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GENERAL 805 (P)

Dunstan

By Ian McCausland (850)

Adelaide (Associated Press) - Donald Allan Dunstan, the trendy, cultured, with-it premier of the state of South Australia, he has introduced a new style to the traditional old guard, conservative politics of this country.

It is a style which the majority of the 1,170,000 people in this wine-growing, auto-manufacturing state appears to like.

Don Dunstan's Labour party holds a 27-20 majority in the Legislative Assembly and one of its main opponents, former premier Steele Hall, has inadvertantly blurted out that the state faces 12 years of Dunstan rule.

Dunstan, now 46, led the Labour party to victory in 1970. His charisma, as well as his policies, won votes.

The charisma is still there but is having less effect: the policies are more evident and are having greater effect.

Few would disagree that the new outlook was necessary. For 27 years under the starchy rule of Sir Thomas Playford's Liberal and Country League (LCL), South Australia lagged behind in reform legislation.

Today, South Australia has not only caught up with the other five states, it is a pace-setter for them. The state's consumer protection laws are by far the most comprehensive in Australia. The Prices and Consumer Affairs Office has the power to take legal action against traders - and does so.

"It's relatively rare," said a Dunstan aide. "Most traders caught acting unfairly quickly correct the situation."

In its recently-completed first six months of active consumer protection, the office saved the public 75,000 Australian dollars (90,000 U.S.) according to the office's report. This ranged from an adjustment of 1,000 Australian dollars on the sale of a repossessed auto to the repayment of 33 Australian cents for overpriced shoe repairs. "People are really just learning what powers they - and we - have," said the aide.

The statutes cover a wide range: Unfair advertising, door-to-door selling, second-hand motor vehicles and unordered goods and services.

These are recent. Lawyer Dunstan started his reforms when he was

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Attorney-General in the 1965 government which broke the political drought for Labour.

He abolished the "six o'clock swill," the 50-year-old law which laid down that pubs closed at 6 p.m. - and accounted for huge quantities of beer being gulped down by customers in the short time between offices and factories closing and bars doing the same. South Australia was the last state to change this legislation.

It was the tail-ender, too, in the introduction of well-organized lotteries and off-course betting shops, both recognized income-earners for Australian state governments.

The reform movement appeared to be infectious. When the LCL returned to power in 1968, it legalized abortion subject to liberal conditions. South Australia is still the only state in Australia to have done so.

Then came Dunstan with his consumer protection moves which are still being introduced. The latest legislation permits land-buyers a 48-hour "cooling-off" period during which they can rescind a purchase contract.

"My family was imbued with a social conscience," said Dunstan. "It has rubbed off on me."

With six portfolios - Premier, Treasurer, Development and Tourism, Mines, Immigration, and Housing - he can be a hard man to catch.

The best bets are around dawn when he takes a three-mile jog or on Saturday morning when he does his shopping at a local supermarket in suburban Norwood.

Though Dunstan is a snappy dresser, he's as likely to be wearing shorts and sports shirt as one of his elegantly cut suits. The same is true in the summer-stifling and creaky old Parliament building. Dunstan has done away with coat-collar-and-tie rules in the assembly.

Dunstan has lived alone in a painting-filled two-room apartment since separating from his wife, Gretel, earlier this year. He becomes frosty if questions are asked about his wife or their children, Bronwen 21, Andrew 18 and Paul 14.

He does admit to giving consideration to appearing in court in December this year to defend student Andrew who faces a federal charge of distributing literature urging young men to refuse to register for military service.

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By circumstance, most of Dunstan's horizons do not stretch beyond Australia - and even going this far outside this 380,000 square mile state has brought editorial and public comment. His frequent interstate trips involved in his many portfolios have been criticized.

"We must establish a better liaison between federal and state governments," he said. "At the moment, the federal government can just refuse to talk to us. They can go on - and do go on - for years like this.

One of his long-term aims is a link-up between federal and state governments in establishing industries to compete with private enterprise.

When Dunstan has lifted his horizons outside Australia, there have been grumbles in federal capital Canberra. "I know Malaysia's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew better than most federal ministers," said Dunstan. "I think this irks them somewhat."

He has annoyed federal and other state governments, also, with his recognition of the principle of Aboriginal land rights - a subject others sidestep.

Dunstan denies any ambition to enter federal politics - aware that no state politician has ever made the big time in such a switch.

However, one of his general aims, he says, "is to deinstitutionalize inhibitions." Many observers believe this could include Australians' feelings against moves from the state to federal scenes.

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