

THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

J S BATTYE LIBRARY OF WEST AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
Oral History Programme

Verbatim transcript of an interview with

JOHN TRESIZE TONKIN

STATE POLITICS AND PERSONALITIES

Access: Open

Interviewer:	Phillip Pental
Dates of interview:	May 1972 and March 1973
Reference number:	OH 2642
Duration:	2 x 60 tapes
Copyright:	Phillip Pental

The Library Board of WA



3 1111 01781350 0

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page No.

TAPE ONE SIDE A

1

A G R Hawke
- personality
- leader of ALP
- first class leader
Alex McCallum
Three Musketeers
Philip Collier

TAPE ONE SIDE B

9

J Curtin
Philip Collier
Alex McCallum

TAPE TWO SIDE A

14

John Tonkin
Political career
- More power to Executive Government
- backbencher
- uniform taxation
- regional governments
Colourful people

TAPE TWO SIDE B

20

War
Military installations and equipment
A G R Hawke
Trade mission

J.T. Tonkin -- 17 May, 1972 TAPE 1A

TONKIN We were calling applications in Western Australia for an organiser and there was a fair number of applicants and McCallum was detailed to interview some of them. His report to us was that Hawke was outstanding.

PP When you say "us" is this the State Executive ?

TONKIN Yes. For the reason that he had an excellent presentation. He was a very good speaker, a very forceful speaker, and a clear speaker who marshalled his ideas particularly well. He had a very good personality and nice easy, friendly approach, particularly friendly. Those were the criteria which, I think, influenced the Trades Hall in making a selection.

I met him for the first time when he came to Hamel and he said he had been sent down to make a starting point there because they knew of my interest in politics. I had stood in 1927 for the Sussex seat at a time when I was teaching down at a place then called 'Nuwellingup' [unclear] and which subsequently became known as Forest Grove. Because I had been a candidate and the party was aware of my interest in politics they sent him down to contact me. He worked around the Waroona and Hamel districts in forming an ALP Branch and had a very good response.

PP You were the chap to whom he came ?

TONKIN That's right.

PP Can you recollect ... you were both pretty much the same age --

TONKIN He was a year or two older.

PP -- and you both had similar interests. What were your impressions of him ?

TONKIN I was newly married. I hadn't been married more than a year or so. He fitted in particularly well in my home. My wife liked him right from the outset as I did.

PP He stayed with you ?

¹In 1927 'Nuwellingup' [unclear] was called Forest Grove according to the Western Australia Post Office Directory 1927, p 230 [EM&C].

TONKIN Yes. We both took very kindly to him straight away and a friendship was commenced then which has developed over the years because we both got into Parliament on the same day actually in 1933. He beat Mitchell and I beat Hubert Parker. So my reaction was that he was particularly well-fitted to the task and I couldn't think of anybody with better attributes than he had for that job.

PP What were the things about him that impressed you ?

TONKIN He was so keen to further the interests of the Labor movement. He realised that his job was to get around and get members. He was full of energy and vitality and with this very easy and friendly approach it was not difficult for him to get the confidence of people whom he approached.

PP On these first occasions did you talk much about ideological things ?

TONKIN We talked about his experience in South Australia and how he came to lose his seat. He told me some stories about people who came up to him during the election day. He told me about one old woman who said to him, "Mr Hawke, I thought so much of you that I gave you three votes." There were three candidates and she gave him the three votes. So he said he didn't disillusion her. This is typical of him: he didn't tell her that that was no good to him; he let her think that she had voted for him.

Then we talked about the ideals of the Labor movement. We were both anxious to get into Parliament. He had been in; I hadn't, but I had tried; and we talked about taking advantage of any opportunity which might come forward subsequently.

PP In your own mind now can you see what he physically looked like ?

TONKIN Much the same as he continued to look later on. He was never very robust in build. He was tall, of course, and of very slim build. I think it is a characteristic of the Hawke family that they are of slim build. I can't remember him as anything else but being very slim.

PP You must have assessed him as you got to know him and he must have assessed you, too. As far as your assessment of him goes, can you weigh up some of the ... you have already said he was a forceful speaker, but on the other hand were there things where you, say, felt if only he would polish up his appeal, he is weak in this area, or he is ... could you try and give a balanced opinion --

TONKIN I couldn't see any weaknesses in him actually. His judgment always appeared to me to be very sound. He was able to make up his mind reasonably quickly and quite firmly. I had associations with him afterwards when we got into

Parliament and we sat together and we often conversed about the difficulties of the job and what we aimed to do. He got into the Ministry before I did but we remained firm friends all the way through. When Mr Wise resigned from the party and he became the leader I became his deputy so we were pretty close together all the way through.

Whilst I have no proof of this, it has always been my firm belief that he stepped down earlier than he would have done in order to give me a chance. That is my belief.

PP He has never said or --

TONKIN Not a word, but rightly or wrongly I have come to that conclusion. There hasn't been a suggestion or a single word from any quarter which would justify my thinking that but I can't help thinking it.

PP After all you do know him intimately and you have done for 40 years.

TONKIN That is it. This is important. We had our disagreements on the line we ought to follow but not serious disagreements, never any acrimony at all, never a cross word - not one in the whole of the years of our association. Now that is most unusual for fellows in politics where the cut and thrust is pretty tough sometimes and you perhaps have a big difference of opinion on the line you ought to follow. But with Bert Hawke and myself, never once over all those years of association was there suggestion or any anger or animosity of any kind. We were always on the friendliest of terms. And I say I came to the conclusion ... I could be quite wrong; he might have stepped down because he felt he was of an age when he should do so and had no reason to continue. But I have always had it in my mind that he deliberately stepped down to give me my chance, realising that I was coming up in years too and if I didn't soon get a chance I'd miss out altogether. That is what I think about it.

PP I have heard from another source who knew him in these days that he had a pretty profound effect particularly on the young members - and I presume when this person said "young" he meant perhaps the blokes in their late teens or early 20s; that Hawke, having come over here - he was a bloke perhaps more mature beyond his years - had quite a fantastic impact on young people in the Labor movement.

TONKIN He did, because that was a section of people to whom he was attracted for a special reason because of his interest in the party's development and he was an organiser. I think he felt that he had to work on the younger people to get any results. I think that was one of the reasons why he went to them and with his easy personality he was able to accomplish quite a lot in that way.

J T TONKIN

PP How would you assess his capacity for leadership in these times ?

TONKIN First class. His capacity for leadership was first class because of his sound judgment and his ability to sort of get fellows to follow him because of the soundness of his judgment. The only time that he experienced any difficulty at all... and this always happens; I suppose it is happening behind by back too -

PP With young members ?

TONKIN Yes, young members looking for their opportunity. Unless you get some room at the top you can't come up you see. So, when he was getting up around the 70 mark, fairly close to it, there was a suggestion that he wasn't pulling his weight. He was not one to do a lot of social work. I think I do far more as Premier than ever he did as leader. As a matter of fact much of the work that he should have done as leader fell onto my shoulders as deputy leader because he wouldn't do it.

PP Why ?

TONKIN He just had the disinclination to go to these functions. Firstly he is practically a teetotaler so cocktail parties had no appeal. Well, cocktail parties form a very large proportion of the functions which the leader is expected to attend. I get two or three a week. He wouldn't go so I had to go when we were in Opposition. The same thing applied in Government. He had a reluctance then to attend a lot of functions which I think should have been his and I had to attend them. It was his failure to assume full responsibility in that field, I think, which stemmed a movement to get him to retire. There was such a movement. As a matter of fact some of the fellows came to me and suggested that it was time he got out. I said, "Well I have got to tell the boss about this", so I went to him and I told him what was on. He said, "Send them to me".

PP Did they go ?

TONKIN No.

PP Now you know what to do, don't you. It is a bit of good advice actually. You mentioned earlier Alex McCallum reported -

TONKIN Alex made the final selection. The reason for that was this: the Parliamentary Labor Party was paying a large proportion of the cost of the salary of the organiser and so they wanted a say in who would do the job and McCallum was the man deputed by the party to make the selection.

PP Was there anywhere in this early stage when you were looking for someone and you were looking for an organiser and a bloke who had the capacity to do various different activities ... was one of these activities writing ?

TONKIN Yes, it was. He was expected to write a column. I think it was for "The Worker" then. I wouldn't be sure about that but he had to write a column and he did this regularly and it was shown that he had a lot of capacity in that field. Although I remember Arthur Wilson saying with regard to this, "All it is is scissors and paste". What he meant was that he was taking slabs of stuff that he had read in other papers and putting it together in an article. I didn't go along with that at all.

PP I have read some of them and I am just trying to get somebody's [opinion]... because he alternated with Curtin; when Curtin wasn't there he would write and vice versa. Somebody said to me that Walter Murdoch had once suggested to Hawke that he should have his articles printed in a book form. Obviously he thought a lot of him as a writer.

TONKIN I thought they were pretty good articles myself but I am just telling you what Arthur Wilson's comment was.

PP So you were looking for someone who could write as well as a lot of other things as well ?

TONKIN That's right. That was one of the attributes they wanted, someone who could advance the party's fortunes by publicity, expressing points of view on various things.

PP Coming to the period when you, Frank Wise and Hawke were elected on the same day --

TONKIN And we sat together on the same bench.

PP Were you aware - and I have it on quite good authority - that you were known as the Three Musketeers ?

TONKIN Yes.

PP Can you tell me what you do know about that ?

TONKIN I think it stemmed from the fact that we were all young men full of energy, full of ideas and anxious to go places. Sitting together we would be discussing the problems of the day and I think we were a real thorn in the side of the Government because you had along the front bench Troy, McCallum, Willcock, Collier and Munsie all well up in years and we weren't to be kept down. We were prodding all the time and always on the warpath and the same thing in the Caucus.

PP I have here that Collier in fact was often heard to say, "How can I keep these young blokes quiet ?"

J T TONKIN

TONKIN That is right. He did, too. I remember Collier saying one night, "Now I have started something I can't stop", and he picked his papers up and went out.

PP This was in the House ?

TONKIN This was in the House during a debate. I forget now what the question was but he sent word around, "You boys can have a go." This was an invitation to us because when you are sitting behind the Government you don't get many chances like that.

PP You mean to have a go, to attack Government or something like that ?

TONKIN Yes, on the question under discussion. So he got the Whip to go around and to say to the members, "If you want to talk on this you can". Of course it was like opening the floodgates and so after this got going one after the other of our fellows got up and then Collier sent the Whip around to tell us to stop. We said, "Go and tell him to jump in the lake; others have had their chance; we are going to have our chance." So when this got back to him he said, "Looks as if I have started something I can't stop" and he picked up his papers and went out. He left us to it.

PP And you had your go after all.

TONKIN We had a go. My word we did.

PP Did the three of you hang about together particularly ?

TONKIN We were always pretty much together. Because sitting together in the House in the cross-bench - we occupied the middle seats in the cross-bench you see - we were always talking together and making plans about what we were going to do and, I suppose, vying with one another too as to how we were going to get on.

PP On that point where you say you were making plans and so on, I know you don't mean that you were plotting against the party or anything of that sort -

TONKIN No, not at all.

PP -- but I am interested in that obviously you were three keen young blokes and like all young people, I suppose, you think the older people don't really know what they are doing.

TONKIN We have them up there now. You see them and Hawke were concerned, what sort of things did you have in mind ? What sort of things motivated you or inspired you and sent you into a huddle as if to say, "We have to do something about this"?

TONKIN Unemployment was bad at the time. It was the depression period and most of the discussions in Caucus were about dissatisfaction with the actions of the Minister for Employment, that was Kenneally, and some of the things that were being done about sustenance and those kinds of things. This was causing us a lot of worry in the constituencies because so many people were out of work and this comprised most of the work we had to do - looking after people in difficult circumstances, getting social services for them, trying to find them work, trying to get an extension of work and when their sustenance was cut out because they wouldn't go to the bush, trying to get it reinstated and all these sorts of things. We would be discussing these and talking about deputations to the Minister, who was going to have a deputation and when the deputation would take place. This was the sort of thing that was going on all the time.

PP But it was to bring legitimate pressure on the Government.

TONKIN That is right - on the Government to change its policy.

PP As I call a particular name - and many of them you have mentioned anyway so far - could you try and paint a brief portrait of each man in as long a term as you think is necessary. I have got about a dozen. Collier is the first.

TONKIN Collier was the best debater I had ever heard. Collier used to read a lot and he had a wonderful vocabulary and therefore a very good command of the language. He could be brutal and incisive when he was speaking. I heard him take Keenan to task one night for criticising me on my maiden speech when I moved the address-in-reply when I came in. He cut Keenan to pieces and he had him almost cowering from the force of his attack.

I have never heard anyone who could marshal his facts better and was able to select the salient points in an argument and ram them home and I throw them all in. I have heard some of the top men in politics over the years: Curtin who was a particularly good speaker; Jimmy Scullen, a particularly good speaker; and Ben Chifley, but I haven't heard anyone to compare with Collier as far as debating was concerned. Not straight-out speaking from the platform. He was quite good at that too but he shone in debate, being able to pick out the important points.

I remember one night I was sitting beside him. Collier and I were very friendly. I was sitting alongside him one night in the House and Marshall was speaking on finance - Douglas Credit theory under Keyne's theory. Over on the other side was R.S. Sampson, proprietor of a number of newspapers and worth a lot of money. Collier said to me, "Listen to Marshall. He knows all about finance and hasn't got two bob.

There's Sampson over there, knows nothing about finance and is worth a quarter of a million." [laughter] That is typical of the way he would sum a situation up. So, about three or four minutes after saying that to me he interjected on Marshall "What do you know about finance ?" That was the end of Marshall. He spoke for about another 30 seconds and then sat down.

PP I will interrupt the list that I have. This is another question I had further down. Did Collier, to your way of thinking, retire prematurely because --

TONKIN He had no option.

PP Yes, but this is what I was getting at. Curtin is alleged to have said his one problem was that he could never relax and his problem of drink compounded all this. Was his resignation tied in with this personal problem or was that just one of a number of things ?

TONKIN His resignation was entirely due to the pressure in the Caucus on the Ministers.

PP On the Ministers ?

TONKIN Yes, saying "How long are you going to put up with this ?" because there would be meeting after meeting of the Cabinet when he wasn't present.

PP But was this due to his problem of drink or --

TONKIN Yes, it was due entirely to his problem of drink.

PP You say you knew him well. From all accounts he was a great leader --

TONKIN He was a great leader. We fought an election and won it with no other slogan than "Keep Collier Premier".

PP Would you go along with that, that his problem was that he couldn't relax ?

TONKIN He could relax all right. My word he could.

[END OF TAPE 1A]

Verbatim Transcripts of Interview tapes

J.T. Tonkin - Tape 1B

TONKIN He used to go out with Munsie and Troy. They used to go down to the Celtic Club and play down there. That's relaxing.

PP That's fair enough. It is just that I did read somewhere that this is what Curtin said.

TONKIN Curtin couldn't relax. He, himself couldn't relax. Curtin said to me once, "John, after you get into a barney in the House, can you go to sleep?" I said, "Jack, I go to sleep in the bus as soon as I get into it outside Kings Park." In those days we had no motor cars and if we sat after 11 o'clock it was a question of getting up and getting a bus home. As soon as I got on the metro bus I would go up to the back seat and I would go to sleep and I wouldn't wake up until I got over the traffic bridge. I said, "No, it is no problem with me Jack. I forget it when I walk out the front door". He said, "Oh God! I wish I could do that". He said, "It takes me hours to unwind". That was the difference.

PP That was Curtin ?

TONKIN That was Curtin himself. That is how tense he was; he couldn't relax.

I would say that didn't apply to Collier. Collier was responsible, or partly responsible, for my not going into Federal politics because he always used to say to me - and he said it just a day or two before he died too - "Don't you forsake State politics for Federal politics; they are too uncertain." He said, "In State politics it is much safer". He said, "I've had plenty of opportunities to go into Federal politics". I said, "I know." He said, "I turned them all down." He would have made a name for himself in Federal politics if he could have got on top of the drink weakness, but he wouldn't go. Well, look at the number of times we have been in Government in Federal Parliament, so for a man who wants to be a Minister it was pretty sound advice. When I went to see him in hospital just before he died he said to me, "John, don't you leave State politics; that's the best place if you want to get on."

So when the time came subsequently, when Curtin died and Frank Ford came over, he was told that I was the man who ought to succeed Curtin in his seat.

PP Who said this ?

TONKIN Frank Ford. When Curtin died Frank Ford became acting Prime Minister --

PP That's right. It was just for a week or so.

TONKIN In the interests of the party he made a special trip to Western Australia to induce me to resign my seat in the State Parliament to stand for the Curtin seat.

PP Why ? Did you know him ?

TONKIN I was John Curtin's campaigner and I was Minister for Education in the Willcock Government.

PP Did Ford know you ?

TONKIN He didn't know me but a number of members in the Eastern States did, and they told him so he told me that I was the man that he should get to go into Federal politics.

PP And why did you refuse ? Because of Collier's advice?

TONKIN Partly because of Collier's advice and partly because I had a young family, and travelling in those days was not what it is today. It used to take the whole day to go from Adelaide to Perth on the DC3s. I had had some experience of this and I didn't like the idea of being over there for a whole week when Parliament was sitting and my wife with a young family being here. I had Collier's advice in mind at the same time. I went to our Government here and I said to the Cabinet, "I have been asked to stand for Curtin's seat. In the interests of the party what should I do ?" I said, "I have my own opinion but I'll be guided by the decision of Cabinet." They talked it over, and then Willcock said to me, "You can please yourself. This is a matter in which you should make up your own mind." So I said there and then, "If I am going to please myself, I am not going to stand" and Beazley then got the selection.

PP And you have no regrets ?

TONKIN None at all.

PP While we are on Collier there is one further matter which arises as a result of Cabinet allowing me to have access to some of those files over the Mitchell appointment. Was this one of the things that might have been, over a long period of time, a catalyst ?

TONKIN I wouldn't think so.

PP It was separated by three years or so; I realise this.

TONKIN Towards the finish he wasn't in the House half the time. He wouldn't attend a Caucus meeting, and they knew why. You can't cover that sort of thing up all the time. The

young fellows got dissatisfied about it. You could just imagine, if I were that way now, what would be happening in the Caucus. They would be talking amongst themselves and saying, "How long are you going to put up with this?" And so this was going on amongst Ministers, collectively and individually. We would be saying to one first and then the other, "Aren't you fellows going to do something about this; it is your responsibility; aren't you going to do something?"

PP The strange part about it all is that it appears that while people were genuinely saying, "He's got to go," they were saying it with great reluctance --

TONKIN This is right.

PP -- because they respected him so much.

TONKIN That is it. But they felt that it was against the interests of the party that he should remain there in the condition he was. Before this boiled up he was sent on a trip to New Zealand to try to get him off what he was doing and to see if it could correct the situation. We all went along with that. But when he came back he nearly fell off the ship. So that was the end of it.

PP Fair enough, you have answered it, but it was not just young people in the party, it was pretty well a general thing.

TONKIN It was realised, and, of course, it took some time to get the Ministers to move because of their close association with him and their reluctance to do anything.

PP How did people like yourself and Hawke feel? It was a dilemma really.

TONKIN That's right. We hesitated but we realised it was doing us no good and it was jeopardising the chances of some of the members to be returned. We had gone a long way past the stage of "Keep Collier Premier". It would have been farcical to put that up again under the circumstances.

PP Could I pass on then to McCallum?

TONKIN McCallum was regarded as a very strong man. He had a lot of weaknesses actually. He was a poor judge of men. He had fellows around him who shouldn't have been around him at all and he was listening to them because of his poor judgment of them.

I can remember Sleeman and I went to see him one day over the Fremantle traffic bridge when it was far too small to handle the traffic then and we wanted him to build a new bridge. Firstly they wanted to stop us from seeing him. I think it was Munt who was his under-secretary and he said,

"The Minister is not in." We said, "But we saw him go in." He said, "Oh! I'd better check." So when he came out he said, "All right the Minister will see you." When we went in McCallum said to us, "It's no good your worrying about another traffic bridge. The way this State is going a small bridge with a handrail would be all we will need." Within the week he had resigned his job and gone over as commissioner of the bank.

He was a forceful debater and a very good industrialist but he was weak in some respects. He was a very windy sort of fellow, pessimistic. He came out to North Fremantle to help me with my campaign when I got in in 1933. It is practice for the candidate always to speak first, and then for the supporting speaker to build him up afterwards. He asked me if I would let him talk first because he wanted to go to a meeting at South Fremantle. We only had a majority of 2 000 or 3 000.

PP Did Hawke help you when you ... in 1930 --

TONKIN Hawke helped me when I stood for Murray-Wellington. He came down to a place called Coolup, I remember, and spoke for me down there.

PP Where were you at the time? Still at Hamel?

TONKIN I had gone from Hamel down to Palgarup. I was teaching at a school at Palgarup.

[Tape inaudible]

PP From the campaign point of view he definitely did help you?

TONKIN Oh! yes, he came down to help me. He supported me as a supporting speaker. I remember him speaking one place at Coolup.

PP This was the 1930 campaign?

TONKIN The one I stood for Murray-Wellington.

PP Did he work with you much?

TONKIN Yes. He did some organising around the district too.

PP That would have been a fairly hopeless --

TONKIN We thought we were going to win it. We had every reason to think that too. It was still a voluntary poll, not compulsory. At the previous election, when WJ George stood, he only scraped home from a fellow called Butler by a handful of votes, the Labor candidate. This made us feel that when

George pulled out and was no longer the candidate, and the margin was so small, that we could win it. What we didn't bargain on was that there were five candidates instead of two the next time, each with his own separate organisation, and I think there was a 97 per cent poll in a voluntary election. They came out from everywhere. I got hundreds of votes more than I thought I would have to get to win it and I got beaten by 1 000.

PP So then it was three years later --

TONKIN Three years afterwards I stood for North East Fremantle and won it.

[END OF TAPE 1B]

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW TAPE

Tape 2 A - J.T. Tonkin, 29.3.73

PP In 40 years in politics you would have seen a big movement in powers and responsibilities and so on from the State to the Federal sphere.

TONKIN Yes, and also from the Parliament to the Executive; less and less power in the hands of the members, more and more power in Executive Government.

PP Could you give examples of that ?

TONKIN This is brought about relying more and more upon regulations which are made to assist administration, rather than upon the Statutes themselves. When I first came in most of the powers which the government intended to exercise were spelt out in the legislation being introduced from time to time. But over the years there has been a tendency to be less specific in the legislation and to confer the power to make regulations which become operative straight away, and the Parliament can only move to disallow when it meets. If regulations are issued during the period Parliament is in recess, then it means they operate for quite a time. And then the Government having made the regulations, it can use its majority to prevent any disallowance of those regulations. So in effect the Government is making the law and not the Parliament.

PP You are saying that this obviously isn't a good thing.

TONKIN It's not a good thing. I have complained about it. That's one of the reasons why I was so keen to have an Ombudsman established in Western Australia because I considered that it gave the people the opportunity to apply to an individual who was a servant of the Parliament rather than the Government, and that the Ombudsman would be able to demand from the Government information which no member of Parliament could obtain if the Government wasn't prepared to give it to him.

PP Bearing in mind Mr Williams' speech yesterday in the Council which was much the same that you are talking about, do you think that you had more influence or power when you were a backbencher than a backbencher would have today ?

TONKIN Very definitely, no question about that.

PP Is this sort of thing inevitable then, or do you think there is some way in which it could be arrested ?

TONKIN I think it's a development which is taking place in all States and in the Federal sphere, because of the increasing desire on the part of Governments to be more in control than they were previously and the more they get in control the less Parliament is in control. I think it has been a natural tendency which has been developed irrespective of the party in power.

PP Bearing in mind that you were something of a rebel as a backbencher --

TONKIN Yes, that's right.

PP -- and there were many young... of your age who came in, does this make you feel a little bit sorry for the backbencher who comes in today, and who may always remain a backbencher ?

TONKIN It does, because whilst they have pretty well the same freedom of speech - although not quite the same, because even the Standing Orders have been altered during the time that I have been in Parliament to restrict private members in the time they can devote to speaking in the House. You see, once their time was practically unlimited. The Standing Orders have been altered to fix a maximum time that they can use in speaking on any debate, and the maximum time they can devote to discussion in Committee on a Bill. Well now, there were no such limits when I first came into Parliament so there was much more freedom on the part of the individual member.

PP Turning then along the same lines to the Federal sphere, in that 40 years you will have seen the movement of power to the Federal body.

TONKIN That's right.

PP This has happened under all Governments under all shades of political opinion.

TONKIN Yes.

PP To what extent does this alarm you and if it does, what is there open for people to do to at least draw the line somewhere or to arrest the trend ?

TONKIN I think it's against the best interests of democracy because the basic principle of democracy is that all the people should have a voice. As they can't all go to Parliament then you have a system whereby, at regular periods, they are able to elect a representative who can speak for them. Therefore, in my view, that representative should have

complete freedom and should not be restricted in any way in his endeavours to properly represent the people for whom he is elected.

Over the years this freedom has been curtailed more and more in both the State and the Federal sphere. I think the same causes are responsible for the change which has been more accelerated in the Federal sphere than it has in the State. It's the same type of alteration, but has been more accelerated in the Federal sphere because it's the growth of power. People who find themselves in possession of power are encouraged to extend their power. You get empire building, for example, amongst departments where people who get to be head of a department are aiming to enlarge it because of the feeling of the use of power and that desire which they get to have more power.

I think that is the force, the motivating force that is responsible for the altered situation with regard to more and more power to the Executive, and less and less power in the hands of Parliament.

PP How seriously then would you view that, particularly since uniform taxation which is 30 years, and since then there has been that gradual removal ... perhaps not removal of power from the State, but certainly the other way around. The Federal Government has been able to build up its powers. Do you believe that it is potentially detrimental to the States ?

TONKIN I do, but the whole operation is simple to follow. The control of the purse is the main thing in the whole of this, because he who controls the purse controls all the other things ultimately. When the States were able to raise their own taxation, then they had the opportunity of expanding their services and they were in more control. When we gave up our rights to income tax we lost the right to a really worthwhile growth tax and so, as the growth of the States developed, the States didn't have the resources to meet that growth and they became more and more dependent upon the Commonwealth.

The tendency then developed that in the absence of getting adequate funds from the Commonwealth the States were disposed to hand to the Commonwealth certain administrative responsibilities, in order to relieve themselves of doing things where they had inadequate funds to do them. That situation confronts all the States now in the readiness with which the Premiers of Victoria and I believe South Australia, and I know for sure also New South Wales, have offered to the Commonwealth that they could take over the railways, because the railways are a heavy burden on the States' budgets.

You get a similar move with regard to tertiary education. The Commonwealth is prepared to shoulder the full cost of tertiary education, both in the university and in the

technical colleges. It will enable the students to go in without paying any fees. Now, I can't imagine that any State can resist that because, if a State holds to the control of university or technical education and wants to charge fees when there's an offer on the part of the Commonwealth that if it's handed over to the Commonwealth there'll be no fees, the situation is politically untenable for the States. So it's inevitable that the Commonwealth will ultimately and before very long have the full responsibility for tertiary education. Will it stop there ?

You see, this is the process which has been slowly going on since the Commonwealth was in the position to get the full benefit of growth tax and the States receive very little benefit from it at all.

PP With 70 years of experience behind you and 40 of them in politics, what future do you see for the States as sovereign States and as State Governments operating closely to the people ?

TONKIN Well, I wouldn't like to predict when it will come about, but I feel that a situation will ultimately be reached under which the State Governments will be quite similar to the local governing bodies which operate now. They will be given certain funds from the Commonwealth, but the main areas of administration will repose in the Commonwealth Government and they will accept more and more responsibility from the States, enhance those responsibilities and they will exercise the power in those areas of administration. The States will be left to the more domestic matters and will have a relationship to the Commonwealth somewhat similar to what the local governing bodies now have to the State Governments.

PP Do you see a time when regional governments might come about as a means of replacing the State Government as we know it now ?

TONKIN Yes, I do. I see that possibility quite distinctly.

PP How would you envisage regional governments ?

TONKIN What I mean by that is that there would be certain areas in the Commonwealth where the conditions in the whole area would be similar, which would determine that these particular areas should be governed or administered in those areas on a sort of domestic level, whereas the overall questions like defence, education and things which could be applied generally, would be assumed by the Federal Government.

You take the various State education systems today; whilst each State wants to hold on to its system, it has a lot of weaknesses. For example, in the days when travel is comparatively easy and people move from State to State

quickly, you get a difficulty straight away. If you take a child from a school in Victoria and want to put him in a school in Perth, he doesn't fit into the class easily. He is confronted with all sorts of difficulties; different types of courses, different school books in use and that sort of thing. Whereas, if it were run by the Commonwealth, it would be uniform throughout the Commonwealth. It wouldn't matter where a man went for a job and took his wife and family with him; there would be no difficulty with regard to schooling in any of those places where he would go.

PP Many people would agree with you that, with the build-up in Commonwealth responsibility and perhaps eventually doing away with State Parliaments as we know them, this regional government concept we were talking about perhaps might mean, say, Bunbury being the regional government centre of 100 miles radius.

TONKIN That's right; a certain type of activity in that area. It would be the natural port and the natural main town of activities which are similar in nature and centred on that area. Just the same as in the Pilbara you will get a number of industries which will be related industries because of the presence of certain raw materials and certain energy sources. That will attract certain types of industries, certain types of people, and so you will get a region which would require different treatment from a region, say, down in the south-west, where they are growing fruit and keeping bees and that sort of thing.

PP But this regional government of, for instance, Bunbury would have perhaps more powers than the local authority but less than the State now has.

TONKIN That's right, that's the way I see it.

PENDAL There would be virtually only a two-way relationship between a regional government and a Federal Government.

TONKIN Yes, that's the way I see it.

PENDAL Turning to another point, you have met literally hundreds of people, or you have seen hundreds of men go through Parliament.

TONKIN Yes, both in State and Commonwealth.

PP Is there any one man who stands out as being the most colourful personality in State politics, for whatever reason, but colourful in the sense that he either continually made people chuckle, or drew attention to himself, or was in some way a bit of a bohemian?

TONKIN Your use of the word colourful presents me with a

little difficulty. One of the men who I admired most and who I felt made a very big impact wasn't what I would call colourful, and I refer to the late Philip Collier. We won an election on one occasion and the policy was "Keep Collier Premier"; that was the slogan. He was so well liked and so much appreciated for his outstanding capacity and ability, that we felt it safe to go on that - "Keep Collier Premier" - and we won the election on it.

PP This would have been 1933 ?

TONKIN No, that would be in about '36. I can't name very many men who were like that, but a colourful personality was a fellow like "Lavender" Bill Marshall - Lavender Bill - who was never seen without a flower in his buttonhole which he could fill with water and which would keep the flower fresh for a period. He was very keen upon his appearance and when he sat down on a seat in the Chamber he would be careful to spread a sheet of brown paper on the seat so he wouldn't soil his trousers. So it's understood how he came to be known as Lavender Bill. Now he was a colourful personality.

Then there was George Lambert who had many peculiarities. He used to be walking around the House pretty well all day with several sheets of paper in his hand but never seemed to be doing anything with them. He had the habit when he was speaking of saying every sentence at least twice. He represented a seat called Yilgarn-Coolgardie and I can remember Ross McDonald saying on one occasion when Lambert had been going on in this strain ... after he had sat down and McDonald got up to speak he said, "It was understandable why the member for Yilgarn-Coolgardie made the type of speech he did - which was always in duplicate - because one was for Yilgarn and one for Coolgardie !"

Those are some people who come clearly to mind as being colourful. And of course Norbert Keenan on the other side I suppose could be regarded as colourful, but was an irascible sort of gentleman who quickly got put out. If he tried to catch the Speaker's eye twice and failed each time he'd pick up his papers and leave the Chamber.

PP Otherwise was this typical of him or was he a pretty friendly person ?

TONKIN Oh, a very friendly chap. I was good mates with him really. He was a very efficient and capable fellow but he had a quick temper and was quite irascible.

PP I think you have already mentioned the personality you think had the most impact on politics since you have been there; would this still remain McDonald ?

[TAPE ENDS - SIDE 2A]

J T TONKIN

TAPE TWO SIDE B COMMENCES APPROXIMATELY ONE QUARTER OF THE
WAY INTO TAPE.

I was able to tell him what the situation was and he then suggested to me that I should go to the War Council and tell them first-hand. But I explained to him that that would put my officer commanding in a real spot for having allowed me to go over there for this purpose.

PP You mean, in effect, absent without leave ?

TONKIN That's right. I had leave, but it was to go over there in civilian clothes for the purpose of reporting to the Prime Minister on military installations and equipment.

PP When really, as a private, it wasn't your business.

TONKIN A private ... not my business; not my business at all. He could have been severely reprimanded, and so could I for interesting myself in something which wasn't my business. As it would have shown the War Council up in a rather bad light, and the heads of the Services who should have been looking over what they had to do to see that we were fully equipped, then it could have developed into a serious situation and been difficult for a number of us. When I pointed this out to the Prime Minister he agreed and he said he would tell Frank Ford, who was then the Minister for the Army, what I had told him and that Ford would then bring the matter up with the War Council. From then on the situation improved substantially.

PP Before you left did you consult with the Government, because you were still an MP ?

TONKIN No, because it was a Federal matter, nothing to do with the State.

PP It was not a matter of you going as an emissary for WA.

TONKIN No. It was purely in the interests of the unit with which I was associated and in the interests of Western Australia as a State, and the people of Western Australia and I felt that as I had the entree to the Prime Minister and could cut the red tape ... of course if this had gone on in the ordinary way ... the officer commanding knew; there was no need for me to tell him, he knew, but he wasn't getting anywhere.

PP He was as concerned as you about it.

TONKIN That's right, yes; but he wasn't getting anywhere.

PP What was his reaction ? Did he know you were a personal friend of the Prime Minister ?

TONKIN No, I told him. I asked to be able to see him.

PP What was his initial reaction to that ?

TONKIN He knew that we were in so much trouble that he welcomed the opportunity and facilitated my going.

PP You later received the invitation to go to the War Council.

TONKIN The Prime Minister invited me to go to the War Council. I pointed out to him that in the circumstances this wouldn't be a wise procedure and he agreed.

PP The next series of questions relates to the feature on A.R.G. Hawke.

 In 1958 you led the trade mission to London.

TONKIN That's right, yes. I had with me Boyne Miller from the Chamber of Commerce, and Frank Ledger, now Sir Frank Ledger, who was President of the Chamber of Manufacturers; Bert Telfer, who was the Under Secretary for Mines. The reason for taking him was that he had been abroad before, he'd had experience of going abroad with Ministers and he was able to facilitate our travelling arrangements and so on.

PP Your trip came at the time when Mr Hawke was having a running battle with Sir Halford Reddish.

TONKIN Yes.

PP This is the point that I wanted to see if you could clarify. It refers to a luncheon that was given to you as a farewell. Do you know the incident ?

TONKIN I know what you're going to say. He reckoned all I could talk about was the Lido or something.

PP While Mr Hawke was under attack back here, with people saying that his legislation was stopping industrial development here, he received the letter from Hoar, the Agent General, and these were Mr Hawke's words, without any prompting at all, "Sir Norman Kipling has openly said that no businessman in London was being fooled by the attack on the WA State legislation by Sir Halford Reddish."

 A few days later in London Reddish released a statement signed by Kipling. Kipling said, "I am very surprised that the Premier should have quoted from anything which was said on such a privileged occasion, and said not to him but to the Deputy Premier." He also went on to say that he couldn't remember making that remark. It seems to me that you are the only person who would be able to clarify that remark.

TONKIN Well, I'm not, because I think it was made to Ernie Hoar, who was the Agent General, and I think he told Mr Hawke; I don't think I did.

PP That's right. According to Hansard he certainly told Mr Hawke. The aspect that interested me was that when Kipling put out this statement virtually denying that he had said certain things, he said, "I am very surprised that the Premier should have quoted anything which was said on such a privileged occasion." He seems to admit without saying so that he in fact said certain things. He goes on virtually to say that it wasn't said to Mr Hawke, it was said to the Deputy Premier. Again, there seems to be that suggestion that, "Well, that may have been said, but I am not saying it was said." Do you see what I am getting at ?

TONKIN Yes, I remember it.

PP He couldn't remember making any remark like that to you.

TONKIN I don't think he made it to me. I think he made the remark all right, but in a sort of general conversation with a group of us and Ernie Hoar heard it. I think it was Hoar who told Hawke about it.

PP Can you remember, while you were wooing British businessmen ... and also at this luncheon there had been a lot of Press publicity in the London "Financial Times", I think, from Reddish saying that the legislation was terrible and then Hawke replying and pointing out that he believed it wasn't so terrible. Can you remember accurately what the general attitude was ? How did the people to whom you spoke in Britain view this unfair trading legislation ?

TONKIN They were quite apprehensive about it. As a matter of fact Dumas, the Co-ordinator of Works at the time, expressed to me the opinion that this would militate very strongly against our being able to attract industry to Western Australia.

PP Did he say this before you went or after ?

TONKIN Before I went and after. He tried to prevail upon me to get the legislation changed.

PP You say they were apprehensive ?

TONKIN I think they misunderstood its import. They regarded it as being a limitation upon profits and if they were to be invited to come out and take business risks in Western Australia, there should be no restriction on the profits that could flow upon their industry and enterprise. Whilst this restriction was there they lost interest and prepared to look elsewhere.

PP When you say they were apprehensive, the legislation, as far as you were able to gauge, may well have been a deciding factor in businessmen saying, "Weighing it all up, no, we don't think we can come to WA" ?

TONKIN Frankly, I don't think that so far as those who were genuinely interested in coming here were concerned that it stopped anybody. I think generally amongst business people who had no wish to come here they felt this was the wrong thing to do and were saying so. But we succeeded in bringing Richard Klinger here, and they have done well since they've been here and expanded.

PP When you say "we", you mean as a result of this trade mission ?

TONKIN As a result of the trade mission, yes. It didn't stop them.

PP Can you remember when you were talking to them ?

TONKIN They never raised it at all, never mentioned it. When I was talking to La Porte --

PP You kicked that off too, did you ?

TONKIN No, but I spoke to them; I put up a proposition to them and they said, "The world conditions are not suitable." It was a similar situation to what existed, say, six months ago with regard to trying to start up a new bauxite or alumina thing. The world conditions at the time were not suitable for a new industry, and what La Porte said to me was, "We're not turning this proposition down; we're only deferring it until such time as world conditions improve to make it worthwhile for us to come." They never at any stage said to me, "If it were not for this legislation that you have we'd be coming out." They blamed the unsatisfactory world conditions.

PP But it would be fair to assume that they knew about the legislation.

TONKIN Oh, they knew about it all right, no question, because it was being featured in the papers at the time. They were well aware of it.

PP Thank you, Mr Premier.