PART 1

This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan History Project for the Don Dunstan Foundation interviewing Mr Lindsay Bowes. Mr Bowes was head of the Department of Labour and Industry in the Dunstan periods but, before that, was the permanent head of the Department as of 1959. The date today is the 25th August 2009 and location is Mr Bowes’ home.

Lindsay, thanks very much for doing this interview for the Don Dunstan Oral History Project. Just to give people a feel for who you are and some of your personal history, can you just talk a bit about yourself, your education, your employment as you started in the public service and how you became one of the youngest permanent heads of the public service?

I was born in 1921 and I went to school well before the days of Commonwealth Government scholarships. I started work when I was fifteen, initially for a few months in the private sector, then in the E&WS\(^1\) Department. I was in the 2nd AIF\(^2\) during the War and a few months after I resumed work with the State Government I was asked to go into the Department of Industry, which then included the Public Service Board, in the industrial section. Believe it or not, until then two men did all the industrial relations work for all government departments. (laughs)

Really?

I was thrown in at the deep end and, through various circumstances, within a few years I was the senior industrial officer for the State Government. There was no Department of Labour and all the advice to Government on industrial relations matters was through the Minister’s office, and that was me.

Some of the other states were in a similar situation, although not as bad as us, and there was a lot of discussion between Commonwealth and state heads of departments of labour. We formed what was called the DOLAC, the Departments of Labour Advisory Committee, in the mid-'50s, I suppose, and I think this area of industrial relations was one of the earliest examples of Commonwealth–State cooperation.

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1 E&WS – Engineering and Water Supply.
2 AIF – Australian Imperial Forces.
The Playford Government realised that they had to have a Department of Labour and it was created in July 1959, and I was appointed to be the first head of the Department. I had done a diploma of commerce at the University of Adelaide on a part-time basis, but that was the only opportunity I had of university education.

**Interesting. How large was the Department when it was set up, roughly?**

About fifty people, I suppose.

**Fifty people.**

Yes. And it was comprised of what was the old Factories and Steam Boilers Department, which was machinery inspection, *et cetera*; the administrative responsibility for the Industrial Court; and the Industries Assistance Branch to try and attract new industries to South Australia.

**Interesting. So the Labor Party got into government in the late ’60s, I think it was.**

’Sixty-five.

’Sixty-five. **What was your view about how that would change things after that long term of the Playford period?**

Well, we just had to wait and see. (laughter) After all, nobody had had the experience. There’d been a Liberal Government since the 1930s. None of the Labour Members of Parliament had had any experience at all in government and they were just learning, and they relied a lot on the public service.

**Can you recall any policies of the time, were you reading that closely?**

No. There were no revolutionary policies. There were some minor changes, like the responsibility for apprenticeship training, which until then had been an education matter coming to the Department. And also, for the first time, lay people were appointed to be conciliation commissioners as part of the Industrial Commission. Until then, you had to be a lawyer to be a judge of the Industrial Court.

**Interesting. So, just flipping into the – I guess we’ll talk a bit about the 1970s and just the early ’70s and through a bit, just to get a feel for how the industrial relations framework was working at the time. There was the Commonwealth Government and its**
very strong Arbitration and Conciliation Commission. How did that relate to the State system and its ability to be significant?

Well, there was really no change in the relationship between the Commonwealth and the State. The Commonwealth still had the power in relation to interstate industrial disputes. The State had the rest. And over the years, with the appointment of commissioners to the State Industrial Commission, there has been a gradually closer relationship. But basically there was no real change.

And did the system evolve over the ’70s? There was the income policy that I’ve picked up in some of the reading.

But the income policy I think came after this.

After, in the Hawke Era.

In the Hawke Era. (interruption, break in recording)

Another broad shaping area was trying to maintain South Australia as a low-cost state, particularly wage costs. Was that something that was impacting or you had just a broad awareness of in industrial relations discussions?

Well, it was always raised and a factor in national wage cases. But it had great advantages for South Australia. After all, people didn’t need to be told that cost of living in South Australia, in Adelaide, was lower than it was in Sydney and Melbourne; anybody who travelled to other capitals already knew that and, as more and more people started moving places of employment from one state to another, it became more obvious. You have to remember that up until the ’60s, ’70s, ’80s, there wasn’t the movement of people between states that there is these days, and no doubt South Australia’s industrial development was helped by the fact that our cost of production was lower in South Australia but at the same time our cost of living was lower.

Interesting. When we were talking before we went on the record, you were talking about South Australian economy changing its shape from an agriculture to a manufacturing economy.

Yes.

How did that change things?
Well, that really was the reason why the Department of Labour and Industry was formed, because there was very little manufacturing in South Australia before the War. It gradually increased with the oil refinery being established, that changed things, and then the discovery of gas at Moomba – and I’ll come to this later, but one of the reasons for some of the things that happened in the ’70s was the fact that people realised that there were huge shortages of skilled people in various areas. For example, when the pipeline had been built from Moomba to Adelaide to bring the gas down there was a grave shortage of welders. After all, twenty years before there hadn’t been any need for welders for gas or pipelines, et cetera, and this was one of the things that started people realising that, while we had plenty of people, they weren’t all properly skilled and something had to be done to match the supply with the demand.

Yes, that’s interesting. So in about 1969, 1970, just the broad functions of your Department – do you want me to put on the record what they might have been, or can you pick them up from the notes I supplied?

Well, no, the broad functions of the Department I don’t think changed. Some weren’t operative. I’ve mentioned the responsibility for apprenticeship, which was the only regular means of training of tradesmen and semi-skilled people, was transferred from the responsibility of the Education Department to the Minister of Labour and Industry; and the Apprenticeship Commission was established, and that would have been in the late ’60s.

We continued with the basic responsibilities of machinery guarding and so on, which was thought in the early days to be the be-all-and-end-all of industrial safety. There was no such thing as promotion of safety activities until 1958, and again this was a result of the collaboration between the Commonwealth and State Departments of Labour. One person from each state was sent to Sydney, I think, to try and start some safety promotion activities. I arranged the first industrial safety convention held in South Australia, that was in 1959 – late ’59, a few months after the Department had been created. We had a long row to hoe. There wasn’t much interest, either from employers – most employers – or trade unions. In fact, we had great difficulty in getting enough people to fill a five-day training course of half a day a week for shop stewards. I think we only ran two or three of them because we couldn’t get anybody interested enough to come, and the unions certainly
weren’t very helpful – with some exceptions. Gradually, we tried to get the idea around that there was more to industrial safety than guarding your machinery; you had to think and work safely, and I could give you some – I won’t – some horrific examples of situations that my inspectors found in industry, which had nothing to do with the employer, just stupidity on the part of employees.

**So they weren’t properly trained either, or the awareness.**

There was no awareness, that’s right.

**Interesting, yes. Just the regulation of awards and conditions, were there a lot of transgressions of those that you had to chase up a lot, in what you recall?**

No. It wasn’t. There were transgressions but they were dealt with as they were found, but it wasn’t a major issue.

**And workers’ compensation wasn’t the big deal that it is now in terms of the workplace.**

Workers’ compensation, until the early ’70s, in South Australia was an insurance matter. The *Workers Compensation Act* was administered by the Treasurer and it was the early ’70s that it became the responsibility of the Minister of Labour and Industry and from that time – and it took a long time to change the thinking – I spent time over a lot of years trying to find out why Australia was so far behind other countries. Two or three times when I was overseas I talked to people particularly in Canada, where they had the most advanced, at that time, workers’ compensation philosophy of anywhere I found, and also in some European countries like Austria and West Germany. But that work started in the early ’70s and it was still going when the Corcoran Government was defeated and it continued during the Tonkin Government, and it wasn’t until after I’d retired –

’Eighty-one.

– Lyn Arnold, I suppose –

**Yes, he was about in the early ’90s. Bannon was there for a while.**

– in the Bannon Government – that the workers’ compensation arrangements as they are now, which weren’t the ones that I was going to recommend – – –. (laughs)
That’s interesting: do you want to talk about that at all, or not?

No, no, that happened after I retired.

So there were these basic functions that had been evolving a bit, given the changing shape of the economy, but then there was a further evolution over the 1970s, and one thing I picked up in just reading some of the annual reports, it seemed to me the first time the Department had set some clear objectives. Where did that come from? Perhaps I’ll just read them out: ‘Protect working conditions, maintain good industrial relations, promote efficient utilisation of the workforce’. They sound fairly obvious, but it was the first articulation in a formal document about those.

Yes. Well, I think it was about that time that there was more dialogue between government, employers and trade unions. It took probably – could have been for a number of reasons – it took a long time to get a department created and a philosophy developed, and one of the things that became clear was that the way the State was developing it wasn’t something that could be done just by one party: not by government, not by employers, nor by unions; they had to work together. And I had started having discussions – first of all informally and then, formally from 1972 when the first Industrial Safety and Welfare Act was passed, under that there was established an Industrial Safety, Health and Welfare Board, I think it was called, so that there could be formal discussions between government through the Department and employers and unions. And the same thing had evolved or was just evolving in the industrial training area, too.

This probably was helped along by what was to be the major impetus that Don Dunstan had on the industrial relations field when he established a committee of inquiry about worker participation in management –

Oh, right.

– of which you were Secretary of the committee, Sir Geoffrey Badger as Chairman, and I was one of the members. Now, no-one knew anything about it. In fact, when I was asked to be a member, I, like others, said, ‘Well, what’s all that about?’ But it did mean that people started to think about the system of management, I guess. People we talked to were equally mystified, including union secretaries and leaders of industry. They said, ‘What’s all this about?’ (break in recording)
I don’t know why Don introduced this, but I was reading the other day a scrapbook of mine. I was interviewed by Bill Rust, the industrial reporter for The Advertiser, a few weeks after I retired in 1981, and in that interview I was reported as saying that:

‘Employee participation in South Australia has had a spinoff in that employers and workers are in many cases communicating better with each other. In this way, there will be fewer industrial disputes and increased productivity.’

I don’t know what Don had in mind – but it was the start of an education process and in this case South Australia was the only state where this was being done. People from other states – ministers of labour, heads of labour departments, et cetera – with whom I was in frequent contact were saying, ‘What’s all this going on?’ (laughter) ‘What’s happening in South Australia?’

Now, at the same time, we in South Australia started an inquiry into training needs, a survey of training needs, which I think – and I don’t have any records of this, but I think from memory that was started off when Steele Hall was Premier and John Coombe was the Minister; certainly it hadn’t been completed by the time the Dunstan Government was elected. But, as I said earlier, there was a growing realisation, at least in South Australia, of the imbalance between number of people seeking employment and the types of employees that were needed. So I guess it was Max Bone who was the Director of Further Education and I, between us we persuaded our ministers that there should be a survey of training needs of South Australia. Now, I’ve heard only in the last twelve months that the Commonwealth Labour Department people admitted that South Australia were far in advance of any other state in our thinking on this, they were looking at what we did with interest. And this I think was the start of the other thing that happened in the Dunstan Era, the need for something to be done about manpower planning, which some people had talked about but nothing had ever been done. And I’m not aware how much my ministers in the Dunstan Era – and there were only three of them, Glen Broomhill, David McKee and Jack Wright – I’m not sure how much they discussed with the Premier the details or the subject matters of what we were doing, except that when McKee was Minister he from time to time would take me with him when he talked to the Premier about what was going
on in the Department. Apparently, the Premier had periodical meetings with his ministers to discuss what was going on. The manpower planning was something that happened after Jack Wright took over from David McKee. But, much to my surprise, at a ministers’ conference in Perth when Jack had put up a paper suggesting that ministers should be serious about manpower planning, he suggested that I should be the chairman of a Commonwealth–State working party. Now, this was unheard-of for a state head of department to be a head of a working party with Commonwealth involvement, it didn’t go down very well – – –. No, I won’t say that. (laughter) But at least that’s one of the other things that happened in the Dunstan Era.

Interesting. One of the early officers involved there was Stephen Baker – wasn’t he recruited from ABS\(^3\) or somewhere like that? – the person who later became Treasurer of South Australia.

Yes. Stephen. Well, if you want to start from the top, John Bannon.

**John Bannon, right, another one.**

These days it’s hard to realise that it was only thirty years ago that the concept of ministerial advisers had started. I had known John Bannon through the Industrial Relations Society. He was the only ministerial adviser to Clyde Cameron when Clyde was Minister for Labour in the Whitlam Government. I met him in Adelaide one day in the street and, talking to him, he said he was sick and tired of travelling backwards and forwards to Canberra.

When Jack Wright became Minister he asked about how he could get John Bannon into the Department and so a position of Assistant Director was created and John was appointed to head up the Research Branch of the Department, which didn’t exist in the early days but which I gradually built up. In fact, the first graduate I had appointed to it was John Hill, who later became the Deputy Under-Treasure.

**Oh, really?**

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\(^3\) ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics.
And Stephen Baker was just in the process of being appointed when I retired, as a matter of fact.

**Interesting – in ’81.**

Philip Bentley was another one who came in under the same era. And John was only there for a couple of years until he took leave to contest the election and then became a member of Parliament.

**Was he a hybrid, like public servant, adviser or was he a – – –?**

No, he was a public servant.

**He was a public servant, right. And he stuck to that public service role through you and whatever.**

Yes.

**I was going to ask you about whether that created complications for you or not.**

No, it didn’t. As I said, I’d known John for many years. And perhaps, while I think of it – and this is out of order, but I’ve mentioned the Industrial Relations Society and that’s probably one I should have mentioned earlier – in the early 1960s the Industrial Relations Society was formed in New South Wales and there were some people in South Australia, led by Keith Hancock, who was then Professor of Economics at the University of Adelaide, who were interested in doing a similar thing. The idea of the Society was to have representatives of employers, trade unions, the industrial tribunals, academics, lawyers and government to meet together in some informal sort of a way, and the Society – looking back, it’s all part of this whole concept of bringing people with similar interests together. It was surprising: there was as much opposition to the Industrial Relations Society from some employers as there was from trade unions. On the other hand, some trade unions embraced the idea and one of the earliest supporters and presidents of the South Australian branch of the Industrial Relations Society was Reg Hurst, who was Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union and later became Speaker of the House of Assembly; and Harry Krantz, who was not only State President but Federal President.
Now, the Industrial Relations Society took a long time to evolve – well, I suppose not a long time, that’s not right, because it was in the early ’60s created. As a matter of interest (laughs) – this is probably nothing to do with the Dunstan Foundation – the first President was Sir John Kerr.

**Sir John Kerr, really? That’s interesting.**

John Kerr QC before he became a judge. And this will give you an indication of the scope of the organisation, of the Society. The second President was Norman Thom MLC, the Federal Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union in New South Wales. George Polites, the Confederation of Australian Industry’s chief, was the third President. I was the fourth. Keith Hancock followed me and then, a couple of years later, Harry Krantz. So you can see – – –.

**Interesting, yes.**

And in the two years I was President we had the first national convention in Canberra, where we had four hundred people attend, and from there on the Society really got going. I was able to arrange then for the heads of all the industrial tribunals, several Ministers of Labour as well as people like Bob Hawke and George Polites and John Kerr to be speakers. But the Industrial Relations Society really has achieved a lot in bringing people with a similar interest together. Because when I first went into it people just didn’t know each other. Employers didn’t know union secretaries and – well, any rate, that’s enough of the Industrial Relations Society.

**They generally saw each other as adversaries rather than – – –.**

They were adversaries, that’s right. One night a number of us – including Pat Galvin was one of them – at a dinner in a café, not a hotel, in Melbourne one night we were talking about forming a union of our own, but we came to the conclusion it would be unfair on our employers because there’d be nobody with any ability to represent them. (laughter)

**Fair enough. Well, we’ve talked about manpower planning. Another area that clearly ramped up was safety promotion – we talked about safety a bit earlier on. Where did**
that actually come from, that move? Was it an awareness of how much accidents were costing?

Industrial safety.

Yes.

Yes. In the industrial relations area, for years the emphasis was always on the time lost through industrial disputes and the federal and state industrial tribunals were established to deal with that problem. But far more time was lost, apart from the human suffering side, in industrial accidents, and that was I think one of the bases on which the industrial safety campaigns were established. There was just not the attention being given to the effects of industrial accidents as there were on road accidents – there were all sorts of organisations – and it was interesting that the impetus for the formation of the National Safety Council, at least in South Australia, came from employers and not from anywhere else, and that was whilst Sir Thomas Playford was still Premier. He asked me to do what I could to try and get a National Safety Council established in South Australia.

And workers’ rehabilitation was picked up as well.

Workers’ rehabilitation was unknown. As workers’ compensation was basically an insurance thing, rehabilitation was unknown. And that was one of the things that – I attended a conference of workers’ compensation authorities – I don’t know when, must have been in the late ’60s, early ’70s, I suppose – of the various states, and there was really nothing being done. And I started a lot of the work rehabilitation thing after I’d been to Canada and heard what they were doing over there, where rehabilitation was a basis of dealing with people who were injured.

So the system prior to the changes was you got a compensation payout, basically –

Yes.

– rather than a continuing salary –

Yes.

– so that it didn’t really matter whether people went back to work or not; but the new system was trying to get people back to work.
That’s right, tried to keep – and that didn’t start in South Australia until the early/mid-’80s, when the new workers’ compensation arrangements were [introduced]. I might have given the wrong impression before: basically, the system now is what seemed to be necessary. It was the implementation, rather the structure, I think that – – –. I think a few things went off the rails.

Interesting. When I was talking to Graham Inns in the interview I did with him, he told me that some department heads used to get together and talk about what was going on around the Government. Were you involved in any of those lunches or whatever?

In some of them. Yes. But in my fields – the industrial relations and safety and training – there were more, far more discussions with my counterparts in the other states and the Commonwealth. We didn’t have many similar ones. While some of the heads of departments got together from time to time, people like John Steinle and Ian Cox, they were in quite different fields and Brian Shea, we were personal friends rather than colleagues.

So there wasn’t any feel, ‘Well, there’s all this legislation happening and a reform process’? One area I want to ask you about was the review of the public service.

In the review of the public service, yes, certainly we were together – and Bruce Webb was another one, who later became Chancellor of the University of Adelaide, he was Director of Mines at the time – because, yes, there were about six or seven of us, I suppose, met about this public service review one afternoon and we adjourned without even having afternoon tea –

Oh, really?

– because Des Corcoran had called the election that morning. (laughter)

Oh, no. I see.

Some of us knew about it before we went to the meeting and others didn’t. (laughs)

Interesting. So the recommendations that came out and some of the implementation of that review of the public service cut out all these departments, but yours wasn’t really affected, from my recollection of it.
That’s right, that’s correct. See, when I first became head of department I think there were fifty-two departments. It’s a bit like the union situation. A lot of the problems that we had were inter-union disputes and I’m not sure of the number, I think there was about a hundred and twenty different unions in South Australia, and it was when Bob Hawke became Prime Minister that this amalgamation of the unions really got going; and a lot of the industrial disputation got back to inter-union rivalry in a lot of cases.

**Interesting. Just over the 1970s the industrial disputes, were they markedly different in terms of lesser numbers under a Labor Government, or was it pretty much the same?**

No, I don’t think [so]. South Australia had, I think, in all of my time fewer industrial disputes than the other mainland states and we were able to maintain that. There were one or two occasions when there was a major dispute, but nothing really as serious here as the coalmine strikes in the 1940s or something like that.

**Okay. Just in terms of – we talked about the objectives of the Department, but just the very broad role: did you see the Department as the one bringing together the various parties? You mentioned people seemed to be talking a lot more, Industrial Relations Society and whatever.**

Yes, I do, yes. All of my Ministers, whether they were Labor or Liberal – and I made sure that we kept lines of communication open with employer associations and the Trades and Labour Council. Within a week of each of my Ministers being appointed I’d arranged for them to meet all of the presidents and chief executive officers of the employer associations, but with the Labor Government they didn’t need to know who was running the Trades Hall. (laughs)

**Yes, that’s right.**

But with the Liberal Ministers we made sure they met the Trades Hall leaders. And this opened the lines of communication.

**So you were seen as a bit of a facilitator in that communication.**

Yes, sure.

**That’s good. Now, I picked up also 1971 there was an Industrial Relations Advisory Committee set up. That was a formal body, I guess, to advance these.**
That was to formalise the informal arrangements that we’d had that I’ve just been talking about, yes.

That’s interesting.

And the representatives of the unions was left, as I remember it, for the Trades and Labour Council to decide and the same with the employer bodies. If I remember rightly, there were one or two appointments I think on either side that I would have preferred somebody else, but you have to accept those nominated. The Industrial Relations Advisory Council and the Industrial Safety and Welfare Board and later the Industrial Training Council were all part of the same move to try and get all the interested parties together on a formal basis. And particularly with the Industrial Safety Health and Welfare Board, most of the law is made by regulation, the Act is only the framework which enables the regulations to be made, and I’m sure in the Dunstan Era that Don Dunstan wouldn’t have known anything about the regulations; the Minister did. Some of the basic principles obviously he had to approve of, but the working-out of those regulations was facilitated by these formal bodies the Department would draft regulations which we would circulate to the members of these bodies and the Board would discuss them, and so that there was a fair bit of acceptance before the regulations were made because the employers and the unions had been consulted. And this was one of the things that hadn’t happened until the ’60s.

Interesting. In terms of some of the issues that were discussed by the I’ll call it ‘IRAC’, I’ve picked up apprentice training, consultation on industrial relations broadly, training on the area, regulations and the review of legislation, flexible working hours – that was a new area, where was that coming from?

Well, flexible working hours came from the worker participation. Nobody knew what was going to come out of this worker participation because a lot of people I think thought that that meant we’re going to have worker-elected directors on the board of management, which didn’t happen and couldn’t have worked in any case. It was part of the education process, I think, of getting people closer together. Now, what was the other matter?

Flexible working hours, yes.
Flexible hours, yes. People started to realise that you didn’t really always have to work from between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. and there were experiments. We introduced it in my department. There were some limits, but people could start anytime between 8 and 10, I think, and finish between 4 and 6 or something, I’m not sure of the actual times. But it was before the days of many part-time employees and it was, I think, just a part of the evolution.

One of the things that I think from hindsight has come to me from all of this is that it takes at least twenty years to have any real changes. The fact these days that occupational safety and occupation training is all part-and-parcel of the jargon when I know nothing about it apart from what I read in the newspapers. But in the early 1970s when we started on a national basis on this there was just no understanding at all, no acceptance of the fact that people had to be trained to do their job, they had to be given not only the safe working environment to understand how to work safely, and some of the things that we were still grappling with – it’s twenty-eight years since I retired and some of the things that are now commonplace we were still battling with in those days. You can’t change things quickly.

Another interesting area, it might have come out of the public service inquiry, talked about was that of discrimination. There was an Act done at some stage, I think that might have been some of it passed under the Dunstan period and some when David Tonkin came in, but was that about discrimination against women or people from other backgrounds?

No, the first antidiscrimination legislation, I think, was the *Sex Discrimination Act*, which would have been in the late ’70s.

’Seventies, right.

I’ve forgotten the details, I did know them once. I think I’m right, but you’d better check, somebody had better check on this: I think it was a private member’s bill from David Tonkin which Don Dunstan accepted and the Sex Discrimination Board was established, I know, in the late ’70s. And, (laughs) strangely, a couple of years after I retired I was asked to be a member for three years, and it was interesting to be involved in the operation of legislation that you’d been involved in the formulation.
And that brings me to one other thing that I should have mentioned about the Dunstan Era: in early 1970s – it must have been ‘71 or so – there was a real crisis in petroleum supplies in South Australia.

**Yes, the rationing.**

I don’t know – it had nothing to do with me, the start, and I didn’t really know much about it or the reasons for it – but apparently the supply of petrol in South Australia was critical and we relied partly on the Mobil refinery at Stanvac and partly on imports. And one Friday afternoon, soon after lunch I suppose, I was asked to go over to the Premier’s to the cabinet room about a petrol problem and people were scratching their heads and Peter Ward – who, incidentally, was the first, to my knowledge, ministerial adviser in South Australia and a very good one, too – was walking around. And the problem was how to stop people from buying petrol. One of the Acts the Department administered was the] *Early Closing Act*, which enabled regulations to be made to close shops at various times. So, as an emergency measure – the Premier was the only minister involved in this – Executive Council met on Friday afternoon and issued a proclamation forbidding petrol stations to sell petrol over the weekend without a permit. I’d had to stop my staff from going home and start setting up an emergency operation and the Government Printer printed a form of a permit which I think I’d written on the back of an envelope and he had supplies up by 7 o’clock that night and I remember I heard that Don Dunstan with a loudhailer was addressing people who were gathering outside the State Administration Building. Any rate, Parliament was called to meet on Monday morning; Bob Daugherty, the Parliamentary Draftsman, and I worked all over the weekend drafting an Act for petrol rationing, which was passed by both Houses and an Executive Council meeting on Monday night over at Government House brought it into operation. (laughs)

**Interesting. It’s pretty efficient.**

And that all passed. It took a few weeks, but the crisis was averted and we’d learnt lessons which we fortunately didn’t have to repeat. But out of that Don Dunstan decided to have, on a permanent basis, a Motor Fuel Licensing Board and –  (interruption, break in
recording) – to have an Act to only permit retail petrol sales to be made by somebody who holds a permit issued by the Motor Fuel Licensing Board and he established that and Nick Burchell, I think, one of Don’s colleagues became Chairman. It became a very legalistic sort of a thing. It achieved its purpose but was only needed, in my opinion, for ten years but it went on for twenty-five and again by a quirk of fate I became, in my retirement, the first non-legal Chairman and it was a lot different animal (laughs) when I was Chairman from what it was earlier. But I just mention that because, at times when there was a need in the industrial field, as with the worker participation and that, Don Dunstan took the initiative.

That’s pretty quick, yes.

They were the two things that he took the initiative in that I know of.

Interesting. I’ll just complete my list from the IRAC –

Yes.

– because I just wanted to get that on the record it also talked about absenteeism, wage indexation, manpower forecasting we’ve talked about; job security was an interesting one because that might have been later in the ’70s when there was a lot of stress on the economy, I think, and some industries struggling a bit. We’ve talked about industrial democracy a bit. Disabled workers, that was probably a new thing.

All those, we didn’t have the answers to things but they were things that people, that employers and unions, needed to be thinking about.

Yes, right.

As was, in the time of rising unemployment, the fact that we were starting to get two distinct groups of people in society: the haves and the have-nots.

Interesting. The role of ministerial advisers, I recall there were at least two I can think of: there was Doug Melvin, who was a bit of a liaison person with the unions, I think.

I didn’t know him, he must have been in the Premier’s Department.

He was out of Premier’s. And there was Les Wright –

Yes.
– who was I think with Jack Wright for a while. Where did they fit into the scheme of things?

No, Les Wright was never with Jack Wright.

I see.

Jack Wright was the only Minister I had who had a ministerial adviser and he was Andrew Cunningham.

Oh, Andrew Cunningham, right.

Who later became, when the Tonkin Government was elected, he became an industrial magistrate, I think.

Okay. We’ve talked about the Industrial Relations Society. In terms of industrial relations reforms in that sense of disputation and wages and conditions, were there any major reforms that you would like to talk about? I’ve picked up, for example, the process of disputation between employers and unions through the industrial conciliation and industrial courts areas was streamlined a bit.

No, the only thing I would say, the one thing I would say – and I do take some personal credit for this – is the industrial tribunals, the members of industrial tribunals, didn’t know each other and there had to be greater coordination between the Commonwealth and the State tribunals, which evolved over the years and by the time I retired they were talking to each other.

This has nothing to do with Don Dunstan, but I suppose it brings out what I’ve been trying to say about people working together: John Moore, Sir John Moore, who was President of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, and I had known each other for a long time and we’d worked pretty closely together. He gradually was able to get the heads of the state industrial tribunals to meet occasionally with him to try and get some coordination. After all, I’ve lived through the time when Australia has developed from six separate states, six colonies which became states, into a nation, and that change didn’t take place until the ’50s, ’60s, before that we were all quite separate. And some of the state industrial tribunals continued to regard themselves as being something quite different. I’ve mentioned that we had a Department of Labour Advisory
Committee. We also had twice-yearly meetings of Ministers of Labour. From discussions with my colleagues in South Australia, I think in the industrial relations field we were one of the earliest ones where the Commonwealth and State Ministers got together as well as the departments, and the Ministers of Labour met together every six months, and I’ve said John Moore organised occasional meetings with the tribunals. Well, it so happened that the Ministers of Labour met in Adelaide one Friday and the heads of tribunals met in Adelaide the same day, and by a remarkable coincidence each party went touring in the Barossa Valley the following morning and about a quarter of an hour after the first group had arrived at Seppeltsfield the other group arrived. (laughs)

Must have been a huge coincidence!

And I just mention that because it’s part of the trying to make everybody work together, and you can only do that when you know each other. (break in recording)

Just on that note we’ll end this interview as part one and we’ll do a part two. Again, thanks very much, Lindsay, for your willingness to recollect a significant amount of detail on industrial relations and other labour and industry areas. Thank you.

END OF PART 1: PART 2

This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation Don Dunstan History Project interviewing Mr Lindsay Bowes on the Department of Labour and Industry’s functions. This is part two of the interview with Mr Bowes and the date today is the 1st September 2009 and the location is Mr Bowes’ residence.

Lindsay, thanks very much for doing a part two for the oral history project. In our interview discussion the other day we were talking about industrial safety, health and welfare. I just wanted to follow up one area of that. In 1972 the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act was strengthened and it required industry to have policies on occupational health, safety and welfare and to make the election of health and safety reps an option for workers and employees if they wanted to have them. Can you recall – I think we talked about the need for more activity in this area given the accidents, but can you recall any of the circumstances around that and the strengthening of those policies?

Not really. But what is important to remember is that it wasn’t just a strengthening of the Act but really a proper Act for the first time. Before – I’m not sure if I mentioned previously, but until 1945 there were no laws or regulations of any sort about industry
outside of the metropolitan area. When I went to the Department in 1959 the legislation was fragmented and it took about ten years to try and develop – departmentally, this is, not politically – ideas about how South Australia could have a unified system of regulation for safety, initially in factories, that was the traditional way, but as we went through the ’60s we came to see that it needed to be all-embracing. The Act of 1972, as I recall it, was the industrial safety and welfare legislation, because at that time industrial health was the responsibility of the Public Health Department and there was jealousies between the departments, so it wasn’t an all-embracing thing.

To the best of my knowledge, a lot of the basis of the legislation was to try and get South Australian industrial safety laws more up-to-date or along the same lines with that interstate, because we were lagging a long way behind; but in the end I think we went past the other states. Later in the 1970s was the first attempt to get uniform safety legislation throughout Australia, something which I read in the newspapers only in the last few weeks that Julia Gillard thinks she has now achieved: that’s forty years later. (laughter)

To get back to your point about the safety representatives, I think that just evolved from the general climate at the time. Remember the worker participation/industrial democracy ideas were initiated by Don Dunstan in must have been about 1971, probably, soon after he was elected I think in May 1970.

Yes, about then.

I remember that clearly because I was sitting on a plane going to Geneva next to Bob Hawke in May 1970 and he told me that I’d have a new boss by the time I got back. (laughs)

So he was up with it, right.

But there was a lot of discussion between employer representatives and Trades and Labour Council representatives in the formulation of the *Industrial Safety, Health and Welfare Act*. It wasn’t just something that the Government politically imposed upon people. I was involved in lots and lots of discussions, and I think in the climate of the time with the need for people – employers and unions – to realise that there were some common goals that
they had to achieve and it’s far better to work together and bake a bigger cake than squabble about the size of your share, and that – I think I last week talked about the Industrial Relations Society and how that had been formed in the 1960s, and gradually employer representatives and union representatives were talking together, firstly the industrial relations practitioners but then it gradually developed that, at a higher level, the principals of both the employers and the Trades and Labour Council were meeting together – and the safety reps I think was just an idea that evolved from those discussions because, with the workers’ compensation legislation in the ’60s being an insurance arrangement rather than having a primary objective of preventing accidents, people were starting to realise that a new approach had to be made, and the safety reps was just I guess a first step which I think, now I’ve been thinking about it, I think was influenced by the industrial democracy moves that had been made.

Interesting, yes, because I think later on the Act was strengthened even more to make sure that there was consultation with employees – I think that was the Public Service Act and the occupational health act – consultation on changes to organisations and work processes and all sorts of things.

There were people who thought that you could only do things because they were in Acts, but there was an attempt to try and get people working together, really, that’s what it was all about, and this was just one step in that direction.

Okay. Well, thanks very much for that. Perhaps we’ll jump to the area of industrial democracy –

Yes.

– which you’ve just mentioned, or worker participation in management. Last time we talked about that area and the setting up of the two committees, the public sector and the private sector, and the questions particularly employers and you just mentioned unions were asking: ‘What’s all this about?’ The committees reported and they recommended probably a gradualist approach of joint consultation and job enrichment. When that was decided on, how did you as head of your department react to those recommendations and then the follow-up in your own department?

Well, of course, the first step – you mentioned two committees: one was in the public sector, which I wasn’t involved in at all, and the private sector one was one of which I’d
been a member so I knew a bit more about that than most people – because at the time the term ‘industrial democracy’ just was unknown. It started off, they talked about worker participation in management, and a lot of people – employers and trade union people – thought this meant Don Dunstan wants worker directors on boards, which was not ever – well, wasn’t ever seriously considered. After the report had been made, I was told that the Premier wanted an Industrial Democracy Unit set up in the Department of Labour and Industry. Those of us who’d had experience with trying to introduce new things into public administration knew how difficult it was to get any new positions created – you had to go through the Public Service Board and so on and persuade people. Well, I was just told that we were going to have four people in a unit for industrial democracy. The Premier had obviously told the Chairman of the Public Service Board that this was to be done and it was done.

We had great difficulty in finding people with any experience in the field. It was mainly academics who knew most about it, and we judged – or I judged – that we didn’t think somebody from a university was the one who would be the appropriate person to start the process of public awareness of what it was all about. Well, I think I might have been wrong in that because one man who subsequently I got to know very well possibly would have been appropriate, but I doubt if he would have accepted the position – anyway, that’s by the way. But gradually we got started. It was just an education process and at least it was something that the press and the media got onto, it was some new subject and they liked that and we had plenty of publicity and all sorts of speculation. But there was great trouble in getting either employers or trade unions to take the thing very seriously; things went very slowly and, after I’m not sure how long, might have been a year or two, I was told that the Premier was going to have the unit transferred to his department. I found out later that it was because things hadn’t been going quickly enough for him.

Interesting.

After another I think about two years, I was told that the unit was going to come back to me. We had a staff of four; I think by the time that it came back to me there was a staff of ten, again the Premier had increased the staff of the unit and it came back, and I’m not sure
that it was very much further advanced than it had been when it was with us, but anyway it continued and interesting to reflect on the fact that the one person who was working with the unit when it was in the Premier’s Department was his press secretary, Mike Rann, (laughter) who stayed in the Premier’s Department. When it came back coincided with the time when, as I mentioned earlier, John Bannon came onto the staff of the Department and subsequently Philip Bentley, two people who had been – or Philip had been involved in the industrial democracy area as an academic.

But it just took years and years for people to accept a new way of thinking. And the basis of the whole thing was that people needed to work cooperatively.

**Who selected Lyndon Prowse to be head of the unit?**

I did.

**You did, right. And what was the background to that – his work in Luv Pet Food, wasn’t it?**

Well, applications were called in the press and I interviewed some people, but he appeared to be the best applicant. He was certainly a controversial one –

**Right, yes.**

– (laughter) or he turned out to be one – but at least he did get public interest. He was one who liked to talk to the media and he got publicity, which was what we were trying to do.

**He was probably a bit too dynamic for some people in the public service.**

Oh, yes. I’m not sure if he was, I don’t think he was a public servant; I think he was on a contract, if I remember rightly. But I don’t remember those details.

**I think he knew – was it Fred Emery who was the big adviser on job enrichment?**

Yes.

**So got him involved.**

Yes, and Fred was one who was very helpful to me. I knew nothing about it and neither did anybody in South Australia.
You set up in your department, I think as most other departments, a joint consultative committee. Did you chair that committee or was that somebody else?

I don’t remember. Yes, I think I did. But we were only a small department of only a couple of hundred. It’s very different for a big department like E&WS with branches everywhere. But I think the joint consultative committee in my department was successful. I think the staff appreciated it. I can’t speak for them, but there was never any problem about it. But I don’t know if there was as much need for it – well, there wasn’t as much need for it – in my department, because I’d made the practice of meeting every new employee who came onto the staff within a few weeks of their [commencement], either on the day they came or when I could or within a week or two of them coming, to try and make sure that there was no ‘them’ and ‘us’ situation.

Yes, right, good. And you didn’t see it as potentially eroding your management prerogative?

No.

I think in some of the other departments there were a couple of runs at people trying to override management decisions.

Management, decisions, yes.

And I read the article Bill Rust wrote about you when you retired, which was very interesting, a good roundup, and I think one of the legacies of industrial democracy and the sort of approach you were taking was this area of closer discussion between employers and employees and things.

And that’s an interesting point because you’re quite right, it was that I was trying to emphasise the need for discussion between employers and employees. A lot of people were saying that the emphasis should be on discussion between employers and trade union representatives, which to me left out the employees and they’re the ones who are, after all, the ones who we should be looking after and working cooperatively with.

At one stage the unions got hold of the whole process and there was a report where they were talking about strengthening their role –

Yes.
— because they were a bit concerned about their role being diminished. Then there was the idea of — I think it was some sort of — it wasn’t a worker director, but like a community representative on boards. There was legislation mooted and that didn’t get too far, either.

Well, if there was I’ve forgotten that.

Right, okay. I think there was legislation drafted, but then everybody —

Backed off.

— backed off on it, yes. The shop trading hours, that was a sort of perennial problem for governments, the tugging between people wanting to open up hours and I guess some business owners and generally the shop trading unions didn’t want to open things up too much, particularly if there wasn’t the area of penalty rates as far as the unions went. How did you engage in that discussion? We talked about a referendum, but was this an area that caused you a lot of problems as head of department?

Yes. Shop trading hours has been a continual source of concern or difficulty, perhaps, for all of my experience. The history of shop trading hours is interesting in that it started with a royal commission in Victoria in the 1890s which was not a unanimous report. The majority said that there were two ways of regulating hours at which shops could open: one was by restricting the hours of opening and the second was by restricting the hours that employees could work.

I see, yes.

In those days, of course, there were no awards and people who worked in shops just had to work whenever the shops were open. The majority of the royal commission recommended that the restriction should be on shop trading hours, and that’s continued right through the twentieth century even though hours of employees are regulated.

I had nothing to do with the shop trading, Early Closing Act, until I became head of the Department. It didn’t take me many years to come to the conclusion that it was a lot of nonsense and that employees were sufficiently protected and there was no need for any restrictions on the hours that shops could open. But that was not politically accepted either by the Labor or Liberal Parties and this continued to be a fruitful source of disagreement (laughs) ever since.
It was 1970 or ’71 I think, when Glen Broomhill was Minister, that the Cabinet decided that they would have a referendum about shop trading hours, it was about Saturday trading, which showed that the community was almost equally-divided, I think about fifty-one per cent in favour of continuing what was being done and forty-nine per cent – it’s something of that order, it was quite extraordinary. And we just continued as we were. Some of the problems at that time were solved by substantially extending the range of what were called ‘exempt goods’, but there were all sorts of anomalies. For instance, the *Early Closing Act* areas were – well, take Darlington – there was a situation where each of the seven oil companies had a petrol station within a few hundred metres of each other on the eastern side of Tapleys Hill Road and South Road, that wasn’t in the early closing area –

**I remember that, yes.**

– and on the other side you had to close. It was a great source of public discontent and made work for the Department, and all in my opinion for no purpose.

**So who actually inspected whether shops were properly open or closed?**

It was one of the responsibilities of people who were titled ‘industrial inspectors’, but they were colloquially known as ‘shop inspectors’. Their main, most important role was to check to see that employers complied with awards, but they spent a lot of their time on early closing.

**Gee. Interesting. Well, we’re getting there.**

It had nothing to do with the people who were involved in industrial safety.

**Another area that came into your department – I’m not too sure exactly when, probably later – was the Youth Advisory Unit. Can you recall whether that was the precursor to a lot more attention to youth policy and programs?**

That was just another of the things that the Premier sent to the Department of Labour and Industry. I guess it was appropriate. But I really didn’t have anything much to do with it, it was an administrative thing – what we had to do was administrative, because the policy had all been determined, and one of my deputies dealt with that so I’m quite hazy on what
happened. But I know we did have it and there were make-work projects like the RED scheme that they administered and some of them were successful and some were not successful.

Just looking at the 1970s broadly, and we’ve gone through a number of areas and the changes that were made, did you pick up any pattern – when you were just thinking about how change, new policies and ideas might best be implemented – any pattern in the way things were introduced and Don Dunstan’s role in that, or his ministers’?

I don’t think so. It was very hard to really determine that, whether there was any pattern.

Well, one observation about Don – and this may not be in the areas we’ve been talking about, I guess industrial democracy might be one – was he put his neck out and he could sense where people were at, but on some policies like that one and there were some others he got the idea and whoever was advising him about it might have helped him flesh out the idea but he was quite willing to run with something that wasn’t fully-developed and there might be a lot of controversy about but at least he was quite prepared to run with it, with something he believed in or fitted into a broader pattern about the right of people to be involved in a range of things in their lives, including their working life. So as a head of department I was just asking the question whether you saw any pattern in that or whether there was something about the change process that helped things along.

No, the only pattern I could see was that, when things were going as the Government – and by ‘the Government’ I mean the Cabinet – wanted, everything went along smoothly, we didn’t hear anything; if something went wrong, well, we did.

One of the things that I thought of and hadn’t mentioned previously, I think that one of the strengths of the Dunstan Government was the calibre of the Cabinet he had. That Cabinet with Des Corcoran, Len King and Hugh Hudson and Geoff Virgo and before Jack Wright came into it, Don Hopgood, rarely does a government have a cabinet with the calibre of the ministers he had, and I really think that – I mean, public servants, or career public servants, were trained to keep an eye to the general climate, and I think all I can say is that while things were going well – or we knew that things were going well if we didn’t hear anything; if something went wrong, we very quickly heard about it. And in a few cases, like the industrial democracy and the petrol rationing thing, we had things imposed

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4 RED – Regional Economic Development.
upon us which I guess was an indication that the Premier had confidence in the Department to undertake some new responsibility.

Yes. And in your discussions with Ministers – I know you mentioned one discussion with Don Dunstan, but your own Ministers – were they looking to you to put up ideas or was it mainly fleshing out the ideas of the Government itself?

The ideas that came from the Department were initially all talked over in detail, of course, with the Minister, not with the Premier. I mentioned that with David McKee, he sometimes took me to see the Premier when they were having discussions about what was going on and at times we would obviously discuss things that were currently being considered and discussed and so on. But I don’t recollect any occasion when Don Dunstan said, in those sorts of areas, ‘This is the way you’re to go’, or anything like that. He had confidence in his ministers.

Just by way of rounding up, was there anything you wanted to say that we haven’t covered, either about specific policy areas or just the Dunstan Era in general?

I think you’ve taxed my memory. (laughs) And I hope that it’s all been accurate because, after all, the period we’ve been talking about is forty years ago and I’m now eighty-eight and I’m sure I’ve forgotten some things. But it’s been interesting to try and remember some of the things that you’ve been asking me about. I don’t think there’s anything that – no, I think that we’ve covered all that I need to say, because it’s for others to judge how effective we were, and it was a combination I think, in the industrial safety and industrial training areas, combination of changing times, the development of Australia from what it was at the end of the War of being six states which were colonies into one country – – –.

You did ask last week about the industrial relations field. I don’t think I probably emphasised enough or mentioned that the Department had really no say in what was going on in the industrial relations field. The industrial tribunals were established to deal with industrial disputes and the Government as such, and certainly the Department, had no role at all in what was going on in the field. So far as the public service were concerned, the industrial relations responsibility was with the Public Service Board as an employer, as the government employer; but it was started in the Walsh Government and continued in the
Dunstan Government of having a less formal industrial relations system through commissioners and conciliation committees than it had been with the Industrial Court.

Well, it was an interesting period – – –. And I guess the other thing I didn’t mention was that in the industrial training area again there was no real understanding generally of the advantages for both employers and employees to be trained for the work that they did. There was training other than in the apprenticeship field or tertiary through universities and School of Mines, as it was in those days. Whether it was the Whitlam Government or not I can’t remember, but probably in the mid-’70s there was a body called the National Training Council formed –

**Oh, yes.**

– in Commonwealth and State with employers and ACTU\(^5\) and people like that and the state governments were involved. I was on the National Training Council for a couple of years, and it’s very interesting to recall now that all the – human relations isn’t it now, the current term? – that sort of field just didn’t exist.

**Yes, that’s true.**

And there’s been great advantages for individuals, millions of individuals, as well as employers in having people trained for the work that they’re doing, and all this that we hear about the Rudd Government saying when they expected a lot of unemployment they put people into training: well, that just was not heard of years ago, people were just put on and put off. And what’s happened in this last twelve months of employers obviously keeping staff and staff agreeing to working on part-time rather than having some being put off is almost a revolution in the way industry works, and to me it gives a great deal of satisfaction.

**Good. Well, thanks very much, Lindsay, for your contribution to the project.**

END OF INTERVIEW

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\(^5\) ACTU – Australian Council of Trade Unions.