, talking about what we'd been doing, and promoting the whole idea of being aware of these things. My favourite description, which I've probably used already but which I can use a number of times, is that my daughter said that, "You fit the classic description of a"—what's the term?—"sort of minor entity."

Ms Anne Yardley: Celebrity?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Minor celebrity, "Because people are aware you're significant, but not quite sure why [chuckles]. I know I've seen you somewhere. I don't know where it was, but I know I have." So I just had the feeling that one of the main things, the reason I got it in the end, is because I talked about what I was doing, I promoted what I was doing, and my apparent enthusiasm in doing that was sufficient that it made various people aware of that fact.

Ms Anne Yardley: So in all this promoting, why is it important to study history? Why should we do that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That's a question that I have strong feelings about but I find it very hard to pin down straightaway, except that I think that —

Ms Anne Yardley: We can come back to it if you like.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: No, no. History tells us about people and it tells us about what's going on. The example that I've used over and over and over to people is the example that I use from the television program centred on what was happening in East London. I'll rely on you to find the name of that later [chuckles].

Ms Anne Yardley: *Upstairs Downstairs*?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: No, the —

Ms Anne Yardley: East London?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Sorry; the Catholic ladies who are —

Ms Anne Yardley: *Call the Midwife*?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, that's it; right, exactly. One of the classic examples of that was the example of a brother and sister who went into the workhouse, which was the way that the British dealt with poverty. The brother and sister—the sister coped reasonably, but the younger brother was really struggling. In the end, the brother became totally dependent on the sister. What effectively developed was a parent–child relationship, in which the sister was the parent. In the story as told on the television, when the brother—the younger one—died, they discovered that he and his sister had been sharing a bed and were living as a married couple. The people in the midwives accepted this—that they were, effectively, parent–child. Now, the point about that is that I realise that this is simply *Oliver Twist* being told all over again, and I realise that awareness of what happened before we had what we have now. We just take for granted the kind of world we live in and the people, and in those days people were thrown into a workhouse and, effectively, lost most of their education opportunities; they were deprived in all sorts of ways. They were treated as lesser than individuals. Australia, on the whole, did not do that, and one of the reasons Australia didn't do that was the role of the trade union movement. So without taking any political sides, I think you need to be aware that the very fact

of the nature of the country you're in is a reflection of its history. Australia did not have some of those experiences that were in Britain, and one of the reasons that we didn't have them was the way society was structured, and the age pension in Australia emerged much earlier.

Now, all sorts of problems have developed in more recent times with a lot of these things, but I think history helps you to understand who you are, why we are and why things are the way they are. With Australia's First People, you start to understand that the reason that they're the way they are is not because they are somehow an inferior kind of people, but that they have a totally different history; totally different structures that they developed with and so on. I just think that people here haven't had this drawn to their attention, and I myself am learning all the time.

When my wife has a classical music concert and she has a number of parents from Asia and they're talking about their experiences, I realise that life is impacted so much by the experience you have, the sort of society, what period of time you're born, what is happening at the time. My wife, who was born in India, her life was completely transformed by making India completely independent—the country. So without history, you don't know the setting you come from or the way things are and the way they're likely to be.

Ms Anne Yardley: Do you believe enough students study history in school, in university, these days to make informed decisions?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I'm pleased from one point of view, but disappointed from another point of view, that so many students that I even hear about now actually know quite a bit about ancient Greek history or ancient Roman history, and I think this is great and it's very substantial. There are some great aspects of our life which you can trace back to some of these things, and certainly lots of people enjoy going to Greece in more recent times. But I do think that they need to know more about the environment that impacts directly on them. I think Australians need to know more about that. They need to know more about their own Indigenous people, they need to know more about the people who are coming to Australia, why they are coming and what some of the differences are, and try to understand why we are the way we are. To be quite honest, that's not easy to understand [chuckles].

Ms Anne Yardley: No. Should this be taught formally at schools and should it be compulsory?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I think history is compulsory, from what I can make out—that's providing people go to school. The increasing number of homeschooled people, I think, is a great pity because you're not getting that same control over what they are being taught, and also it deprives them of the opportunity of friendship, which can be such a huge factor. I do realise that Dave Mossenson—the former director general of Education—he argued, that you can't have everything done at school. He said there were huge cases that people should be taught to drive cars as part of their school. He said you simply cannot leave everything to, have everything done at, school. There have got to be some choices made, some limitations, and you hope that those limitations and things would be sorted out by other aspects of life. But he said the call that everything has to be done at school is unrealistic and creates pressures that you cannot deal with. I think that's probably true. It's got to be rationed, and you have to, in the end, rely on the judgements of some of the people who are doing it, and in some cases—I mean, it was like my university career; the passions and biases of individuals can take you in a completely different direction than you might otherwise go.

Ms Anne Yardley: There's a big question about the biases in teaching. The teaching of history, does it need to evolve? Do we need to have different perspectives on the teaching of history?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That's not a question I find easy to answer. I suppose all I can say is that I want people to be aware of things, to have at some point in time been given an awareness that something had happened. To take a very simple example: if I am talking to anybody around the place and if I mention some of the experiences of my very early childhood, which included air-raid shelters in the backyard and so on, this creates—"How can you be talking about that? You're living in Perth." I just think that somehow if we can get awareness that it's not that long ago that there were differences, and also that great changes don't last.

I remember being asked to talk to students about things that I had learnt and were no longer valid in a relatively short period of time. The one I used to start with was drive-in movie theatres. There were no such thing as drive-in movie theatres, and then at a certain point this became the in thing to do, to go to these drive-ins, and

within what I can hardly think is a breath of time, they had completely vanished. And long-playing records. I used to have one needle that would play one piece and then you'd throw it out. Then they brought in the long-playing records, and this became THE way of doing things. Then it disappeared again, and now it's there as collectors' items. There are people who do this all the time. As I say, life in the last 30, 40 years—perhaps more, I'm not sure—things are dated much, much faster than they used to be. I think it's getting people aware that that which seems natural and that's surely the way it always is and, on the other hand, that there are some things which are still fundamental, you know; that if you're going to enter into a relationship with another person, there is the whole question of marriage and what actual function does it perform and what do we need to do; what is the place of religion in Australian society? So there are all kinds of profound questions like that as well. In the end, what you should do at school, it's an impossible list—you can't possibly do all those things. But I think that awareness of what happens over time somehow to me is the starting point; that what happens in one era can very quickly be dated by what happens in another era.

Ms Anne Yardley: I think that'd where we'll leave it today.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes.

[End of DavidBlack_5]

DavidBlack_6

Ms Anne Yardley: This is another interview with Emeritus Professor David Black. It is for the parliamentary history project and we are again at David's home in Leederville. Today is Tuesday, 18 September 2018, and the interviewer is me, Anne Yardley.

David, I would like to talk about a couple of the publications that you were involved with, particularly to do with *Parliament: Mirror of the People?*, which was the members of the WA Parliament from 1890 to 2007. You described it as one of the more interesting and enjoyable of the books that you did. Why was that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It dealt with the variety of sources from which members of Parliament were recruited, with which occupations that people were most likely to be involved in and things of that kind. It also enabled me to focus on the particular stories which I regarded as highly significant. One story that I think is particularly worth mentioning again was the seat of Nedlands. It had been represented for some time by an ageing member and in 1950, I think it was, that was the year it was due to have a new member but, at the last minute, the existing member, who was in his 80s, refused to leave. The consequence of that is that a man called Cyril Bird, who was an accountant with an accounting firm and a very prominent supporter of the Liberal Party who put a lot of money and effort into it, was endorsed for the seat of Nedlands. In the contest which took place, there was a Labor candidate and there was also a man called David Grayden, who actually himself, interestingly, went on to become involved in politics for a short time, and his brother Bill Grayden was also very a significant [long term member]. The point of the story was that at the last minute [in 1950], the ageing have won the seat comfortably, lost the seat to David Grayden, the young student, and Labor Party preferences became involved. The result of that is that Cyril Bird, who was highly upset by all this and had been a major financial supporter of the party, refused to be involved again.

So in 1953, the Liberal Party endorsed a couple of candidates, one of whom was a man called Charles Court. In a very close election in which David Grayden was involved, on Labor Party preferences, Charles Court just managed to get ahead and he also received Labor Party preferences because of the anomalies in the way the numbers worked. The point of all that story is that if Cyril Bird had been allowed

to win in 1950, there would have been no seat of Nedlands available for Charles Court in 1953 and one of the major features of Western Australian history would have been completely different. It was those kinds of things which quite fascinated me. That quirk of history meant that Charles Court became a major dominant figure in Western Australian political history and he wouldn't have been there at all if the existing candidate had stayed on or if the preferences had been different.

I felt that all the way through reading about the occupations from where MPs were recruited, I realised that some people became members of Parliament because it was clear that they intended to become members of Parliament—it had been planned all ahead—but there were numerous cases, too, of what you might call “accidental members” and that in turn led to my interest in what happened to people if things didn't work out. That's why in the interview program we even started interviewing people who served only one term in Parliament. The point which arose from that and which I would include in any summation I made of all this is that one term in Parliament is a disastrous way to spend your career because not only is there no immediate future in it, but the trouble is you have typecast yourself as belonging to one side or the other if you are then going around trying to seek other employment. If you were sufficiently high up in the system, it doesn't really matter if you served in Parliament. But if you are not high up, having had one term in Parliament, that means it typecasts you and restricts your opportunity for getting a job, not the other way around. It was those issues and quirks that I found quite fascinating. *Mirror of the People* was simply illustrative, if you like, at times, of the arbitrary nature of parliamentary careers and, crucially, the relative short-term career, which most parliamentary careers are. For people who survive more than five or 10 years in Parliament, they're doing very, very well. In other words, it's the kind of thing which may give you an opening into something but it's very likely also to close you out of a whole lot of other opportunities.

Ms Anne Yardley: And this was the kind of thing that came out in a book like this—*Mirror of the People*?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: A book like *Mirror of the People*, that's exactly what it was about. That was the whole focus of the book and I found that quite fascinating that there were certain patterns, there were certain ways in which things happened, but there were certainly extremely arbitrary things which occurred. Of course, you get

certain elections where lots of people are swept out of office who would normally be secure. You get other elections where there's very little impact on the existing personnel.

Ms Anne Yardley: Another one that you describe, too, as being interesting was *Documenting a Democracy*¹⁰, and that is looking at constitutional development and change in Australia. What was so fascinating about that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, it was in one sense not a central part of my interests. In fact, the real reason I became involved in the records office as much as I did and which led to my being involved in *Documenting a Democracy* was actually my career at Perth Modern School. At Perth Modern School, when I was interviewed, having got a scholarship to the school, I told the interviewee, when they asked me what I thought my future life would be, to my astonishment I found, when I saw the records, that I said that I would be a statistician. This was, in part, completely true. I was in fact spot on because my fascination was statistics, which had a lot to do with everything in elections. But what happened with Modern School is that I became the custodian, as I did later with Parliament, of making the Modern School records. I organised interviews with people. We found the data and I went to the records office on numerous occasions hunting out various things about individual people and what had happened to them, where they had gone to and also about the records of the entrants to Modern School. The school itself had quite good records, but they had not been superintended or kept much notice of, so I became involved ultimately in writing a history of the school to that point in time.

Just as a sideline, if I can mention that one of the crucial factors which emerged for me was the fact that the Modern School became a highly selective entry was, interestingly, not because it was chosen to be a highly selective entry school, but because there were not many schools available. One of the interesting things in Western Australia is that they built numerous high schools in Kalgoorlie and Bunbury and places like that, but were very reluctant to build them in the metropolitan area, which says something about the political structure of the Legislative Council in my opinion. I think the rural areas are grossly overrepresented these days and they were grossly overrepresented in the provision of schools. So what happened is that the Modern School, by necessity,

¹⁰ Is a website of Western Australia's significant documents:
<https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/area-aid-9.html>

became a highly selective school since there were not a lot of places available. There were schools like Perth Boys and Fremantle Boys and the equivalent for girls that were available, but the Modern School itself became a highly selective entry and I became totally fascinated with who'd come, where they'd come from and how long, the careers they had, where they stayed, and that in turn led to me making substantial use of the State Records Office.

As a consequence of that, when they were investigating all the documents in the State Records Office, which account for the history of Western Australia and the various processes going back to 1829 and onwards, I became fascinated with that process. That accounts for my becoming involved in that project and it also accounts for the whole thrust of the Geoffrey Bolton Lecture, because the Geoffrey Bolton Lecture, which focused on the records being held by the state, became a source of fascination for me. In a quirk of time, when the proposal was recently made to move Modern School away from its present site, which is an extremely historic site. There were deputations to the Premier to ask for change. In the end, they got the change, but people like Malcolm McCusker made sure that even though I was an employee of Parliament in a sense, I was still on the group plugging for this because I had been so involved in the history of Modern School. I regard my fascination with the state records—it's all a derivation from my fascination of statistics, plus my own very strong personal involvement. My father, mother, both brothers and daughter et cetera all went to the same school.

Ms Anne Yardley: And this is where the constitutional development and change in Australia from *Documenting a Democracy* comes from?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: That's right, yes, because I was working with the State Records Office so much. They invited me on a number of occasions when the records, which they kept secret for so many years and then made public—for a number of years, three or four years, I was actually asked to do the public address about the particular set that had just been released. All of that made me very involved for that time with the State Records Office, but that was not something that I did for the whole of my career. It was something that I did at a certain stage that became a major source of fascination for me. But, subsequently, I moved on to become very much more involved with the Parliament and I became less

involved. But it was reborn with being asked to give the Geoffrey Bolton Lecture¹¹. Of course, my own personal links with Geoffrey Bolton, through where he'd come from and so on, was quite critical in that respect. This is in fact much the story of my life—the way in which one facet or thing influenced something else and something else comes into it, you meet someone else, and a whole fresh set of issues become important. But one of the underlying features of those things is that statistics, in one form or another, was always a crucial part, and the State Records Office, of course, has dealt a great deal with statistics.

Ms Anne Yardley: Before we go back to Geoffrey Bolton, there was another thing that piqued your interest. You were very involved in the digitising of the handwritten minutes from the upper house. What's the importance of getting those records digitised, and which records were they?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I was in a sense fascinated by it and I urged that it be done, but I was not of myself directly involved. It turned out, and what I didn't realise, is that I had assumed that *Hansard* was this official documented history of the Parliament all the way back. I discovered that whilst that was true in a sense, it was not true for many of the early years. The notion of Hansard reporters recording what was said each day and the Parliament itself publishing the product of this did not in fact eventuate until somewhere into the 1870s. Before that time, these records were kept but they were mainly in the local press. If you really wanted to know the early history, you used the local newspapers, and from there you obtained a lot of these records. The possibility arose of having these records properly done by Hansard, but it involved using handwritten records and these handwritten records had to be turned into, eventually, a digitised form. This task was seemingly a task which I would have thought would take forever and a day, but in fact it was done within a reasonable space of time, and it made me impressed by what they were able to do. They were able to go back through what were frequently handwritten records, records of various kinds which appeared in the local press and so on, and from that they were able to construct the official records all the way back to the original Legislative Council in 1832. If you go to Parliament now, you can see the original Council, which consisted of a small group of officials. There were no elected members. In the original Council, there were no nominated members; they were only officials and a secretary. Somehow, out of all

¹¹ In David Black delivered the Geoffrey Bolton lecture. It can be found here: http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/geoffrey_bolton_lecture_dblack_2010_000.pdf

that, the official records have been found. Today, with *Hansard*, you can get access to anything that was said anywhere, anytime, or anything that was recorded anywhere, anytime, all the way back to 1832 when it was first found.

I found this to be completely true when I went to Canada, and I went on the railway line that was being built in Canada across the Rockies. This, to me, was a major historical comparison with Western Australia, because the construction in Canada of the railway across the hills and the mountains and all the rest, in Australia the counterpart for this is of course crossing the Nullarbor Plain. I remembered that Frank Crowley had taught us that John Forrest, who was often portrayed as being opposed to Federation, in fact, in Canada in the 1880s, had spoken about the importance of the trans Pacific railway line and how important it would be for somewhere like Western Australia to have something of the same kind. Now I was fascinated about whether this was true, and when I came back to Perth, I asked if they could find in the *Hansard* records anything. They looked up the speeches made by John Forrest and, sure enough, they found a speech by John Forrest in the local *Hansard* records of the time, talking about the importance of the Canadian Pacific Railway line and how important it would be for Australia. This, in a sense, vindicates Frank Crowley's line that however hostile to Federation Forrest may appear to be, in fact, underlying it, he recognised that Federation was absolutely inevitable. What he was concerned about was getting entrance to Federation on decent terms, which included a commitment to a Trans-Australian Railway line.

Ms Anne Yardley: As a historian, where do you place yourself? We've been talking a bit about Geoffrey Bolton there. He was an important figure for you, and in 2010 you delivered the Geoffrey Bolton Lecture. You've talked about the history department at UWA as being crucial to you. So in the time line of historians of that ilk, where do you place yourself?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I place myself as carrying forward much of what they were doing, but I don't see myself as, shall we say, for example, the great biographer. If someone is really going to write a life of John Forrest, if someone is really going to write a life of John Curtin, I'm not the person to do that. I regard myself as fascinated with the whole range of issues that were involved, the sequence of events, the politics which took place. Curtin's life, for example, I can write in my opinion a very thorough and solid account of it. I feel that I am the sort of person

who can write a very thorough and carefully documented account of what Curtin did. I thought working with the John Curtin [Prime Ministerial] Library and writing a book about his private mail, for example, I was fascinated by this. But I always felt that I was the person who could put together the lists, who could work out what happened when and what happened to him, and to get the right sequence. The historians who are what I would call “novelists”, the people who actually can portray and do the story in greater length, that’s not really me.

I think the starting point of my issue is always the statistics. I like to know what happened when, what the sequence was, who represented who at what time, who played what part, and in the process I can become inspired by certain things. For example, I was very inspired with John Curtin announcing after Pearl Harbor that he was going to produce a Prime Minister’s letter to the Australian people. In that letter he forthrightly set out that England would have to look after itself and that Australia, without any hesitation of any kind, any inhibitions of any kind, would turn to the United States for help. In other words, Curtin was able to deal with the bigger picture when he needed to, but for most of the time he is not the sort of person you see in those grand terms. I mean, you see it much more in someone like Robert Menzies, who had a very flowing way of speaking—just hearing his very voice alone had a substantial effect. There are those kinds of individuals, and Western Australian history is full of those kinds of people—people like John Forrest, who played an enormous role; James Mitchell, who, with all sorts of faults and weaknesses, nevertheless played huge kind of things. The story of those people needs to be told by what I call literary people. What I am good at is knowing who did what and when, what contribution each one made, and getting it into the right source.

For example, one of the fields that obviously suited me in my school teaching days was that I became very much involved in the setting of modern history examination papers. I was fascinated with the periods that we were examining. There were some periods we were examining that I wasn’t particularly expert on and I did my part of the job because I needed to, but the Australian history part very much so, and in later years the Middle East part. That in itself gave rise to all sorts of stories. One of the stories, for example, which was always part of my outlook and has been ever since, was the so-called Suez Crisis in 1956, which was the one time where Robert Menzies got it badly wrong; he survived, but he got it wrong. He automatically supported Britain in what amounted to the conflict over Egypt and

failed to see that it was the United States which was the dominant and driving force. Casey, his foreign secretary, kept telling him that we've got to go the way the Americans want now, and Menzies was slow to realise that the Britain he thought of was—it didn't come in a hurry.

Now, I regard myself as the sort of historian who's fascinated by these things. I'm not the person to write the whole life of Menzies, but I'm the person to see certain phases of Menzies' life: why Menzies succeeded to the extent he did and where the weaknesses are and certainly how they became—certainly in the 1960s, near the end, Menzies was completely out of his depth. The Vietnam issue and the role of the United States took over from a man who'd been so closely linked to the United Kingdom. This was a huge help to me in school teaching, because it means that I can see the significance of things that happened—who related to whom, where. But the really dashing biographies, it's the Geoffrey Boltons of this world who write those books, not me.

Ms Anne Yardley: I'd like to ask you to tease out something that you've said, and that is about Australian politics generally. You've said, "I think the greatest strength of the Australian society is the strength of the national government, no matter how good or bad it is at any point in time."

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, I begin by talking about that in 2018, I feel —

Ms Anne Yardley: Would you like to review that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I would certainly need to put it in perspective. It seems to me that what I saw, the period in which Australia had the Menzies of this world—for what it was worth—we had the Gough Whitlams, who were highly significant people; someone like Malcom Fraser, who had two sides to him, which made him particularly fascinating; Bob Hawke, who I thought was a very good Prime Minister and really knew what he was on about; and Paul Keating was an extraordinary individual of great consequence. When I was asked to find the best speech ever made by any Australian politician, without hesitation I started with the Redfern speech¹² given by Keating. Howard, with all his things that people could object to

¹² In December 1992, in the Year for the World's Indigenous People, Paul Keating delivered the Redfern address:
https://antar.org.au/sites/default/files/paul_keating_speech_transcript.pdf

and his failure to realise what Vietnam was all about and what was happening, the fact is that he was an extraordinarily successful Prime Minister. Since then, we've had an array which, you know, it makes me think about the very early days—the sequence and the kind of stabilities somehow seem to have got lost somewhere. I'm not quite sure where Australian politics is finding its way at the moment [This still applies in November 2019] .

It seems to me that the traditional lines on which the parties have been drawn, clearly things have changed over time. The trade union movement is still of great consequence, but it is not of the great consequence that it was. This is one thing that I learnt as an historian—the trade union movement for many, many years was extremely crucial and important to Australian life. I think, for example, the basic wage and the courses that I taught on social history, Australia was actually particularly well handled from those points. It didn't have anything like the workhouse system they had in Britain or anything like that, and I thought that was the strength of the trade union movement. But in recent times now, we don't quite know where the dividing lines come between the parties, and the individuals within them are behaving in a way which led to the facetious comment about the Italy of the Southern Hemisphere. This may be just a phase. I've had enough to do with history that I shouldn't get too overstressed about what's happening around me, but the fact is that ever since Howard left, it seems to me that Australian national politics has lost what some people may think is a major disadvantage, but also some of the advantages—a degree of stability and a structure which kept things together. Of course, it had what I consider the major achievement of compulsory voting, which I regard as extremely crucial because it means that every section of the community is relevant and every section of the community has to be thought about and catered for. And, by the way, if you're interested in predicting election outcomes, you've got far more chance of getting it right with compulsory voting than you do with the sort of systems they use in the United States.

Ms Anne Yardley: You are very keen on women and their success, and I wonder what you do make of what's going on in the federal sphere, especially at the moment with so much talk about the bullying going on with women parliamentarians, and how we can attract women to the Parliament.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, the first thing we have to say is that notwithstanding what's taken place in the world in recent years, there is still not the slightest doubt

that given the structure we have, it's always harder for women as a large-scale group to become involved than it is for men. I thought of this strikingly at a church sermon I heard only the other day in which they were talking about what the Bible has to say about the difference between men and women and the different arguments—that fundamentally they are both in a sense the same entity in relationship to God and in issues of that kind. It struck me at the moment that there's one factor which you can't take out of the equation; and, that is, if you are going to give birth to human beings, that it is women who give birth to them. That, undoubtedly, meant that no matter who they are and no matter what they want to do, that's going to alter their role in the community. Okay, women can simply not give birth to children at all and that's one way around it; but, let's face it, there's a very substantial proportion of women who do wish still to be the one—and that inevitably means that it requires the sort of role which the women normally perform, if they're going to play roles in politics and broaden things out, they need a male partner who is prepared to do things differently. These remain absolutely the essence of and fact of life. So I think the political system, by definition, inevitably will always be geared that it is easier for a man. A woman abandons the idea of having a family and then she is in the same position as a man you might argue—although even then I'm not sure that it would still work like that in the community. But I do think that there is a fundamental issue though there are different ways that women can manage and deal with that.

The jokes and stories that I used to think of were like Joh Bjelke-Petersen's wife was one extreme—a woman in politics who still makes cakes and things; she's that kind of person. You have women who say that there's really no difference whether you're a woman or a man then. Then there are women who argue that you need a particular perspective which only women bring to the story that you're trying to tell. The facetious one, of course, is that there are the women who are really men—Margaret Thatcher—and they can cope fundamentally easily. In other words, I think the system by definition, by biological necessity, for all kinds of reasons, is geared that it is intrinsically more difficult for women. For women, the way round that requires artificial restructuring in some sense. I mean, the Labor Party have been more successful and one of the reasons they've done it is that they've artificially reconstructed numbers and they've set quotas. If you do that, then you can to some extent balance that, but even then it's not as easy. But, certainly, there's a very distinct difference between the success that the Labor Party have in

bringing women in, not only in federal Parliament but in state Premiers and positions of that kind; it's somehow more feasible for Labor to do that than it is for the Liberal Party.

Can I just conclude by saying that, obviously, my personal experience has been that I had a mother who was a very traditional mother but who at the same time was demanding that women should have certain rights and equal pay; she was passionately in favour, even though as soon as she got married she gave up paid work. In principle, because of what she saw around her, I became a supporter of that. I have found in my own life that I think there are gender factors in the kind of outlooks that people bring. I think if this is true, and I suspect it is somewhere, then politics needs that variety of outlooks. To me, it's one of those things which we haven't done as badly as all that, but we've a long, long way to go, even so. The fact is we've only had one woman Prime Minister in all this time and for such a very short period of time, and we don't seem to be getting anywhere near it at the moment, even though there are some reasonably strong contenders around.

It's an issue which became fascinating to me, and the result of that of course is that Harry Phillips and I worked on *Making a Difference*. The crucial thing in *Making a Difference*, which we wanted to do, was not only to talk about what women there were and how they came and what they did and all the rest, but we wanted, as far as it was possible to do so, to let them tell their own story. That, in turn, I found—I thought the whole way that the world works. For example, there was a Booker Prize short-listed book, which I read—a very short book indeed—about the whole story of Christ and the Crucifixion and so on but does not talk about the mother after the Crucifixion, and that's what the book was about. To me, there is a whole side to things. Where is the woman in the later pages of the Bible? Where is the mother? What is her role subsequently after the crucifixion? I think society still hasn't fully come to terms with that and to grips with that—not only our society, but certainly American society is a long way from it. Britain is nearer but, as I say, she has a Margaret Thatcher-type story, which is not really what we're talking about.

Ms Anne Yardley: I've interviewed a couple of the women that you had spoken to in *Making a Difference* and they have said to me that the way Parliament behaves and responds would be different if there were more women, if women were more representative in both houses. How do you respond to that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I haven't detailed any of my thoughts, but one thing that I'm aware of is that when I meet with groups of people, when I have lunches and so on, there is a difference if I'm having them predominantly with women. The greatest difference I find is the wider context that they will talk about. With men, there is a tendency that there are certain things that are seen as what men do—these are certain things to do with sport and certain things to do with hardline business and certain things to do with aggressive behaviour and things of this kind. But there are other aspects which might be regarded in some ways as feminine qualities, I, personally, am proud of what I consider my most feminine quality; that is, if I hear a particularly extraordinarily beautiful piece of music, it brings tears to my eyes without any doubt at all. I regard this as a highly desirable attribute that I have, which I regard as an attribute which women would be considered most likely to have. In politics, it's not seen as a great thing. The women who somehow in the end have been moderately admired are the kind of women who behave a bit more like men. It seems to me that what humanity needs ultimately are men who are more aware of what women do and women who are more aware of what men do. There was a man with psychological training who I talked to at one stage and he argued that so much of society things are engineered so that if you're a man, you should believe and you should do certain things—that's really the way to be. If you're a bit tough and can resist things, then this is a highly desirable quality, and if you don't, well, you're softer. I think it's true; I think it would make a difference. From my personal way of viewing the world, I think the Parliament would be the better for having more women, but at the same time the society structure makes a difference and the fact that women are the ones who, whatever else has happened, are the ones who have to give birth to their children.

Ms Anne Yardley: You've been very involved with the Australasian Study of Parliament Group and, in fact, have been the WA chapter chairman. What does this group do and why is it important?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It's an attempt to talk about all kinds of things about politics and the way politics are conducted—what are the trends, the sorts of issues that we're talking about now and numerous others? The Australasian Study of Parliament Group is an attempt to do that. The audience that it deals with, many of the things that we do, people are invited to attend. Often if we can get school students to come or university students to come, this is great. But it is also a group which involves the MPs themselves. The real issue of the Study of Parliament

Group is that the members themselves have to think about this. We can get panels of speakers to talk about the impact on Parliaments of certain things. We have some men expressing their views; we have women expressing their views. The whole essence of it is what Parliament can do and how effective Parliament can be.

We then have related issues, like the one I'm going to be chairing in a few days' time is about the former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. So we're educating people about the impact of the law courts, on what happens. We've had ones not only about the constitutional law courts, but we also had one about the ordinary law courts and what's the difference in the way trials are conducted, what's the difference in the structure of prosecutions and things of that kind. So it's an attempt to educate parliamentarians themselves, but in the process also the Harrys and me of the world, and also, students at significant levels. It overlaps strongly with law, but law is only part of the story. As I say, the previous one that I attended, we had Alannah MacTiernan, who had the experience of serving in the House of Representatives, the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly, and performing ministerial roles in state politics, but also being involved in federal politics. She talked about being a member and how effective the proceedings of the House of Representatives was. For example, the story that she gave us was the House of Representatives actual processes of dealing with things and their committee structure leaves a great deal to be desired. So it's those kinds of insights that the Australasian Study of Parliament Group is concerned about. It's concerned about seeing Parliament as an entity, how it's functioning and so on. Its membership includes lots of members themselves, but it also includes people like Harry and me, and it also includes students.

Ms Anne Yardley: One of the issues that I think you've looked at is hung Parliaments. Different people have different attitudes to whether a hung Parliament is workable or not, and I wonder what your opinion is there.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: There is no doubt that probably, ultimately, Parliament requires—[doorbell]. A hung Parliament is a recipe for considerable difficulties. As we've seen in the recent experiences in the House of Representatives, if the differences are sufficiently substantial, particularly within the government party itself, so that the Parliament is not only hung because the government and the opposition are so close to each other that it only needs one or two, but if there are

substantial differences within the government party at the same time, then that's when you really do have a problem. On the other hand, there's no question about it: in the right circumstances, a hung Parliament will function. The classic case of this was in 1942. When John Curtin became Prime Minister, he did not have a majority in his own right in the House of Representatives—he required the support of two Independents—and in the Senate, he had no majority at all; Labor had quite a poor representation in the Senate. He was able to govern successfully because of the circumstances at the time—the cooperation with which this was done, the Speaker's role was held by someone from the other side, which meant that the vote which would normally be lost because you're the Speaker who doesn't vote on things; the opposition provided the Speaker. That was a wartime thing; and, obviously, it's an extremely unusual circumstance. All I am saying is that there are the mechanisms within Parliament for it to function if the will is there, if the requirements are sufficiently good.

One clear way is when the opposition will sometimes provide someone who will sit in the chair, and while they are sitting in the chair, their vote is not available to their colleagues. There are ways and means in which a Parliament can work. The trouble is, the will needs to be there, and frequently it's not. But the biggest difficulties of all, in my opinion, occur as we have now, when there are major differences within the government party itself. It's not that the government and the opposition are so finely closed, but within the government itself, there is not the will, truly, to provide the authority that we need. So when you have that situation, I am not quite sure how it's dealt with. The potential conclusion, if you're not careful, is that the sort of remarks about the Italy of the Southern Hemisphere is that you could finish up with the situation, which we have had in parts of Europe, where unstable government is the order of the day. If we continue sufficiently along some of the lines we've seen now, that's what the consequence will be—that Parliament will become highly vulnerable. In that sense, it's obviously much easier for democracy to function better if one side or the other can win convincingly. What's happening at the time of doing this interview is a situation which is more of a concern to me than much of what I've seen before and exactly how this is going to work. Now, in theory, it could be resolved fairly easily if the right leader can somehow emerge, but whether this will happen, who knows?

Ms Anne Yardley: That's for the future, isn't it?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: Coming back to where we are—the role of committees. You made the point following the WA election in 2017 that you had concerns about the committee system functioning well with such a decimated Liberal Party. So what's the importance of committees and what threatens them?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: My experience so far is that possibly the committee system is not under quite as big a threat as I thought it might have been because of the one-sided nature of the Parliament, because the real issues still have to be fought out. Assisted suicide, if we call it that, or whatever it is —

Ms Anne Yardley: Voluntary euthanasia.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, voluntary euthanasia that the committee system is functioning with at the moment represents what the committee system can be—which is that it can be a place where parliamentarians spend time investigating a problem, liaising with the public, bringing in people from the public, raising the issues with them, bringing in experts and getting the experts' responses, and in which there is not necessarily an official government line or party line that is going to be followed. Voluntary euthanasia is one of those issues in which, whilst there may be a tendency for one party to be more strongly on one side than the other, at the same time the opportunity for individuals to play particular roles is very clear.

My colleague Harry Phillips, in particular, considers that the Parliament functions very much the better when the committee system is at its strongest and best. One of the things is the committee system deals both with the issue of parliamentarians and what they think about issues, but it also involves direct contact with the public on all kinds of issues, and these are issues which are not necessarily party based. The fact that some committees are chaired by people from the opposition and so on is, I think, an example of when it functions as it might do, it can be one of the strengths of Parliament—that they can investigate an issue, they can find out what the arguments are for and against; these can be weighed up. The party system is still there, but there are opportunities that it can be dealt with. The classic one that I can recall, not so much in committees but just the role of Parliament, was the abortion legislation which came in many years ago. There was a difference between the parties up to a point. The Liberal Party were more inclined to be

resistant to increased access to abortion. On the other hand, the Labor Party was more likely to agree to it. But, nevertheless, the differences overlapped quite significantly. The statement which always stays in my mind is a comment made by a Labor person, talking about an extremely conservative member of the Liberal Party, and saying, "I'm eternally grateful to him for the support he gave in enabling the abortion legislation to get through." In other words, people even went differently than what you might have expected from their basic personality. In the end, the parliamentary process let this happen. It meant that you had all sides involved.

If the parliamentarians are prepared to actually deal with the issues—and they made the very clear points that when a member votes on an issue at any time, there are certain factors which are key: What party did they belong to? What are their colleagues doing? That is a crucial aspect. But an equally crucial aspect is: What do your constituents think? What would those who vote for you think? Would they necessarily go the way of your party? Then the third issue is: what do you personally, in your own conscience, what do you feel? I feel that that sums up what happens when Parliament deals with an issue of that kind. You have the party basis, you have the constituency basis and you have the individual commitments, individual values, the systems of the member. When that functions best, that's what the committee system does. It gives access to all those different aspects. It gives access to the role of the parties and what they're doing, but it also gives a role to the expertise that members have acquired and it also gives a role to what the constituency wants.

I think when Parliament functions the best—and my colleague Harry Phillips in particular argues it functions best at this when the committee system really does function. The example that he gives when it didn't function as much was with Sir Charles Court. Sir Charles was full of extraordinarily important and significant ideas and was a great person, making certain things happen, but he would not have a great deal of time for committees, or even for Parliament itself in a sense. His view was that there was a right way of doing things and a wrong way of doing things and if the right people were in power, they'd do things in the right way. I think the argument for the committee system is that, whilst there are maybe occasionally leaders who can show the way and can lead their country or state, or whatever it is, the fact is that ultimately the most effective way is to make full use of Parliament from all those three angles: the party, the personal conscience or what the electorate wants.

Ms Anne Yardley: You mentioned the abortion debate just then. It's something I did want to ask you about—the more memorable moments maybe during your time involved with the Parliament. That was one that divided people. It was a very emotive kind of situation, wasn't it? What else do you recall of that time?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Hmm! I'm not completely clear as to which time. My feeling is, I suppose, the times that I differentiate in politics is when you have individuals who make a striking difference and who alter the way things have been heading. For me, the standout is the time that I became involved with the Parliament, the Parliament itself was developing in a very interesting fashion, the role of the Clerk and people of that kind were quite critical but the actual political scenario that we had was—well, there were two phases. There was one I call the Brand–Court phase in which you had Sir Charles Court as the driving force but you had David Brand as the hugely significant modifying, community safety almost person. Then you have the period when Sir Charles virtually ran the show, once Brand had left, and which I think was not one of the great periods for parliamentary government at all, because Sir Charles was convinced that what he was doing was going to be of particular importance for the future.

Then there was the transition in the period 1983, when Brian Burke and Mal Bryce and others came in. There you had a transformation of the line-up that had been before but very strong views on a different side. That, in turn, in the Western Australian Parliament, threw up the issue which is still there to this day—the issue of the upper house. The upper house is structured in such a way that the Labor Party has never had a majority in the upper house, ever. The only thing that one can say perhaps, the number one starting point in defence of the current situation, is that no Western Australian upper house has ever, in fact, brought a government down. They have made life difficult for them, but they've never brought them down.

Then you had Richard Court, who had some of the virtues of his father but a very different kind of person, and then you have the complications of the appearance of parties like One Nation. Among other things, of course, that's one of the issues which until recently has almost been a key issue of the federal Parliament. Now the issue has moved away from the actual government itself, but the minor parties and those kinds of groups. So Parliament undergoes these kinds of changes in the way that the electorate—and that in turn leads to my increasingly strong view that the electorate, as the years have gone by, perhaps even more than ever before,

what the electorate has come to do is to decide what it is about an administration that should lead to them being discarded and replaced by someone else, rather than the development of a strong new line of thought.

The Vietnam War had the effect of, I think, for a moment meaning that causes became crucial, and fit against questions like the development of the contraceptive pill, the role of women, the end of the White Australia policy and all these kinds of things. There was this real period in which society adapted itself and Parliament adapted itself to what there was. Unfortunately, in more recent years, the impetus of that somehow seems to have died and we now simply have a situation in which basically why should we vote out a particular government and vote another one in, rather than who is putting forward those things that we most want. Occasionally, that's when I think if Parliament can resort to issue by issue, they might get somewhere, as they have with same-sex marriage, for example; where notwithstanding all the difficulties they are having in other respects, that was handled. I still think if Parliament can function and use its committee system properly, and you can get sufficient agreement across the board, Parliament can play its role. But I'm not full of optimism just at the moment.

Ms Anne Yardley: [Chuckles] The upper house, you mentioned that just then. Is there a better way for the upper house to function or to be elected? Is that the issue—that it tends to be conservatively dominated?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The issue is really that from the one point of view, it can be argued that in a society which is becoming increasingly urban based and a society in which the significance of rural centres is shrinking, you might argue that the Legislative Council is extremely important in preventing everything becoming completely dominated by the three-quarters of the people who live in the south western corner of Western Australia and all the rest just have to fit in. The problem is that the distortion that occurs the other way is that they continue to have—I mean, the Agricultural Region, for example, is the classic one at the moment. It used to be the Mining and Pastoral Region, but the growth of population in the Mining and Pastoral Region has meant that that gets more like the sort of share that it should have now rather than an exaggerated one. But the Agricultural Region, for example, is massively over-represented at the present time. On the one hand, people living in certain rural areas will argue that without the protection that they get from vote weighting and things of this kind, that they'll simply be

overwhelmed and their views will be of no consequence at all. How we balance that out, I don't know.

The one thing that can be said for the Western Australian Legislative Council is that it never actually brought a government down, even though there were one or two times that it looked as though it might. But I think the Legislative Council issue is a very tricky one and it's not necessarily—for example, the way it's done now, the South West Region, which you might class some of it as what you would call rural society, is really not treated terribly differently from the metropolitan area, whereas the Agricultural Region, the old-style wheatbelt and so on, is now massively overrepresented. So the distortions move over time and move in different directions, but this has been a perennial issue, and it will go on being one. It certainly means that certain kinds of governments are always going to be within certain bounds of what they can do.

Ms Anne Yardley: There's been a great change of pace, too, over the years that you've been involved with the Parliament with technology changing—social media, the 24-hour news cycle. How does that affect what happens in the Parliament?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I suppose that the best answer I can give to that question is that the coming of social media has left me a bit out on a limb. I don't quite know where I am with it. Those who are involved in social media, which does not include me—there are in my own family, for example, people who are very involved in social media.

Ms Anne Yardley: But, nonetheless, politicians have to respond to social media.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: They have to respond. All I can say is that I'm hoping that whatever else happens, what we seem to have at the moment is that with social media and the rest, we also have compulsory voting. I'm hoping that it means that when it really comes to the crunch, not only is the impact on the result important, but the fact is that my opportunity in knowing what the result is likely to be is fairly significant. I think if you link compulsory voting with social media, then whatever you think about what's happening, you know what's happening. You know what views are being expressed, what the reactions are. If a politician is under fire, you will know whether the majority out there think that the politician deserves to be under fire, as was the case recently with a certain leader of the National Party for

example. It seems to me that at least we know what is happening and the parties can then react and respond to that.

Now, I don't think you necessarily need to be participating in it. The crucial thing in politics is to be aware from social media of where the society is going—what directions are taking place. That in turn will help to guide what might be done to produce a different consequence and, by whatever strategy is used, you can still achieve things. Our present federal government, notwithstanding the situation that it was in, in the end—not in the way that I would have originally suggested, but in the end—effectively, it dealt with the question of same-sex marriage. They found a process, a means through what was going forward. Once the community took charge, the issue was dealt with in no time.

So I'm hoping and trusting that one of the things about social media is however disturbing it may be, it also gives parties the opportunity to know which way the society is moving and how you adapt society to what's taking place. At the same time, you get all the information you possibly can from as many places as possible—not just from social media but also from people. For example, the medical person living near me who put me straight—he very helpfully said that he sees a great number of younger men who have got various issues with drug overdoses and all the rest. He said that there's not the slightest doubt that certain things are happening, like the increased use of drugs. But he also said there's a substantial reduction, in his opinion, taking place with alcohol and with smoking. So, in other words, things are not all going in the one direction. I think the crucial thing is to be aware and to learn what's going on. That sensational media, however disturbing it is, also gives you a bit of the story of where the problems really lie and what are the things that you need to focus on. For example, I don't think Australian governments need to lose a great deal of sweat about smoking at the moment. On the other hand, they should be very concerned about certain aspects of drugs and things of that kind. So I'm pessimistic about much of what social media does and some of the weird things that you sometimes see, but I am optimistic at least about our chance to be aware, to be informed. If we don't find out as much by ordinary polling as we used to, we may find out more by the means of social media.

Ms Anne Yardley: So some good and some bad.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes.

DAVID BLACK INTERVIEW

Ms Anne Yardley: Thank you, David.

[End of DavidBlack_6]

DavidBlack_7

Ms Anne Yardley: This is a further interview with Emeritus Professor David Black for the parliamentary history project. Today is Tuesday, 25 September 2018.

Before we go any further, I'd like to ask, David, about WA politics in the broad context. How do you put it in the broad context?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The question is whether this is something that arises because it really should be what arises, or whether it simply reflects the fact that there's the pond in which I found my feet and where I found the support and backing for me to do various things, but I think of Western Australian politics very much from the point of view of history, and I see it as one where it was not just particular forces that were important, but it was particular individuals. There were certain individuals who simply dominated for so much of the time, and perhaps my feeling is that in the context of where we are now, perhaps less so, but even so there are still individuals who make a huge difference to what the outcome is.

You start from the beginning with James Stirling, and then the comparable person over the time was John Forrest, whose huge influence in the period in Western Australia of self-government and the Western Australian decision to join the Federation and the part that he played in this—which, by the way, was a far more positive role from what I have understood from the history I studied than sometimes for which it is given credit. Then there was a somewhat curious individual in the middle, James Mitchell, who in many respects was not a dominant figure. He was a big fish in a very small pond, and he was not a great intellectual or anything of that kind, but he was passionately involved in politics. One of the things that I never quite got over in Western Australian politics was in 1933, when Mitchell was the Premier—he had been in opposition for some time against Phil Collier—and the image had grown up that Western Australian politics was a bit like a cricket match, where one side batted and one side bowled, but they actually had a great deal of time for each other.

In the 1933 election, which is a standout, the Mitchell government was absolutely annihilated because of the Depression. It had administered Western Australia for three years during the Depression. But also, at the same time, the Mitchell government was pushing for secession, and the Western Australian electorate

were all in favour of this. So you had the overwhelming vote for secession at the same time the Mitchell government was thrown out of office and Mitchell lost his own seat.

What is typical of Western Australian politics is what happened to Mitchell when he lost his seat. Two things happened. He was appointed the Governor of Western Australia, or Lieutenant-Governor of Western Australia, by his political opponent. The reason, I understand—I wrote a thesis on Collier, so I am aware of this—the reason he did this is because he knew that Mitchell would be struggling financially and that they were colleagues who had worked together, even though they were on opposite sides. So you had that personal factor.

Then of course you have a fairly mixed period, and then came the emergence of Charles Court. Charles Court is another John Forrest—a huge figure, given what he did for Western Australia, what he did for the iron ore, what he did for our connections with Japan, this latter is something I have become very involved with subsequently in my career. Sir Charles was not a great parliamentarian. Parliament was a necessary place in which things had to be done. He believed that decisions—executive decisions—were the way to go. In no sense did he ever try to bring down David Brand, who was the Premier ahead of him. He was perfectly prepared for Brand to be there, providing Sir Charles could be influencing events the way he wanted to. The North West Shelf became his ultimate ideal, and he reached that just before he eventually had to retire from politics.

Then, as he went, we had Brian Burke—another extraordinary figure; very dominating in his time. He struck deals with the business community and he transformed politics. Then he and Mal Bryce, served five years of Parliament and they both left. The irony is that I was invited to a centenary of the Bunbury high school at which Mal Bryce was one of the main hosts and he died of cancer a few hours before the meeting I was at.

Then, in more recent times, if we try to find some sort of parallel, there was Richard Court who played a significant role, and there were various others including Geoff Gallop. But the significant one from those sort of stories was Colin Barnett. Colin Barnett was a typical Western Australian politician. He tried to do everything himself. He had huge ideas, plucked them out of the air—his famous canal, which didn't come to anything on the one hand—and the huge election

victory which he had in 2013, was followed by the disastrous election defeat in 2017. Phil's story for me was that Western Australian leading politicians did not do things by halves. They were in a relatively small pond. They were big players. I think how Western Australia will be able to continue in that mould is extremely interesting.

The current Premier is not that kind of person. He is a significant person because of the way that the system has developed, but he is not that hugely dominating kind of figure. Perhaps that's an era of Western Australian history that we have seen and will pass by.

If you don't mind the analogy, I think of Western Australian politics and Western Australian history in a sense paralleling my own life. You know, I felt myself at times as a moderately big fish in a small pond, and I think Western Australia frequently behaved in exactly the same way. When other people saw it was a very small pond, they saw themselves as hugely important. Watching the reaction the other day to the success of the Eagles suggests that Western Australia is that kind of person. It's hugely parochial. A very large state, population jammed into one corner of it, and nothing was done by halves.

Ms Anne Yardley: Tell me about the significance of the blocking of supply, or the fact that a WA upper house has, as you've mentioned, not done this?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, for someone like me who was brought up with the principles of the way politics works, the idea of one side winning an election then the other side taking over always struck me as the way things should be. The blocking of supply seemed to be distorting the result, and this is because the upper houses, which were doing the blocking, were elected in a way which, with my fascination with statistics, they were massively gerrymandered, as they still are to this day. At this very time that we are talking, for example, the Agricultural Region has a hugely out-of-proportion membership of the upper house compared to the metropolitan area, where such a huge part of the population lives. Even in the rural areas there is the distortion between the south western corner on the one hand and the Agricultural Region on the other, and what used to be the Mining Region. The Mining Region's populations have grown, and so they are not as distorted now, but the Agricultural Region is more so than ever.

It all seemed to me, as a matter of principle, not the way that things should be. The idea of a government being decided by election, or—and this is one of the fascinations for me—by what happened with John Curtin, when he did not win an election which had made him Prime Minister. But in fact one of the other—the opposition Independents defected and moved across, and he came to power by a vote of the House of Representatives in the same way as we have only seen the other day in Western Australia with the departure of Malcolm Turnbull.

But the Curtin one was a classic case of democracy functioning the way that I felt democracy should function, in that if a government was overturned, it was overturned by a vote of the elected house, not overturned by the Senate. That's why I have been delighted that, generally speaking, these kinds of things have been avoided in most parts of Australian history, and they've certainly been avoided in Western Australia.

Ms Anne Yardley: We'll pause that for a second [interruption for a phone call].

Prof. DAVID BLACK: My whole conception is that the idea of the upper house, there is an argument for providing effective representation for certain kinds of people, but the fact is that when it comes to the crunch, the system that my original passion for politics came from was the system in the United Kingdom. What appealed to me about the system in the United Kingdom was that ultimately the House of Commons decided the issue—not absolute democracy by any means. In the House of Commons there were massive differentials between the way the seats were divided up; there was no necessary attempt at one vote, one value. But once the values had been established for those seats, then those were the things I was talking about. There was no upper house that could get in the way. The House of Lords intervened only in extremely unusual circumstances. It struck me that the best feature of Australian politics was where it acquired this.

That in itself leads me to a very interesting point which I haven't really had time to think enough about, but which I'd like to in the years I've got ahead of me still, is the difference it makes to have a constitutional structure where you have a High Court that can intervene in the way that our High Court does. I tended to think of the system that ultimately the voters ruled and they made the decisions, but I've realised that some of the things that have been happening in recent times, including the eligibility of people to be in Parliament and so on, that these are in

fact decisions which have been made in the courts. From someone coming from my background, I prefer the English concept that the Parliament is ultimately supreme.

I checked with the former Chief Justice only the other day, and he said that basically it is true that with very limited exceptions, the English Parliament is answerable to nobody, whereas the Australian Parliament is not, by any stretch of the imagination. That's not to say that I didn't welcome some of the things the High Court did do. I think that one of the strengths of the Australian system was that the Labor Party, which had difficulty making significant changes to the fundamental systems, got some major legislation through during World War II, and the High Court did not let that be thrown out. Starting from a very simple point, the fact that the Commonwealth government collects income tax, whereas, previously, before the Second World War, the state governments did; that decision was confirmed by the High Court, and it's been there ever since. Although I consider myself a Western Australian, I also consider that in the end I like the system of Australian Parliament as a whole and that that's the way the decisions are made, and I like to feel that the broader context ultimately prevails.

Ms Anne Yardley: Are you saying that we don't have a true separation of powers then between the court system—the High Court in this instance—and Parliament?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I think that the talk I heard only the other night from a former Chief Justice, I realised that the High Court has considerable significance in all sorts of ways. Some of them I strongly approve of. But there's no question that, for example, there are numerous things in which basically the High Court decides whether something that's been put onto a state is or is not in conflict with the principles of that state. That essentially is a decision made by the judiciary. That's why, from my perspective, the judiciary—I don't like to think of it being ultimately answerable, but I do like to think that in many respects they enable things to happen.

For example, one of the things I most admired about Australia was the refusal to ban the Communist Party. Before we say "hear, hear" to the Australian population for refusing to ban the Communist Party, we must also say that every judge of the High Court bar one refused the government the right to ban the Communist Party either. So the High Court acted absolutely as democratically as I would have

wanted. The Chief Justice was one way, all the rest were the other way, and the Australian people supported the decision they made. It's that kind of element which does appeal to me.

On the other hand, having the High Court playing around with whether someone is a dual citizen or not, whether they're aware that they're a dual citizen or not, I mean that, personally, I can see that straightaway. I mean, I don't think my wife knows to this day whether she still is entitled as a British subject or not, because when she came here she got an Australian passport, but what does that mean about her previous? My brother in the United States fought long and hard. He wanted to become an American citizen, but he refused to become one until he was allowed to keep his Australian citizenship as well.

So there are issues like that. I like to think that I spent a lot of time focused on Western Australia playing its own game, but I like to think that I saw Western Australia playing its game within the broader context of ultimately what parliamentary democracy is all about. I still think the starting points of it comes from the United Kingdom.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's look at closer to home, to some of the things you saw at the WA Parliament during your years there. You mentioned to me the march of People for Fair and Open Government.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes.

Ms Anne Yardley: What was that about?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Well, it was really an objection to the sort of government that developed after Sir Charles Court's demise and the Burke government. The feeling was that they were—interestingly, the party had linked itself with the business community in many ways. But the feeling was that what was happening was that the government was playing its own game for its own financial reasons. I find it all very ironic in a sense, because the party that had the support of the upper house and would on perhaps one or two occasions have actually blocked supply, was in fact so annoyed about what was happening with some of the things that the Burke government was doing and some of the relationships that were being struck up. So it seemed to me that there was a two-sided argument.

But the ironic feature of it all was that Bevan Lawrence, who was the driving force, and the Labor Party leader who was developing at the time was Carmen Lawrence—brother and sister—and the direct conflict between the two of them was a major factor. I always find the principles of these things—as I say, I have already started to analyse them and I can't go along very far with them, but the personalities played a role. That's one of the things about Western Australian politics, as I have already said. Politics is a lot to do with personalities, a lot to do with individuals, and in a state geographically large it was somehow nevertheless a relatively small pond. If you were a big fish, then you were a very big fish.

Ms Anne Yardley: One of the issues that I know divided politicians was the abortion debate—reviewing that bill. What do you recall of that period?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: It was an issue which had been lurking around for a long time, if I can use that expression. I'd never been fully clear as to what the rights and wrongs were. In my own case it had never been an issue that I had felt particularly dear to my heart because I was not aware of people who were in that much—I heard stories from my own grandmother, who had illegal operations to try and make sure after her husband left her that she didn't get landed with another child and all this sort of thing. So it wasn't an issue from that point of view that penetrated me, but it was an issue which if I was asked to give my view, my views were absolutely without hesitation that I think people had to have the rights in the end to determine these things, and it was not an absolute right. Part of my reason for that was because many women had found themselves pregnant in circumstances when they didn't intend to be and for which the male had disowned responsibility et cetera, et cetera. If I had to weigh that on the social scale, my own mother's view was the same—she felt that a woman should really have the significant degree of say.

When this issue came up, with the non-Labor government, my feeling was we're probably going to push for something much harder than that. A very fascinating debate developed which Harry Phillips, my colleague, and I both became involved in. I remember we went to a conference in Tasmania where we talked about it. For us, we came to the point: debating what really were the factors that should determine how a member of Parliament should vote? I remember this is one occasion when I really clarified my views quite clearly—that there were a number

of different reasons to determine how they would vote. One reason that would determine how they would vote would be the party that they belonged to, and what attitude was their political party taking. The second attribute was what would their electorate want—the actual people who were voting for them, irrespective of whether they are Labor or Liberal, those people? What did their electors want? Did they agree with them? The third one, and this is the one that in the end I would have felt the nearest to: was what did it mean in moral personal terms to the member concerned? I saw in the abortion debate in Western Australia all three. I saw all three stances put forward. I saw people coming from each of these grounds.

I saw debate in which each house produced a piece of legislation and we had the houses going in opposite directions to each other. Then there are just casual remarks that I heard. I don't know whether I should be using names or not, but I think I will. One of the apparently most conservative members on the government side was a man called Peter Foss, an Attorney General. He was a highly conservative man, extremely intelligent—one of the brightest people in my time in politics. One of the Labor women said, in my hearing, "For the rest of my life I will be eternally grateful to Peter Foss for the support he gave us in enabling our private member bill eventually to get through." In other words, there were people like Peter Foss who actually, in the end, went by their own judgement of what was right or wrong, not by the party, not by their electorate, but by their own assessment, even though it appeared to conflict with many other things. I just thought there's not a lot of that in Parliament, but that kind of issue, in a way, made me think that there are moments when the parliamentary system reigns supreme. The parliamentary system, in this instance, produced a variety of different things—two different bills going in opposite directions, considerable conflict, all the issues involved in what should confirm how a member voted, and in the end the parliamentarians made their decision and it's a decision which has stood the test of time and, from my perspective, was the right decision.

Ms Anne Yardley: Are there any other instances as emotive and as difficult as that that you can recall during your time?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: The other ones that were as emotive somehow I didn't seem as involved, because I was younger. There's not the slightest doubt that what I saw as the extremely right-wing issues that developed at the end of World War II, and particularly the banning of the Communist Party, these were issues which I was

actually quite stirred up by, but at an age when I was not directly involved in politics; I was just fascinated. One of the influences in this respect, which is interesting, was my father's influence, in that of all the film stars there ever were, he thought there was one who head and shoulders left all the others for dead, and that was a man called Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin, whatever else he did, was a massive supporter of individual rights. The film he made about the rise of Hitler, what was most significant was the way in which he portrayed what was wrong with Hitler and what should be done, and how he portrayed Mussolini. Mussolini was a man who was portrayed as, when he had a visitor come, he put himself on a very high chair so that he was dominating over him and all these things. Those sorts of issues actually influenced me quite a bit before I actually became directly involved in politics. When I am asked by anybody, I consider one of the greatest moments in Australian democratic history is when the electorate refused to ban the Communist Party. That was at the time of McCarthyism in the United States. It was an extraordinary decision.

My comment is that with a lot of these issues, I don't like to think what would happen now. I am much more dubious. I think there are so many crisscrossing factors now that I don't know whether what I saw as the essence of things would somehow survive.

One of the complications of this has been the question of the original Australians. The original Australians, on the one hand, they should be given substantial rights that they don't appear to have had until now because of the historical circumstances, and yet at the same time, what does that mean in the way that the politics of the country is conducted? I regard it probably as a personal weakness for myself that so much of my background to politics came from the UK and those fundamentals, and yet I regarded them as absolutely critical. Coming to terms with our failure to deal with the Indigenous Australians and how we should do that is one of the issues which I've never fully been able to take—except to say that in every respect I would love to see the Indigenous people get more and more recognition of the part they played in history. But the difficulty from my intellectual background is that they didn't play this part in a documented form, which the history that I do know about was. I feel that's one of the weaknesses for people like me—that we need more ways of actually discerning what's going on. If we had the equivalent of a Dickens, or someone like that, writing, I feel that it would be easier for me to be educated about those values.

Ms Anne Yardley: It's tempting to say you've got more time now, so let's get on to that. At the end of last year, you and Harry Phillips, your contracts were not renewed by the Parliament. How did you feel about that?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Intensely disappointed, because from my perspective—if I can start with a personal philosophy—my personal philosophy, which has been expressed by one or two people as well as me, is, “What did you most want in life?” to which the answer was, “I wanted to live on in my apartment”. Simply humanity, being part of it, is to me what everything is about. While I was in Parliament, I could deal with these two issues alongside of each other. I could deal with my personal position, my personal relationships, the fact, as I have no hesitation in saying, that I found the social meetings with other people, for me, the most successful always included some women. It's one of the reasons why I would love to see even greater representation of women in politics than we currently have at the present time. But while I was at Parliament, I could both deal with what had always been my central passions in life, and yet at the same time I could actually produce what looked like useful and meaningful productions, starting from the very beginning with the appearance of the story about Western Australia in 1990, and one by one, step by step, those kinds of things and being able to see these things recorded, seeing these things written down.

What Parliament gave me the opportunity to do was endorse the reason that—well, not the reason. When I was asked to fill in a form at Modern School—and I discovered my own form decades later—and when I was asked what I wanted to be in life, I wanted to be a statistician. I realised that my absolute passion for elections, but passion for a lot of other things, came from statistics. One thing statistics show are rises and falls. They show successes and failures. Analysing them is a starting point to the actual human side of these things. It doesn't sound very human based. When I first started and was counting how many Chevrolets and how many Buicks and how many Fords went past me on the road, that hasn't got any particular social feature, but out of that developed eventually elections, the whole business of the Communist Party referendum, how that was going to be handled and all the rest.

At Parliament I felt that I had the double—and of course I had wonderful colleagues. Harry Phillips and I worked together for years. Additionally, the original

driving force, Phil Pandal, was in a sense the whole reason for my existence in Parliament—the encouragement he gave me, the passion he had for it all and the values that he showed. One of the most striking examples of those values was when he voted against his party to get rid of capital punishment. His argument for that was the best argument I've ever heard. He said, "As a Catholic, I believe that all life is sacrosanct, and that applies to everybody, even including people who've been convicted of murder. It is still not our prerogative to put them to death." Someone whose views were like that, even though I disagreed with him at other times—like, he would have blocked supply. The fundamentals of the values he had, to me, were so critical.

The starting point, which I think is probably, if I had to identify the starting point, was the passion for history. That, I think, is where, really, I should always start everything. When someone gave me a book on the kings and queens of England, that set my life. History was going to be the thing that most passionately confirmed me. It was about people. It was about their relationship with each other. It was about rulers ruling and then dying, sometimes violently, sometimes just in the natural course of events. That's why, to this present day, every time we have one of these programs on the Crown and the evolution of the royal families, I'm fascinated by it, because of the way in which that can be done over time. One of, I suppose, my regrets about the United States is that it doesn't seem to have the kind of national qualities to me. It's a mishmash of all sorts of different peoples: the people who live in California on the one hand; the people who live in the Deep South on the other hand and so on. America always strikes me as a place that was populated by others—the British—but never quite was itself. It has developed very fascinatingly, whereas Britain somehow, and I suppose particularly London—the feeling that London kind of embodied Britain, the comment doesn't go down well with me when other people live in other parts of England.

So, from my perspective, working at Parliament meant that, well, for one, I was given a remuneration—not massive, but very handy—well into a stage of life when one would normally expect that you'd be well and truly tied up with the social service system and that sort of thing, and the chance to be where things actually happened and where I could see around me various books and various publications; the visible signs of what I'd been doing. That's why just very occasionally, like today, when someone presented me with a painting, I like to feel

that my departure from there is not only noticed by me but by some other people as well.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's look at what you're doing with your retirement. I'm wondering whether you've put your love of statistics into working out whether your football team is going to win or not, as they had quite a spectacular loss on the weekend.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I do play with my love of statistics for sport, but I don't do it all that much for Australian Rules football anymore. Australian Rules football is an entertaining game to watch. It's a high-scoring game, but its statistical make-up is not something that clicks easily with me. There is a much more potent one, which I now assemble statistics for every week and I have been doing for several years, which is not Australian Football, and that is the Premier League in the English soccer. That, to me, is my ultimate passion with statistics, because you play a certain number of games over a year and those games have a very tight frame; you can only get a limited number of goals most of the time. It goes back to my much earlier days. So while I enjoy Australian Rules football, and I have always enjoyed going to it, I don't find it statistically interesting. The tragedy for me—and I use the word “tragedy” almost accepting that it really was—was that the people were hiring out the rights to the English Premier League, at the end of each week, there was a one-hour program in which every goal in every match played in the Premier League was shown in between other comments. In other words, in one hour I could see the very best or worst of all the teams and all the goals. Then, in a bidding war between financial interests, the rights to this were lost by Foxtel, and we don't have Foxtel and I don't see it anymore. But I use that to sum up my love of statistics.

Cricket was, again, very much like that. I kept lots and lots of cricket records for a long time. Cricket, in the end, developed so many different forms of the game that in a sense it moved away from me a bit. The one that has remained intact has been soccer, and the English connection I think says something about me as well. That doesn't mean I don't love Australian Rules football. I have watched it and some of the big moments of Australian Rules football I will always remember. In fact, I will say to my dying days, the climax came in 1951 when West Perth was playing the best team there was, South Fremantle, and led by five goals at three-quarter time

and won by three points, my feelings when the siren went remain unique to this day [chuckles].

Ms Anne Yardley: We haven't talked very much about your family—let's do that, especially as you're retired now. You have your wife, Penny, your children and grandchildren. Where do they fit into your life?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Let me just deal with the different parts of the family. The starting point of my family were my parents and to some extent my two brothers, but my parents in particular. My daughter's comment that, "Dad, your problem is that you've always thought your parents were right in everything", in a sense was right. My parents' sense of values that education mattered. My mother, whose father walked out on them very early on, studied a great deal and did very well with universities and all this kind of thing, and my father became the leading piano teacher in what we have to accept is a very small pond. They loved reading, they loved education; they were just all the things that I would want. I was the kind of individual who was never in any conflict with them. The sad thing is that I lost them relatively soon. My father, in particular, died of a heart attack before he was 70, and my mother's last years were not all that great anyway.

Then there's my marriage to my wife, who was learning the piano from my father when I first met her. We are very different personalities, which is why we got married. To this day I accept that the marriage guidance counsellor, who was a former student of mine from Curtin, who said to me, "The great problem is that people marry to fill the gap in their own lives and spend the rest of their lives trying to live with someone different." One other friend of mine said, "That's all very true. Providing there is a point of intersection somewhere, you can get by with the rest." So, I mean, I've been married for well over 50 years now and the only person who probably can see my weaknesses is my wife [chuckles]. I think I would be at times a slightly irritating person in that I would not respond easily to doing things drastically or revolutionarily.

Then there's the children and, of course, they matter. All three of them education-wise did extremely well. From that point of view, I find that really pleasing. My daughter has been very successful in law and is very interested in politics. My eldest son did all kinds of things, including law, including commerce and others. My younger son was the one who after being a vet for many years has become a

dermatologist. Two of the three of them are in successful marriages and families which have stayed together. The ones who has gone to live in Adelaide, the medical ones, are still relatively young, but my daughter's two are older and I've got to know them a bit.

The biggest problem is my eldest one, where the marriage broke up and where what we have is a mixed up combination of one parent in each house and various children in either house at different times. From that point of view, the mistake that they have made, which I don't mind putting on the record, in my opinion, is going for homeschooling; whereas, I think myself, if I can give my personal reason on this, to this day, we have a group of us who went to Perth Modern School together who meet four times a year at various times. Why do we meet? Because we have known each other since we were at school together. The trouble with homeschooling is you don't develop those kinds of friendships.

So I think with my family life there are things I would like better; but, on the other hand, everyone in the family is hugely important to me, very close to me and it means a great deal. I'm very glad that at least one of them was a woman; and, as I've tried to suggest in politics, I think politics would be the better not to be dominated by women, but just to have rather more of them.

Ms Anne Yardley: [Chuckles] What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: If I was to be absolutely honest, knowing what happens, how can we make it so the same thing will happen again.

Ms Anne Yardley: [Laughs]

Prof. DAVID BLACK: You know, the things that I did, each one of them. I enjoyed school. I was very fortunate that at the Claremont school I went to I had marvellous primary school teachers. I had the experience of going to Modern School where the teaching wasn't all that great but where the fellow students were terribly—the school itself had all kinds of traditions. It didn't give enough, say, to women and so on. Then becoming a schoolteacher, for someone like me, was valuable because it meant I had to learn to relate to people. I can tend to close in on myself a bit, and I had to relate to them in school teaching. School teaching, in turn, opened up other

opportunities going into university, and the opportunity to take up the parliamentary history. What I would say to myself is that the sort of people that I encountered along the way and the help they gave me, I was extraordinarily fortunate, and I would not actually ask for a second life because I doubt if I could get as many things to work in my favour as did. So the greatest single regret that I have with my career at Parliament, by so far it doesn't matter, is when it stopped [chuckles].

Ms Anne Yardley: We've talked about a lot of things over the last few weeks. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you'd like to add?

Prof. DAVID BLACK: I'd like the opportunity to think about that and to say something to you before you finally sign, seal and deliver this whole thing off, so give me a week or two to see if there's something that I think we should have talked about. But not really.

Ms Anne Yardley: Let's revisit that.

Prof. DAVID BLACK: Yes, that's what I reckon.

Ms Anne Yardley: Good.

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