AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

INTERVIEW WITH MR. KEITH SMITH, FIRST COMMISSIONER, AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL 5 DECEMBER 1987

INTERVIEWER: PETER DONOVAN

(006) - **Mr. Keith Smith - ...** the point was in the early days, because the Commonwealth Railways was such a relatively small organisation, how could they possibly, without any experience on a large scale, take over and run a large amalgamated system. So, it was not at all clear, nor possibly that the Commissioner of the Commonwealth Railways and his executive staff would be in charge. So, although there might have been misgivings in other railways systems, there were also misgivings in the Commonwealth. In the run up to the amalgamation, of course, we had a fairly regular modernisation, structured things and constructive results. So, in the long run it turned out that the Commonwealth Railways were a major executive force in the amalgamated system and, looking back over it, I can hardly think of one Tasmanian or South Australian executive officer who made good in the final scheme of things. I just can't think of one.

(021) - **Peter Donovan - These are people who stayed with their other organisations who didn't come over?**

(022) - Well, no, they came over to us, but for the more senior positions, I can't think of anyone that really made the grade either from Tasmania or South Australia. Stockley, of course, always reckoned he was a Commissioner, but he'd never been appointed as a Commissioner. He didn't last too long and McLean that he was a chief civil engineer, well he was out quick and lively. The chief mechanical engineer, yes he was the best of the bunch.

(028) - **Was that Tom Saunders?**

(029) - Tom Saunders. Yes, he was the best of the bunch. The others, well, they never came, they never gained any position in the thing. It wasn't because I was against them. It was because they couldn't do it.

(032) - **Go back to the beginning where we were discussing just briefly yesterday about Gough Whitlam, and what you believe to be the genesis of the whole AN ...**

(034) - Well, I suppose, the real genesis of it was, Australian Labor Party policy which had been developing for some years, but I first met Gough Whitlam at the opening of the new Canberra Railway Station. I think it was around about 1964-65. I met him at the instigation of the American Ambassador who we had taken for a trip over the Trans. He was quite taken with Gough Whitlam and he said, "You ought to invite him", as he said, "to the dedication of a new station". And I invited him. Of course, the American Ambassador and Gough Whitlam came along. I remember him walking up to me. "Oh, I was going to introduce myself". "Oh", he said, "No need to", he said. "I know you from your photograph" and he started talking about railways there, at the reception that followed and he mentioned this business of amalgamation and asked me what I thought. Of course, any railway man in an executive position could see the advantages of it. He said he'd like every support if, in due course, you know he'd bring it about. I told him I was very keen on it and the reasons why and we had quite a spirited discussion I recall. I always think, as far as the actual practical application to amalgamation, that was the door to it.

(050) - Did you have many discussions with him afterwards before he got into government?

Oh, yes, no not many, not many. Sometimes he'd ring me up but he knew my attitudes and I think he felt that he had very strong support. The other chap who had a finger in the pie was old Bill Wentworth. He thought it was a good idea for amalgamation, but his main [contribution], of course, was standardisation and he gets a bit of the credit for it, but I think he gets more credit than's due to him.

(061) - When did you first hear of it as being a 'goer'? Supposedly the policy speech of Whitlam in December 1972. He acted pretty quickly after that didn't he?

(063) - He did yes.

(063) - A matter of weeks?

(064) - I think I had some inklings about it before. Of course, I'd spoken about it at various places. And things did happen fairly quickly and, I suppose, because it wasn't so marked out in definite Stages 1, 2, 3, 4 that my memory's a bit, well, it's not a bit, it's quite opaque on the question. I know the main thing was to overcome the resentment of the executive staffs of the various railways. I think South Australia was the first one if I recall, followed by Tasmania. I really forget that now. If anyone would be the last to go, or the last to come into the fold, I would have thought it would have been South Australia. I think in the event it was the first. Because it had a Labor government - Don Dunstan ... I remember one of the main discussions whether we'd have the metropolitan railways. I certainly didn't want them. Dunstan made some overtures for us to take them over, but finally was convinced they should keep them. But I'm very glad that we never took the metropolitan railways over because they're a sink, a political embarrassment no matter wherever they are.

(081) - Did you want to take over Tasmania?

(082) - Well, personally, I didn't, I didn't, maybe from pride. I was still a reasonably young man at the time. But I was in Tasmania. I was Workshop Manager down there for a couple of years. I thought it would be nice to go back to Tasmania as the chief, as it were. I liked Tasmanian Railways. I knew that they could do a lot better than they were doing. Yes, a lot of people, the accountants and so forth, of course, uttered horror. But they were right as far as the accounts were concerned. But from a railway point of view, I mean, for example, the Commonwealth would consider all railways systems quite apart from their financial respectability. I thought it was a good thing.

(092) - Were you involved at all in the ... Well, how closely were you involved in the various negotiations that took place?

(093) - In what ...

(093) - Say, from '72 to '75. Not at all, or was it the bureaucrats?

(094) - Not very much. My main task was to go around locating the Commissioners and executive staff, really, and then the union opposition rose to a crescendo, or queries. I used to chair the meetings of the combined unions. Normally I kept right out of it. ... I suppose, like all executives, all you want's no trouble.

(099) - **So, who was doing most of the negotiating?**

(100) - Oh, various committees.

(100) - **I guess Collin Freeland was pretty active at that stage ...**

(101) - Yes, I think the main negotiations really was between the departmental people rather than the railway people, you know between the various people from the public service in each particular state. I'm sure it was. - - - The thing had to be done right various Acts of Parliament in each particular State. It was a question of drawing and writing the Acts and getting agreement to the Acts between the various people, and the carve up of assets and money and all that type of thing. No, I don't think our railway people had too much to do with it except to give advice and to give the assurance once the thing was done we could carry on working and assimilating any other people. We had the practical job to do with running the thing rather than shaping it by legislation.

Have you got any comments on some of the deals that were done? Even if you weren't involved, you must have had some . . .? With an ear to the ground, you must have got some feedback from various people.

Oh, I think ...

Would you describe that South Australia was a generous settlement?

Well, I think it was more than generous. I think that Tasmania was more than generous, really. Tasmania was a bit of an embarrassment, but then I understand there was a fair bit of money into it as well. No, it wasn't a niggardly arrangement. People who dispensed with their railways did well out of it, apart from the loss of pride of losing an arterial method of transport under their control and under their patronage.

What about the others who didn't come in? Some of them remained negotiating for quite awhile.

They did, as I understood, to see what kind of deals could be done, because any particular State. . . They wanted to let go of their railways, not for the good of the railway system of Australia, but for the short-term and long-term benefit of the State itself, you see. And the bigger the State is, of course, the more people to talk about it and the more things to settle. Finally, the feelings of the powerful railway people through their ministers would prevail depending on their position in the hierarchy, as it were, and with the amount of bargaining and negotiation with Tasmania and South Australia it took all the time up, any rate. We were bargaining people in the Commonwealth. The Treasury were getting a bit 'jack' of it because I think the Commonwealth Treasury had to pay a lot more than they thought they would, so that

they didn't want to be burning their fingers with Western Australia, I suppose, or New South Wales, or Victoria. But I don't think Victoria was all that interested. We'll leave New South Wales. . .

Collin Freeland suggested it might have even been down to personalities when New South Wales pulled out. He said, this is under Tom Lewis' time as Premier, he said that [he was] the only Premier he saw who didn't like Gough Whitlam for some reason or other. Even Bjelke-Peterson got on civilly at Premiers' conferences and things like that.

Well, there's no doubt that when there's a question of transferring something from the State to the Commonwealth or something from the Commonwealth to the State, in my experience, personalities and the top people are of tremendous importance, probably of commanding importance, yes. So, if the top people didn't think, in their own view, that it wasn't a good thing, then generally it was taken not to be a good thing and that was that. I mean, when I look back on it I'm often amazed that South Australia and Tasmania were amalgamated. But at least we did show one thing, that once the amalgamation was complete in the political sense, we did make it run and run well. Politically and in a practical sense. And if it hadn't been done then the amount of losses we suffered would have been horrendous.

Charles Halton - how does he figure in all this? What influence did he have? Did he have a big influence, a little influence, fairly overt or covert?

I think oh, probably overt influence. I hate to use the word covert. He had the advantage of being someone new in the field of top public service administration, he had an engineering viewpoint and probably he could see more clearly than someone who'd been in Australia for many years and associated with the transport field who'd been tainted, shall I say, with the various forms of discrimination - one railway against another. I think he was anxious to see that he was a success, and for the sake of the railways and also for the sake of his own reputation.

You had a bit of influence in recruiting him or getting him or something like that?

Oh, Gough Whitlam asked us to see him; they were thinking of bringing him over from Canada, I think he's got a degree. Collin Freeland was in this thing and a couple of others were going around looking at suburban rail cars and some deal that the federal government wanted to carry out with the Victoria and South Australia and probably Queensland and Western Australian [governments]. He said, "Have a look at this chap Charles Halton in Ottowa? Call in and see him", which we did, "and let us know what you think of him". I thought he was a good bloke, and I told Gough that but probably they'd arranged to bring him over here before I ever had anything to do with it. But I certainly saw him, had dinner with him and talked with him months before he came to Australia.

How did you get on with him later?

Very well. As far as I know, I never had a cross word with him except the day of the opening of the Alice Springs railway. Peter Morris, the Opposition person, wanted to make a speech and Charles laid down the law saying he couldn't make a speech. Well, Peter Morris said he'd bring the press in, and made a statement there that would rock us all on our heels. And Ralph Hunt came in, and he was distressed about the whole thing and I had to tell Hunt, I had to tell Charles Halton, it was my railways. It was under my auspices that the thing was being opened. I was the host so I was introducing the Princess to all the Premiers that were there, to the Hunts and so forth. And actually, in short I was taking the place of the Prime Minister who wouldn't come because of an impending election. And when you read the orders of the day, you will see what I say is true: that I had to do all this kind of thing that the Prime Minister would have done. So, I said, "I'm not having the thing spoiled by you Charles, and if Morris is going to call a Press Conference I'll be at it and I'll give them my opinion in no uncertain terms". He caved in, of course, but that's the only time I've ever had any harsh words with him because I should get ...

Well, did Morris get to say something?

Oh, yes, he made a stupid speech about transport in Hong Kong and he went on for a long time. Oh, yes, well, he was entitled to make a speech as the Opposition Shadow Minister for Transport. But anyway, I made no bones about it. It would be nice to end up the thing saying that Charles came and told me I was right or something, but he never did. The thing went off and went off very well. So, that was quite pleasant. But, otherwise, Halton, you know, he used to defer to me in most things, get me what I wanted. As far as I know, he never actively opposed me. If he did, he didn't do any good.

No, he suggested... I asked the question of him of you, and he suggested pretty much the same thing. He said the only real difficulty he had with you, difference, was over Vern Dyason and whether Vern should become General Manager or not.

Yes, of course, Vern Dyason, a personal friendship there, really. I had a bit of an idea Vern was interested one way or the other and I thought, well, in running any organisation it all depends on confidence, not so much on competence, and I wasn't going to let him down and that's what it was. Of course, at times you've got to assert yourself, and the first Commission that was being set up Jonesy had the union representative on it. As a matter of fact, I recommended every person on that first Commission. But there was a fellow called Begg, he was an AWU, that Jonesy wanted to put on as the union representative. I knew this Begg. He came from Port Augusta and had certain social and moral qualities which I did not approve of and I knew very well existed. But because I'm on tape, I couldn't mention what they are, but I told Charlie Jones that I didn't like him. He said, "Why don't you?" I told him and he said, "I think he ought to go". And I said, "I don't think he ought to go. In fact, I won't have him". "Well, won't you", he said. I said, "No, I just can't. I just couldn't have him". And, well, the impression was that if Begg came on I was going, so things stopped there. And Charlie said, "Well, you pick your own union bloke", he says, "and fix it up yourself". So, I picked Ralph Taylor. I picked Harold Bell. ... I picked every one of them, and it was me who decided that the headquarters would be in Adelaide because a

lot of them wanted it to be in Canberra. But I felt that Adelaide did not have, and as far as I know, still does not have, except for the Australian National, federal headquarters there. And look what happened. No-one gave me any opposition at all. I mean, that was a tremendous thing to decide where the national headquarters was going to be. I could have put it in Melbourne, where we were then. I could have put it in Sydney. It could have been in Canberra. It could have been in Adelaide. Adelaide was the best place for it. I thought it was central and also it's a good thing for Adelaide, and it worked out quite well.

Why did you pick Harold Bell? Where did you meet Harold Bell? Why was he there?

Well, we wanted to get an economist.

Can I just put a bit of background there. All the others seemed to be fairly logical. I guess George Webb as Commissioner of Transport in Tasmania, a railway man and, I guess, he was involved with standardization - Broken Hill to Port Pirie.

George was only in Tasmania because he was involved in standardization and he wasn't a railway man ever. So, he used to travel around with me quite a lot with standardization.

And Tony Flint, I suppose, from South Australia.

Yes, I didn't pick him, but he got up as a nominee of the South Australian government.

That's Ralph Taylor a union man ... did Harold Bell ... Collin Freeland, you wouldn't have picked him would you? He would have been foisted on you to some extent.

No, I asked for him.

Yes?

I asked for him. No, I knew Collin. I asked for him. But Harold Bell ...

Harold was, say, totally outside all the others that had vested interests.

Yes, yes, but we had no-one there to establish a financial standard and one of the great things of the amalgamation was to prove that it was an economic thing to do for a start, apart from being a practical operation. But I'd met Harold a few times at these TIAC meetings, he was a member of TIAC. And, of course, he was the Chief Economist for the AMP Society and a good speaker, well known everywhere. But I was hunting around to get someone, but I thought he was a lot older than he was, because he looked it ... Some of the economists they put up to me I didn't like the sound of them anyway and I thought about Harold Bell, and they told me his age and I was quite surprised. George Webb knew him well because they were brought up in Ballarat, both of them. And so I asked for Harold Bell and I rang him up to see if he was coming and he said,

"Yes" and that's what it was. But because he was a recognised financial authority. He used to talk on the ABC. He used to give his opinion on the Budget - get locked up and so forth - the idea [was] to give some financial credibility to the new Board.

In the early days, I think about 1977 or so, some fellows came over from Canberra - O'Neil and Delaney - did you have much to do with them?

Oh, no, some vague recollection.

Were they foisted upon you by the government or the department?

Yes, I think they were, but they [had] to set up the thing into compartments to run in a real modern way as far as I recall, but I think it turned out to be a fiasco. Only saw them once. I wasn't having anything to do with them because in the old Commonwealth Railways we were absolutely independent[?] apart from one way or another. They tried to come in and decide what you write to the Minister is this, and that kind of thing and they decide what's going to be done and, of course, that's a voyage to disaster, but this was, of course, another ploy of departmental people to get a strangle-hold over the railways. I think it was a fiasco. . . I certainly took no notice of it.

So, for a period there, there was quite a sort of a running tussle about who was going to have control, okay?

Oh, there might have been.

You, the Commission and the department?

It wasn't [on the part of] the Commission. It didn't worry us at all. But, I suppose, down in the Admin. Section the general tussle took place. As I mentioned before, in all my experience, either as Commissioner or Chairman, no-one ever told me what I was going to do, not that I was a fearsome kind of person. It was the kind of thing you grew up with. ... Except the Prime Minister rang me up seeking a favour, "Please make sure you finish the thing on time, the line to Alice Springs. I'd like you to do that", he said. "In fact, two months earlier for a certain reason I won't give you". The reason was, of course, he was going to get the Princess to come out here and he said, "And make no mistake about it", he said. "You can use every resource that Australia has at its command to finish it". In the event, it was finished quite well and under the Budget. We never used any remarkable resources at all, but that's the only really direct command I ever received in, I suppose, thirty-one years.

How did you get on with your Ministers? You served under a few but we'll just take the ones from, say, Charlie Jones onwards. How did you get on in the period when Charlie Jones and Labor were 'turfed out' and I think it was Hunt came in next wasn't it or was it Nixon? Anyway.

Well, I was ... they all varied before and after. But, Jonesy, yes, I had a little bit of a tussle with him because he was a new Minister and so forth but he was one of the three Ministers that ever came into my office. When he first came, just to say hallo to talk about ... going out he said to two of his staff, "I met the Commissioner", he says "and

we two are like that. We get on". So, he never, ever came back. But, after, well he thought I was politically naive. Probably I was. There was a fellow called Lynton Morris who was a Liberal Member of State Parliament. They used to take him for trips over years and years and years, but I thought he was a Labor member and I sent him an invitation to something or other and so forth and Charlie reckoned it was a terrible thing because I didn't know that this fellow was a Liberal, you see. So, apart from that, no we got on pretty well. ... Every Minister I ever had, the relationships were cordial and an absolute success in every way. When I retired, something that happened in Canberra, probably it's never happened before, they gave me a farewell luncheon and every Minister I ever had, and I think I had eight, some of them long retired were brought to Canberra to be at my luncheon. Fraser popped in to say goodbye, Nixon was there, Hubert Opperman came up, Charlie Jones, Ralph Hunt of course, Ian Sinclair. Oh, it was tremendous. It was quite lovely. Freeth was one but he didn't come. But I remember when I was first appointed, Opperman was Minister and he rang me up and asked me if I'd take the job. And I said, "Oh, yes". So, came the day when I had to see Menzies and Menzies stuck his finger out and said, "Oppy's a good bloke. You look after him". And then we had a real tremendous rapport with Opperman. He was quite right. Oppy gave a book he wrote called *Pedals, Politics and Power* and in the foreword he just said that in all his experience he said that he had never struck a more energetic, a more fearless, I think a more effective local member than Hubert Opperman. He was pretty right too. Oppy won Corio, a Labor seat, of course, with an increased majority at every election, and he was a Liberal, simply because he looked after the electorate. When you look at the Standardization Agreement, nearly everyone [puts it down to] Hubert Opperman, Acts and so forth. The most effective Minister really, I suppose because he was in Cabinet, was Peter Nixon. Rather quiet, retiring kind of fellow but he got action. Said he'd do something, he did it. Never thought much about it. Ian Sinclair was alright, but a fair bit of grandstanding with him. When we were getting concrete sleepers on the railways, [?] was, of course, a member of Forrest in Western Australia, a great tree growing place. He wouldn't even get out and look at any concrete sleepers. Sinclair when he was a Country Party Minister, I wanted to make a completely concrete sleeper track from Port Augusta to Whyalla. Of course, it was greeted with horror everywhere and so forth. At any rate, Sinclair said he'd look at it if we did a cost benefit study ... which we did. They brought it in and he approved it. It was the Country Party in power, the line to Whyalla was built with complete concrete sleepers and they gradually took over and, indeed, the line to Alice Springs is completely concrete sleepers. As I speak now, I think that it's almost concrete sleepers across the Trans. It's starting to take off all over Australia simply because, as I say, Sinclair agreed to it after a cost benefit study of the Whyalla railway.

The first two Assistant General-Managers, Alastair Maddock - he was the first one to come on board - how did you get on with Alastair?

Oh good. Of course, he was a Tasmanian.

Did he get the job because he was Tasmanian?

No, no.

To a large extent?

Well, probably to some extent to show confidence in Tasmania, [to satisfy] the people in Tasmania. Yes. Psychological respects to say that, but he was quite a forthright type of fellow and he had a fair bit of trouble, shall we say, with provincial unionism in Tasmania. They see things in a different light. He was one of their own. He was very forthright and took no nonsense. I think he'd been a skipper of a boat. I remember he was the husband of that lady who writes these train books. What's her name?

No, evidently he married a woman in New Zealand. The story goes that Patsy Adam Smith ...

That's the one, yes.

sued for breach of promise.

Oh, that's right. I thought he was the big fellow in her books. That's what George Webb told me that he was Patsy Adam Smith's husband.

Well, evidently not quite, not quite.

Oh, well, I never looked into it. I just took George, what George told me, you see. No, because he was a big upstanding bloke, he was forthright and came from Tasmania. Give the Taswegians a go. They're not left out of the consideration. Yes, that's if they get it. That's a normal administrative ploy, I suppose.

Did you have much to do with him or was that, sort of ...

Oh, I had a lot to do with him yes. He used to come and talk to me quite a lot, yes. Originally, I mean, after I got going I didn't see very much of him.

No, just wondering whether you did or whether it was Vern who did so or Don Williams.

Well, it all depends on their memory but probably, they certainly dealt with him a lot more with him than I did. But originally I never had anything to with him. Of course, I used to do a visit of inspection now and then. Once he was appointed I'd come into contact with him.

Did he need much backing up in Tasmania when he went down there? The impression is that he went down there to really sort Tasmania out. He came in as what, General Manager (Administration) or something, but then I think after a meeting up in Alice Springs it was determined that he should become AGM Tasmania ...

Yes.

and he should move back to Tasmania.

I don't think he heeded this report after he got it. As far as I'm concerned he just met the unions. I don't recall any vociferous or controversial union meeting with them and so forth. I was quite happy he was approached. Don Williams was quite happy, and things went on and the job didn't fall to bits.

And Don Williams? You were saying he was one of the few fellows whom you ever interviewed.

Yes. Of course, at the time, I suppose, there were quite a few aspirants who didn't have a railway background and I think that the federal people weren't as committed to someone who wasn't clearly imbued with all the railways of the past ten years or so forth - something from the profession outside. But he was an engineer and obviously he was capable and I suppose I interviewed him with an interest in the case because I felt that he should get the job which, indeed, he did. Probably our feelings were along the right lines. I think he couldn't do anything else but succeed at the end of it. He still has a very good personality. He has a wide streak of humanity. He's good the patrician looks of an administrator, which is quite handy at times.

What sort of a relationship built up between the two of you? This is probably when he was General Manager, I guess. Obviously, there was a direct line of communication between you and he. So, you must have worked out some sort of *modus operandi* there.

Well, I suppose- - - . I did some of the ceremonial stuff as it were and kept in the background and Don would do the real running of the railways. I'd have ideas and things like that and carry these ideas out, but I think it really boiled down that I was never breathing down his neck and he never haunted my office. The point is, of course, in the situation like that it means you don't want to see anyone and alter a decision of his, if they come and see you, unless there is something really dreadful or something like that. The knockers on your doors fade away like snow in the sun. In other words, he was running the railways.

Were there any differences between you?

I can't . . .

Were there any times you had to sort of pull rank and say, "No, it's got to be done this way".

Oh, I suppose there must have been, but I can't recall. There might have been. Has he got any differences?

No, no.

No, I can't recall anything that ever happened. No, it went off alright, as it should.

You know, because he was a very reasonably young man there when he took over. Did he seek your advice on particular things?

Oh, yes. Oh, we used to talk about things, yes. Oh, we talked quite a lot and often. There's a saying, "We used to make suggestions rather than give commands". When you start giving commands and they go wrong, you're in trouble and it brings in a different atmosphere in any organisation. I often think that there's a tremendous amount of truth in old Teddy Roosevelt's dictum: Those in command really should talk softly and carry a big stick. ... I mean, no-one ever defied me.

So, how did your relationship change over the period? You said, that perhaps near your retire[ment], you became more ceremonial than actual administration.

Yes, well, of course, there were these Corporate Plans and the computers coming in one way and another. Unless you're an expert in that you can't give any advice, suggestions, commands at all one way and another. And it was a new world to me and most everyone else. It was a new world to most everyone else. - - - Of course, there was the changing over of the logos and the colours and the general approach to the uniforms and one way and another. And I thought that the changing over of the logos and the colours, bit of razzamatazz [was small beer in the] scheme of things, but Don thought it would be a good idea apparently. He showed some modern thoughts, even though it cost a lot of money but, you know, all of these things were coming out. Don was dealing with them and probably he had other people dealing with them too. I don't suppose he's a great computer expert either. But to get to efficiency and no problems and no trouble. I suppose there's one dictum of administration that's true is that anyone can only really control two or three people at the most.

Talking about this Corporate identification project. Did you see it as anything of substance or was it all froth and bubble or necessary?

No, I saw it as being of substance, not necessarily for the good of the railways in the railways, but it was good for the perspective of the railways and other viewpoints - a political viewpoint, say from a commercial viewpoint, one way and another, and if you can command respect and confidence from people outside railways, but, well, you can always get infusion of capital funds and things like that which otherwise you may not get. If they thought that you were yesterday's man not having anything to do with this, well it's marvellous how quickly circumstances change. You know, I think it did a lot for the rail, altering our accounting practices one way and the other, but I think generally it did more for the perception of railways around the field.

How did the railway people take to it? I know Merv Nayda didn't like the colour green. He suggested he hoped the grasshoppers would eat the first loco.

Well, of course, it was a new idea one way and another, you know, but I think most of the railway people really saw it as something new, something novel. People like that ... oh, all in all, I think it's a good thing. Yellow: probably make the vehicles more visible at level crossings and things like that. You give a sense of one-ness to all the various vehicles of the national railways at least because, you know, they're running from Mount Gambier to Alice Springs to Parkes to Broken Hill. So, it's a pretty vast area. It gives a sense of unity, I suppose, and the time had past when we were probably giving a real sense of outrage to other railway systems when the vehicles came on their tracks. In the early stages, of course, you had Railways of Australia printed on the

carriages which ran interstate. Rather than Commonwealth Railways, you had Australian National Railways. So, people were not outraged. It can be seen by the public in a wide area. - - - But I think they've started to fade down by now. Now you see them everywhere.

The Corporate Plan, did you have much ... There are several little things that you don't seem to figure in much at all by this stage. We can tell the story of the Corporate Plan without involving you at all.

Yes, that's right.

Were you involved there?

No, not very much.

Did you push it?

Oh, yes, we pushed it at Board level. We pushed it at Board level. The Corporate Plan ...

SIDE TWO:

Just on the timing of that Corporate Plan, evidently there was a direction from Canberra that you should go ahead and compile such a plan. I think Don Williams was off coming up with a so-called master plan for rationalization of lines and stations and things like that, and, I think, about a February or something a direction came over from Canberra, 'Can you give us a Corporate Plan of where you're going to be in ten years time?'

I wouldn't say it was a direction. It was a suggestion. Of course, they had their Transport organization going then one way then another. I suppose they were looking for some people of influence to build up their empire. The Corporate Plans were a great thing. In those days, it's the beginning of them, they're starting. Of course, they're really accepted now. Yes, Canberra was in it with the kind of proviso that the Minister wouldn't give approval for this or that unless his Corporate Plan was going along kind of thing. But there was no opposition to it because it was a good exercise and the unions wanted it, especially the clerical unions and the professional unions. They certainly wanted it. They pushed very hard for a genuine and a professional Corporate Plan.

So, what was your input into the Corporate Plan? Much at all, Keith?

Not much, no.

One gets the impression that Don Williams carried it.

I think that would be correct, that would be correct, yes. I thought it was a good idea and so forth, but my input wouldn't be much compared to Don Williams.

Charles Halton suggests that at this stage his department was insisting on Corporate Plans for several of the government agencies.

Yes.

Do you have any ...

Oh, I think they were making the. . . I was going to use the word 'threats', but it's not that bad. They were just making the suggestion that if you don't make these Corporate Plans your funds are going to be cut in a dramatic way. Which is of cause what all government departments tell their victims. I think they're [accepted] now. I've just got the latest Corporate Plan and it seems to be working extremely well. I mean, as far as we were concerned at that time, it was a new method of management.

It's just that, as I say, until recently we've had the impression that, you know, the Corporate Plan of Australian National was something pretty unusual. It certainly seems to have been in terms of government railways.

Oh, yes.

But evidently the government, the department, was pushing this in several directions. It wasn't just the railways.

Oh, yes. I mean, Qantas or the shipping line or things like that. Well, of course, the Department of Transport had a tremendous to-do with the political facts of amalgamation. They were saddled with that part of it, and to do as much as they could to make the whole thing effective and successful. That would be the main concern, I think.

A fundamental part of that plan was the identification of so-called PSO's at that stage. They call them CSO's now.

Public Service Obligations was it?

Yes.

Yes.

How do you feel about that? You just mentioned last night that you still consider railways a bit of a public service.

Yes, well they kind of are, but I think it's identification of all these public service obligations, like they're closing wheat lines right, say here now, because they're such a drain on the railways but I would have thought that couldn't they make half the railways over to the Wheat Board and let them take the costs for it. In other words, these public service obligations, well, the government used to determine that coal, wheat or whatever, have got to be carried at this, which would be clearly stated in the difference from what the railway freights are, or were, and what the government decides they're going to be now, should be paid to the railways. I mean, the thing is done with pensioner travel.

It's identified and the pensioners travel at half price, but the railways get full price. Well, that's the kind of thing which no-one can object to that, but if you ever carry pensioners the railway gets criticized without end because of bad financial results, it's not conducive to fairness or a proper picture of the real railway, you see. I think all these public service [obligations] should be identified. It was one of the great things of the Plan wasn't it when you come to think it it?

(Pause)

There's probably stacks more to chat about. Just to get started. Railways of Australia, there Keith. You suggested yesterday that in some sort of funny fashion you might have been responsible for the naming of that new committee. But I know, that about 1973 you effectively took it over didn't you, in a sense?

Yes, probably.

That a New Zealand Conference there ... I think the executive, tiny though it was, was based in New South Wales I think, wasn't it, and you sort of ...

Got it put into Melbourne, in my own office, yes, that's right down in Collins Street. Well, I think, before I went into it we could have been more effective at it because we had the federal backing of funding, you see, and at the time standardization, or pending standardization, was all the rage - people could get interested in it. So, it seemed more fitting that the Railways of Australia should be under the banner, as it were, of the Commonwealth Railways and probably, you know, this Railways of Australia had a lot to do finally with the amalgamation that took place later on.

What was the change from the sort of Commissioner's Conference to Railways of Australia? In 1975 there was a change of name or something, a sort of a ...

I wasn't aware it was Commissioner's Conference. It could have been Railways of Australia. I think it's just the general trend in the thinking of those days. We were not thinking as, well, I hope we weren't thinking as, Commissioners of various State and Federal Railways. We were thinking as Commissioners in a sense of all the railways. We were responsible for the conduct of all the railways. Of course, brought about by standardization and such a flow of the goods and vehicles all over Australia. And so many vehicles in each others systems - couldn't trace them and couldn't get them back and all this type of thing, so it needed some people on the spot to be able to find out where each system's vehicles were in one way and the another. Then, of course, different vehicles started running over different tracks. They had to conform to the safety regulations and design specifications of each particular railway, too. So, it needed much more intimate contact between the various technical forces of each railway.

So, that organization changed quite a deal, the whole reason for it with standardization?

That's right because everyone's rolling stock and interests and ideas were all mixed up in a way that they never were before standardization took place.

Going back a bit, going back to Australian National again. In the period of about 1975 to '78, okay, the decision had been taken to amalgamate, but what were the chief problems in that period, when the Commonwealth had financial responsibility, but not yet day-to-day responsibility. What were the chief problems in that three year period?

I don't think they were financial really. I think everyone had made up their mind that probably there was quite a deal of confusion and so forth, the way the various accounts were kept, made to agree with one another, but the main problem, undoubtedly, was the suspicion on the parts of the various railway systems being amalgamated. No-one was too sure what was going to happen, what was going to come 'out of the blue' and, of course, the unions were threatened in many respects because of other unions in other railways and it's human nature, of course, that such difficulties were magnified and expanded beyond all measure. So, it was human suspicions ... and uncertainty.

How did you overcome those problems?

Oh, of course, I suppose, it would register to any administration as not as one would think, a decision of imagination, sobriety, one thing and one thing only, is just old fashioned patience. Just letting things work themselves out without 'stirring the pot' too much and it worked pretty well, indeed. Everything subsided in a much shorter time than it probably ever would ...

How about the unions? One gets the impression that was a pretty hard problem with something like twenty odd unions or something.

On paper.

There would have been masses of awards that had to be taken into account.

Oh, on paper it was, but the industrial officers had a good field day with it bargaining with the unions and so forth, but it came out alright without too much trouble. You often find with union matters that there's a lot more noise than there is firm intent. [In the final event] there wasn't much there.

Did you have much direct involvement with the unions as chairman?

Yes, I had quite a bit of [involvement] because unions are, you know, people who believe that they can only get any satisfaction by going to the real top man, and they'd have discussions, of course, at various levels, but quietly and in all cases of dissent we used to sit around a table and talk it over one way or the other. Sometimes we used to make hurried trips to various places to talk it over with the unions. The main thing was that they just wanted to talk with me really, to show their members that they'd gone to the highest level and had the ear of the highest person as it were. Psychologically that was important. I mean, I wasn't there to win fights with unions, or to lose them. Matter of fact, I was more or less there to get a satisfactory conclusion to everything. The unions were just one facet of the whole thing.

How about Ralph Taylor? People suggest he had a pretty tough time on the Commission trying ...

He might have had from his unions; not from us. Of course, Ralph was one of the old-time union fellows. He was all rough and tough - came from Tasmania originally. Well, of course, he gets on the board there, and I suppose he gets used to, in many ways, to having his own way. Of course, what to do when you meet with people who are just as tough and just as rough, you see. He finally ended up being a very fine board member. He helped considerably in industrial relations.

In what way? Can you be specific. Can you think of any specific instances.

Well, he'd hose things down, he'd hose things down where they could have blown up out of all proportion. He hosed things down sometimes in the board room. Maybe George Webb and Tony Flint and so forth would be laying down the law about what should be done with the unions and Ralph would take a, you know, a more generous stand about the thing. He had good ideas to improve relations, too. I think a lot of the smooth transition really had a lot to do with Ralph Taylor. In fact, I think his hard time came up from the board of the railways and went to his own members where he was 'hobnobbing' with the bosses. I think he, finally, after I retired he only lasted a while and he decided he'd leave too. I think finally David Hill did him over and I don't think he's with the ARU any longer now.

Yes, he is. He's still federal secretary.

Is he? Oh, I'm surprised. I thought he'd left.

No, no, no. I haven't managed to get on to him yet, but I was by 'phone to the federal secretary office and he was still ...

His name never appears anywhere. He must be having a very low profile. I only just believed that he kind of left.

Did you think it unusual, oh, I suppose, given the complexion of the federal Labor government, but the idea of having a union man on the Commission?

I didn't think it was unusual myself, whether it was Labor or whether it was of any political persuasion. I think it was a great thing. I still think it was a great thing for the railway to be representing the union viewpoint ... Yes. It used to give the bulk of employees a kind of voice in what's happening. In these days of democratic government I think it was a kind of a fresh breeze in a rather arduous autocratica. Yes, I think it was a good idea to have it. It certainly worked. You see, the point was, when you look back over it, all the ingredients were there for a general explosion in the management of unions and things like that. It just didn't happen.

Well, it seems AN has had pretty good relations with the unions over the years.

Oh, always. In any urgent situation, the unions always supported the executive, always.

How about Collin Freeland? How did he fit into that Commission?

Oh, he couldn't be better. He couldn't be better at all. He probably had a lot to do with 'toning down' ambitions in the hierarchy of the public service, in the transport field. He wasn't working for them, so he reckoned the board was doing a very fine job of work and if we wanted help from the hierarchy, he seemed to be able to get it or he adequately conveyed what was happening to people over in Canberra. So, I think that was one of the real good appointments, [Collin] Freeland.

So, there was no sort of conflict of interest on his part either?

Not that I know of, no, no, no.

Whereby the board might have been, you know, recommending things that they knew the department mightn't go along with or ...

Oh, yes, he'd say that. Yes, the department mightn't go along with it, but the board was concerned whether the Minister went along with it. It was up to me to see the Minister and so the Minister, whoever he was, had to finally decide between Halton and me, I suppose, or have his own view of it, one way or the other. I can't ever remember having to side against myself. Maybe Halton and I thought exactly the same, but I don't know. If we wanted to do, we always did. I can't recall any board decisions he ever queried, never. It meant, as I said before, that [we were safe guarded] against interference by nameless, faceless, people from outside you see. Oh, no doubt they did have some influence from the general managers and people further down the line that they didn't have with the board.

George Webb, how did he fit in there because you are on record as recommending that he ought to stay for a little longer?

Oh, the old school tie kind of thing. I'd known George for a long, long time in standardization, you see. He was a great supporter of mine and we got on very well - was as fearless as a lion, knew his way around the traps. In a semi-political atmosphere, you wouldn't have got a better board man. He was never sick. He'd get 'firey' now and again, but he was as good as they come, George was. I suppose that's why I wanted him to stop longer.

It just seemed a little odd that, he didn't even see out the first Commission. Okay it was said that he had to retire at sixty-five, but there was evidently a way around that. He could have retired and then been appointed again under a separate clause. I think he went out in about 1977 or something just before things were settled.

When was he supposed to go out?

Well, when he did.

Oh, yes. Yes, I think actually all those things apply to Commissioners but they don't apply to acting Commissioners. Could have been appointed as an acting Commissioner.

Yes, that's what he raised. No great problem on that. Did you have much to do with someone like a Geoff Virgo? Well, what was his role in all this?

Geoff Virgo, I didn't want to have anything to do with him. ... He was always on to me. . . He was in the workshops when we first took over. Every day of the week either Dunstan or Virgo or someone was down at the Islington workshop haranguing the crowd. He used to come to see me to motivate me to do this. In other words, the characters who were there to build the national railway should be at the Islington Workshops. He nearly gave the government a stroke there and it cost a fortune, and the workshop people ran the whole thing. Because Virgo had been an electrician who came from the Islington Workshops. He was a very strong minded chap. In other words, he ruled the Transport Department in South Australia with a rod of iron and because we'd shifted to Adelaide he was going to rule us, you see. Yes, I had some nice fallings out with him and he had to confess later that he could not motivate me, but we were rather friendly. We used to sit together at TIACs and talk and joke and we'd call in on pubs and things like that. Oh, he would have been a lion let loose on Australian National if he'd had his way, there's no doubt about it. ... Even the falling out between us, oh, it wasn't really, but there was a failure with motivation, I suppose, it would have been.

You had to establish a ...

Oh, yes. A kind of barrier which he didn't get through, which wasn't all that hard, oh, there wasn't any nasty frame of mind. It was just the two of us were implacable that's all.

Did it ever go any further than you? Someone has suggested that it was relatively easy from a union point of view to some extent, in the old days of SAR if somebody had a complaint they'd run straight to the minister ...

Oh, they certainly did.

who was sort of at the end of the chain, of course.

Yes, well this is what's happening, of course, when you're taking over.

When it went over to the Commonwealth they couldn't go to the Minister because he was in Canberra now. He was a different ...

But they still ran to Virgo who took it up with the Ministers in Canberra. Of course, Virgo's not Minister for Railways, he's Minister for Transport - roads, buses and that kind of thing. He had intimate contact with the Transport people in Canberra, TIAC, road funding and all this type of thing. Oh, yes, he used to take it to the Minister and so forth, but so I know he did but nothing ever came back from the Minister to me, never, not even verbally.

For a long time there seemed to be quite an impasse between, well, that letter I showed you there earlier, between the South Australians and the new organization. How was that resolved?

Mainly through the effluxion of time, that's all. We just kept to our particular view and we had all the authority on our side, all the power under the agreed acts and so forth. So long as we had that and weren't shown to be arrogant fools, people lusting for power, were understanding managers. Well, of course, people leave, people die, people see it as no other way out and the thing, well, solves itself. That's all it was, but, as I said before, the opportunity was there for a tremendous explosion of rancour, hate, and all that type of thing.

The whole question of fitting in two, well, even three sorts of administrations, I suppose, how did that work out as far as people were concerned? Did many people have their noses put out of joint? Presumably there were people ...

There's only one winner anywhere in any place, I suppose. I mean all the ones that don't win, of course, have their noses put out of joint. Oh, yes. Obviously there's a lot more people with their noses put out of joint than people who keep their noses in joint, yes.

Was that a big problem? Like, did it manifest itself as a problem in terms of morale and things like that?

I don't believe it did. I was told time and time and time again that it caused problems with morale had dropped down and so forth, but people still lined up and got their pay and had their Christmas parties and everything else, but I don't think it was a problem at all, but I think that most people recognised that what we were doing and the what we did was the best possible job that could have been done under the circumstances and I had no personal enemies or anything like that. The only thing that we were accused of was preferring the Commonwealth staff over the Tasmanian staff and the South Australian staff, and there were very good reasons for that, the others weren't good enough. Actually, I think what had happened, I think over a very long time under Ministers like Virgo, any incentive had been sapped for self-expression and in taking responsibility and they were just incapable of doing this. The Commonwealth fellows, well, we didn't have that many of them, and they had to do almost any job, do it, do it the same day and take responsibility for it and that was the reason for the Commonwealth people all [being preferred].

What was your role as Chairman? What did you spend most of your time doing in any one week what were you doing? A little bit of ceremony, perhaps?

Oh, I don't know, come into the office, I suppose. I didn't ring for anyone and generally Vern Dyason would come in and tell me what was happening generally and think there might be a problem developing somewhere or other. I never had a secretary, ever. I found when I did have them, I generally found they made that much work for you that you didn't have much time for yourself. Oh, and, of course, a lot of letters had been prepared for the Chairman's signature, might ring up a board member or something or other but, well, it's hard to say. I often wonder myself. They told me that I retired

about ten years before I went, but I think I kept a pretty low profile, but I was there every day, but there was a fair bit of travel, of course, going to lots of conferences and things like that. But not getting too involved with day-to-day work I was free to go anywhere at any time, which was important because you have to engender knowledge and confidence, you know, around the traps right around Australia.

Your time ran out at a particular time in terms of a five year appointment, but you were kept on for a little longer. Why was that? Was it just so that you could see the railway line go through to Alice Springs?

No, I don't think so. Oh, it might have something to do with that, yes, but I don't think they made up their mind who was going to succeed me as far as I could think. I should have gone around about May or something. It was about the next March I went, I think.

Yes, yes.

I think. I didn't express any desire to stop on. I mean, I was glad enough to stop on. The time came on and on and no-one said who was going to succeed me and I thought I was going to stop, but it wasn't all that unusual. A couple of times when my term had gone up as Commissioner, they'd forgotten to re-appoint me. Sometimes there'd be a few months when they didn't have any Commissioner at all kind of thing. That was the kind of haphazard thing. I didn't actually ask. I didn't think it was all that unusual but when you look at it as far as, you know, the top public service is concerned it's pretty hard to find someone who's been kept on over sixty-five, quite unusual, yes.

Did you make any recommendations for a successor?

Yes, I think, I made Don Williams. I'm pretty sure I did. He would ... yes, I did. Certainly wouldn't have been anyone else.

Did you make any other recommendations about the position? Like, it was full-time when you were there and a little later became part-time.

No, I would have still recommended Don Williams obviously and if I'd have done that, I mean, obviously it would have been as a full-time. Couldn't get a young bloke like that just working full-time and then suddenly making a part-time person. No, I think the full-time position was quite adequate and so forth. I suppose I'm the old-fashioned person. I'm not very keen on these real top positions being part-time. Seems to be a bit of a sinecure. Can't escape from real responsibilities there. Oh, I might be proved wrong if Don becomes a part-time Chairman. Oh, it wouldn't necessarily prove me wrong though.

Did you know much about Lou Marks before he was appointed?

I'd met him a couple of times, but, no, not a thing. Came as rather a surprise, but then, again, management practices in those days, and probably still is, getting someone in who's required into the job to bring fresh ideas to it or something like that if you like that.

Any suggestions as to why he was appointed rather than someone else?

No, I only heard rumours one way or another. He was a very good transport man. Horizons seemed to be evaporated in the place where he was. Some said that his strong Country Party affiliations, but probably Charles Halton got to know him pretty well at TIAC and Ralph Hunt got to know him pretty well at TIAC and as time was going on, and I was still there they might have got a bit desperate. They were going to appoint, of course, before any of them, was Keith Johinke, who was the roads fellow in South Australia, but he didn't take the job and rather luckily for the Railways he didn't, because he had a very severe stroke not long afterwards and he had to leave the Highways. But Johinke was certainly offered the job.

Had the job changed much over that period of five years that you were there?

As far as I was concerned, yes. You see, I'd come up as Chief Mechanical Engineer through all the various stages. I was Chief Civil Engineer and Chief Mechanical Engineer. I was Chief Construction Engineer when we were building the line to Leigh Creek, Marree and used to write letters to one another but I used to take, you know, a tremendous amount of responsibility and tremendous authority for all sections of the service and gradually became Commissioner and became Chairman, and gradually kind of recede and you're just in a Board room and you're not mixing so intimately with all these things and you're not taking any responsibility actually. I used to take it actually before. Yes, it was changing all the time. Of course, you get someone of the calibre of Don Williams come in and that changed the picture straight away. If some 'mug' came in well, of course, the picture could be changed again. Back you go, you see. Yes, it's changing. It's always changing.

People say, we went through this yesterday, I think, just mentioned it - you were always someone who got things done. The question is how and what sort of things? You mentioned you had a good range of contacts.

Yes, I suppose so.

How did you develop those?

Oh, you just go and talk to people I suppose, that's about all. We got things done. When people said to me, 'You'll never, ever get the line built to Alice Springs'. It was approved and applauded. 'You'll never, ever get the line built to Whyalla'. I saw the Chairman of B.H.P. (McLennan I think it was). I said, 'Why won't you recommend that you want a line to Whyalla?' 'Well,' he said, 'We do. Can you build it?' I said, 'Yes'. In eight or ten months we could built a line to Whyalla. We could get the money for that. It was done, concrete sleepers. No-one's ever had them before. It was impossible to have that. That was something I got done and when we thought that, you know, the best thing I'd ever do as Commissioner was get standardization between Broken Hill and Port Pirie, oh, well, we got it through to Perth and we got it through to Pirie and we got it through to Adelaide. Impossible, people said, but it was all done.

How?

Well, just persistence, I suppose, just persistence and patience, that's about all and getting people to have confidence in you. Completely welded rails across the trans - no breaks in it anywhere - up to Alice Springs and Whyalla. Impossible they said. All done. But the railway to Alice Springs, it was the first long-distance transmission to use solar-powered radio in Australia. We got the headquarters in Adelaide, we got the headquarters over in Keswick. Some said that could never happen, but that was done. A tremendous lot of things were done, come to think of it. Indian-Pacific built. All the diesel locomotives replaced. It went on and on and on, kind of thing.

So how did you do those? As I say, just through your contacts, just a question of chatting to people, just ringing them up on a 'phone.

Oh, well, just going around where people knew us and so forth. Success breeds success. Gee, I remember going up to see Oppy just after the election - he wouldn't sign these things for some, I think it was ten big diesel locos. 'Oh', he said, 'If it's going to Sydney, you know, it won't do us any good in Victoria because. . . If we get in', he said, 'I'll sign it for you'. Any rate they got in finally and I went up to see him and he wasn't there. So, we had three weeks I went up and down to see him and suddenly his Secretary, who was an English woman and so forth. Any rate, can't remember her name. She said, 'Hasn't that silly old wretch signed it for you'. She said, 'I'll sign it for you', so she signed H. Opperman. That was millions and millions kind of thing you know, but that's getting something done. She did it for me, see. ... But there were so many things that were done you know. It's quite extraordinary when you look back on it, but there's no real rational explanation except, you know, human confidence in people and things like that.

You said earlier that you had no trouble getting money.

No, no. We had a real hard time when we were exporting iron ore on the Northern Territory railway. We started a bit before we should have, you know, the line needed strengthening, they had a bad Wet, trucks were coming off everywhere and two or three transports in Darwin Harbor waiting for iron ore that wasn't coming in. The screams were terrible and so I had to go to Canberra for an All-Department Conference. I was the boy who'd let down the side, you see. Everyone's there, except Immigration and Health, and they just complain about lack of funds and so forth which they hadn't given us which was a real hard time. The meeting lasted about two and half hours. I went in a pauper and came out as rich as Midas, all the money I wanted. So, that happens anywhere at all where there's a bad crisis of money. Treasury really well used to give us quite a lot. Actually, our main problem was spending it.

Oh, I think that just about gets rid of most of my questions.

Oh, that's alright then. That certainly stirred my memory up a little bit.

Anything else that you find, sort of, ought to go in the record? Do you have much to do with the younger, or more junior management, like the Merv Nayda and Tom Williams?

Oh, yes, I have a lot to do with them, yes, yes. I used to go around to talk to them, go to their offices, laugh and joke with them, 'What are you doing this for?' And some things that I knew was going to happen, I said, 'Well, you're just wasting time. That's not going to happen' and things like that. Oh, yes. That was a constant thing. Used to go down to the Publicity Section and sit down and talk to them about what was happening. I wasn't, you know, a remote kind of person, although I never encouraged anyone to come up and have chats in the office or things like that. I went down to the Workshops and talked to people in the Workshops, oh, yes. In fact, just off the record they asked me to go down and have a look at the Bathurst Workshops last week because there was a lot of grandstanding going on about that and some person knew I was brought up in Bathurst and I was here now and asked me if I would go down and talk with people in the Workshops who were all going to lose their jobs. So, I rang up a few people in Sydney and went down and went through the Workshops and shown through with royal honours as it were and had some talks with them. I think I did quite a lot of good. Everyone seemed quite happy. But that's the kind of thing - go around and talk to people.

Someone suggested that Commonwealth Railways made quite a deal of money on overseas consultancies.

I'm trying to think out where they appeared from. Of course, once they started, these consultancies seemed to grow like topsy. I think it might have grown out of one of my visits to the United Nations. Went over for a big Transport Conference led by Casey and so forth who taught me. We met a tremendous lot of people over there, talking about us helping, we called it the Third World in those days. I called it a developing nation. I'm never too sure whether Australia is a developing nation either. But somewhere or other to Canberra in the transport field we were asked to do something about this **because we were the** railway and technical experts for the Commonwealth government. So, I think the first job Australia did was before the Vietnam war. With rolling stock in Vietnam, of course, it brought some work to the Australian workshops and it started to grow from there. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if we still haven't got a team in Indonesia on the track there. **They have been there** for donkey's years welding the track and bringing in technical improvements. We did the railways in **Sudan**. We did Christmas Island, if I recall correctly. We were going to do a big job in Algeria but no-one could talk French so that was the end of that. But then we did some jobs for the World Bank. The last overseas trip I did for the railways was up at Bangkok - a big transport international conference, with all the secretaries in China, Japan, even Russia, America. I was chairman. ... **...** from the World Bank was there. They wanted us to do jobs for theirs anywhere and we had a good reputation. Whether we all went on with that I don't know. But, yes, I think that the fees and so forth, what we got were quite adequate. You know, in the railway world you do a lot more than running railways in a particular district.

What changes in railway operations did you see? I suppose the five year period you were in charge of Commonwealth Railways is a bit small to - were there major changes in railway operations at that time? You mentioned something like the solar power up to Alice Springs.

Oh, yes, well, of course.

Concrete sleepers, I guess.

With modesty I have to say that the railway practice in the Commonwealth Railways are far superior to those adopted, certainly, in the railways we took over and certainly in most other places. I had the real advantage of being brought up in New South Wales with a very close contact with the ... task of pulling **loads** ... and long before we amalgamated we were running by far the longest trains in Australia, including concrete sleepers and long welding tracks, radio control of trains from guard to driver - and that was not even looked at in any other systems. And, of course, when we took over the other railways well, these practices started to come in. We admitted the driving locomotives and long established practice of the Commonwealth Railways became newly established practice in these other systems, and so forth. That was the same in South Australia. ... But they still wanted to build four-wheel wagons, you know ... and they thought it was a good thing. Well, we were building seventy-five foot goods wagons, freight wagons, and things like that.