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**OH 589/3**

Full transcript of an interview with

**BRUCE EVANS**

on 18 January 2001

By Jude Elton

Recording available on CD

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AUSTRALIAN WORKERS' UNION AND NORTH AUSTRALIAN  
WORKERS' UNION RELATIONS WITH ABORIGINAL WORKERS TO 1975:  
J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, MORTLOCK  
LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIANA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 589/3

**Jude Elton interviewing Bruce Evans on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2001.**

TAPE 1 SIDE A

**(tape gradually increases speed) This is an interview with Bruce Evans at his home in Adelaide on 18<sup>th</sup> January, year 2001, conducted by Jude Elton. In this interview information may be requested as to whether Aboriginal workers were 'full blood' or 'half-caste' as attitudes, opportunities and award coverage may have differed over time according to these dominant culture definitions. Where were you born, Bruce?**

LS: Cleve, South Australia, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1925.

**When did you become a police officer?**

LS: On the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1941 as a Junior Constable.

**And when were you stationed in the Northern Territory?**

In 1945 myself and four other men were seconded to the Northern Territory police for a period of two years.

**Where were you based?**

Based at various places in the Northern Territory – Darwin, Alice Springs, Daly River, Finke.

**Did your duties bring you into contact with Indigenous Australians?**

All the time.

**In what way?**

Well, in those days, the police were given – the main job of the police was looking after and (tape speeds up) running a police district which was mainly populated by Aboriginal people. And the main job of the police was visiting the camps and helping people. Any infractions of the law which may have occurred, it was their job to sort them out and if necessary bring the offenders to justice, yes.

**And, as a police officer, were you also a Protector of Aborigines?**

Yes. That was the role of the police – mainly the police in outlying areas. In the main centres like Darwin and Alice Springs, they had in those days Aboriginal Department people, but they were mainly in an administrative role. In the outlying areas the police used to act as Protectors of Aborigines.

**Did you travel around to the cattle stations?**

Yes. During my time there I didn't do much travelling around cattle stations, but on a couple of occasions I went on patrols which took me through cattle stations, along with other police officers who were also on the patrol.

**In what areas would that have occurred?**

One that I call to mind was a patrol from the Daly River police post, through cattle stations in the area – Tipperary, Barrundi, up through Pine Creek, Ooloo, Dorisvale, Lilyvale – that was in the Adelaide River, Pine Creek area, that one. And another one was from the Finke, we went through Tieyon, De Rose Hill, Kenmore Park, Ernabella, Victory Downs, Kulgera and back to Finke.

**Did you cross the border at all into South Australia?**

Yes. From the Finke we came back into South Australia through Abminga, Tieyon to Rose Hill, Kenmore Park to Ernabella. They were all in South Australia.

**And even when you weren't on patrol through the cattle stations, did you have any contact with Indigenous people who would have worked on stations?**

Well, at that time – this is back in 1946 – most Aboriginal people who were in that area in contact with whites worked on stations. Most of them lived in family units on the stations, and the males worked on the stations, mainly cattle work. There were some sheep places, but they were few and far between. Yes, that was back in 1946. Later I was more involved with them, when I was stationed in the Far North of South Australia.

**Were the women working on the stations as well?**

Very few. Very few. There may be one or two women working in the house along with the whites, mainly in the domestic – doing a range of domestic jobs, but not very many, not very many.

**How did you travel in the '40s?**

In the '40s? Either by horse or by camel. In the north of Australia by horse, down in the centre it was by camel.

**Over what sort of distances?**

Oh, crikey. I suppose a total patrol in the north of the Territory would have been about five to six hundred miles, and in the centre on a camel patrol it would have been around about the same. From the Finke to Ernabella Mission was about – and that was the turnaround point – was about 300 mile.

**Did you actually see any Aboriginal men and women at work on the stations?**

Yes, I would have seen – yes, I would have seen them there, but we're talking a long time ago. The men would have been working in the camp, in the cattle camp or the sheep camps, and – well, I've no doubt that I saw women who were working in the domestic situation at the homesteads.

**What range of work would the men have been doing on the stations?**

Well, we'll differentiate between sheep and cattle work. To do cattle work first, mainly in the stock camps. Also quite a few of them used to assist white contractors working on the stations who were, say, sinking wells or fencing, building yards for the cattle work, and they were the main jobs that Aboriginal men used to do. The women, as I said before, were mainly domestics at homesteads.

**If you like, we can come back to the sheep stations later –**

Oh yes, well, no, we can go on – – –.

**– well, we can deal with them separately, (telephone rings) if you like.**

All right, yes.

**So if we're just talking about the cattle stations –**

Yes.

**– how did you regard the standard of the work that you saw Aboriginal workers performing?**

They were very good stockmen. Most of them could ride horses very well – this was before the advent of motorcycles in the cattle areas – but most of them were good riders, good stockmen, and if you like to term it as they 'fell into' stock work very easily. It was – they had a natural talent for it.

**How reliant were the stations on Aboriginal labour?**

Oh, very much so, very much so. This was back in the – we're talking now during the '40s, because there was a difference then to later on. They were very reliant on Aboriginal labour, the stations. They did have white stockmen as well, but when you look at Aboriginal men who could track – they could track, they could track cattle, they knew how to – they soon learned how to work cattle, and the stations were very, very reliant on black labour, yes.

**One of the arguments that some managers and station owners made against Aboriginal labour was because they might not have been able to count, for example, therefore their level of responsibility couldn't be very high and they always had to have a white person to supervise them. Was that your experience?**

Well, it was a fact of life, I think, that there was always a white person in charge. As to the counting, well, the Aboriginals I knew had a counting system, but it was a very – how can I put it? – kudju [phonetic spelling] was one, kudjara [ph.sp.] two, mungulpa [ph.sp] three, kudjara-kudjara was four. But from there on it's just 'a big mob', you see, so it was very basic in the counting. But I don't know – it's something that I never ran across, insomuch that if you were counting cattle numbers, well, it was generally the head stockman or the manager who took that job on, you see.

**What were the working conditions like?**

Pretty primitive. As was – it was pretty primitive for the people who were living in the area, too, overall. But, you see, generally there was a native camp attached to the station where the families lived in the camp, and very rudimentary camps they were, too. And I can't – in those days I can't remember any station that actually had separate quarters, if you like to call it that, for Aboriginal people. It wasn't – I can't remember any.

**What was their accommodation like?**

None. As I say, they generally lived in rudimentary camps away from the station homestead, and depending on the whim of the occupants they could shift camp at any time, but they always remained within a certain perimeter around the station.

**Were they paid wages, as far as you're aware?**

I'm not really aware of a wage structure at that time. I've no doubt that they were paid some wage, but in those days the family used to live at the station and they were provided for along with the stockmen, but as to how much they were actually paid in cash I don't know.

**Were you aware of the Aboriginals' Ordinance which set down certain allowances and rations and so on that were supposed to be paid to the stockmen?**

Well, yes, I knew there was an Ordinance in existence, but I personally wasn't – I never had occasion to investigate that, because I was a junior member of the Force and I travelled with a senior member of the Force and it would have been his responsibility.

**Did the treatment of Aboriginal men and women workers differ between the large company stations and the smaller concerns?**

LS: I think, in my experience, the smaller concerns were more of a family-oriented situation where a group of Aboriginals would be at that station, it was generally their country where they were born, *et cetera*, around about that area, as opposed to the large, overseas interest stations. I've no doubt that a lot of the Aboriginal workmen there would have originated in that

area, but it was more of a – they were more remote from the personnel who administered the station.

**Did you ever have occasion to go to stations like Victoria River Downs –**

No.

**– or any of the large Vestey's companies?**

No, not Vestey's, no. I never went on – I was never on any of Vestey's country in an official capacity, no.

**Did provisions differ, depending on whether the workers were defined by the administration as 'full blood' or 'half-caste' – did you ever notice any difference in the provisions?**

I don't think that there was any difference. Not that I can recall.

**How did wages and conditions compare with, say, Award provisions?**

(laughs) I would think – and this is only a supposition on my part – that wages, with regard to Award conditions attached to the pastoral industry, I don't think wages would have reached that standard. But it's only a supposition.

**Did you notice any difference between, say, the cattle stations in the Northern Territory as against over the border in South Australia?**

Well, of course, the area that I was in at that time, you know, the border's an imaginary line, so that the conditions were about the same in the Territory and South Australia. Now, here again I qualify that by saying that I was a very young person in those days, and these sort of things didn't impinge on my consciousness as perhaps they would later on.

**With the wages and conditions, how did they compare with those of white workers?**

I think if they were good – here again, I've got to qualify this because, see, you had people who were absolutely top-flight stockmen, and I have a feeling that they may have been paid more than the average. Because a lot of them – 'half-castes', I refer to 'half-castes' mainly – were usually used in a sub-

managerial position. They were maybe a head stockman and they ran the camp, whereas the 'full-blooded' Aboriginals were subordinate to them, I should think.

**Were you aware whether the payments met the requirements of the Aboriginals' Ordinance?**

Look, I'm not aware of that.

**And so that would be the same, then, for, say, food and accommodation?**

Mainly on the smaller places the station used to provide rations for the camp, and it was fairly rudimentary rations, of course – flour, tea, sugar and beef. That was generally supplemented by the people themselves, who used to go out and hunt. And the – and of course the rations for the white stockmen in the camp, they were – well, that was about the same for them: beef and bread, beef and damper, you know. It was fairly rudimentary rations in those days. Bottle of sauce if you got sick.

**(laughs) If the Protector of Aborigines had come across payment or conditions that fell short of the Ordinance, what would they have done, or what *did* they do?**

LS: I don't know. No, I can't help you with that one because, yes, they did have Aboriginal patrol officers who – but I don't know whether that facet was included in their job, as to the payment of wages, *et cetera*. I would have thought that the *Aboriginal Ordinance Act* would have covered everything like that but, look, I can't, on my own knowledge, answer that. I don't know.

**So in training as a police officer, which included the role of Protector of Aborigines, were you then given information and training about the Ordinance and its enforcement?**

No particular training. In those days you used to pick things up for yourself. But the various Ordinances which existed in the Territory at that time, if you wanted to know something you went to the Ordinance and looked it up. But you were given no specific training.

**If there had been any adverse report of, say, the lack of provisions on a station, and it was raised either with the employer or with the administration, first of all, how comfortable would you have felt as a**

**police officer of making an adverse report, and how do you think it might have been received?**

I would think that if conditions were bad on a place that the police officer whose job it was to patrol that area would make the necessary representations first to his headquarters in Darwin or wherever he was stationed, and it would be taken from there, passed onto the necessary Department to do something about it or to have it further examined, you know.

**Were you ever aware of it occurring?**

No. Look, I (pause) can't remember any specific cases, no.

**Did Aboriginal men and women ever complain to you about their wages and working conditions?**

Not to me personally, no.

**Are you aware of complaints being made?**

I can't recall any. I can't recall any specific complaints being made, no.

**So you didn't ever come across –**

I never came across it.

**– expressions of desire for equal wages and conditions with whites?**

Not in those days, no.

**What appeared to be the relationship between the government and the stations, station management?**

I think the government used to let them roll along. I can't recall any specific areas in which the government intruded on the station management.

**Were you ever aware of the North Australian Workers' Union taking an interest in Aboriginal worker wages and conditions?**

No, no. The only time I was aware of the North Australian Workers' Union was when I was in Darwin and they were – then they were more, to my knowledge, more concerned with the things that were happening in Darwin itself, because it was a difficult transition period then. It was just at the end of the War and the Army was relinquishing control and it was coming back to

civilian occupation, and the North Australian Workers' Union was represented there and – mainly on the wharves, I think.

**So you wouldn't have been aware, would you, of any differing interest by the NAWU with Aboriginal workers depending on whether they were 'full blood' or 'half-caste'?**

No, no, no. That was never a – I was never aware of anything like that.

**Were you aware of any NAWU organisers visiting stations?**

No, no.

**As a police officer or Protector, were you expected to take a particular position in relation to the NAWU in contact with Aboriginal workers?**

Not that I can recall. (pause) Here again, I've got to qualify this by saying that I was a very junior member of the police, and I would have thought that if there was anything like that it was managed at a higher level than what I was.

**At one time you were a chauffeur for the family of the –**

Of the Administrator!

**– Administrator, Mr Abbott.**

Yes.

**What impression did you gain of him?**

A very austere man, a very political person. A nice enough old bloke, but my relationships with him were cordial enough, but he was an administrator and that was about it, you know.

**END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A: TAPE 1 SIDE 2**

**You talked of the Administrator as being 'political' – what do you mean by that?**

Well, the Administrator of those days, it was a political appointment, and if I remember rightly he was a member of the National Party in New South Wales, and I've no doubt that he – he was answerable, of course, to Canberra, and his job was to administrate the Northern Territory with the funds that he

was given from Canberra and various directives which emanated from Canberra, that was his job. As far as I'm aware he performed those duties efficiently.

**What impression generally did you gain of him, say, for example, in relation to Aboriginal members of the community?**

I don't know that he – I don't think he bothered himself with that. He was on a much higher plane than that. He left that to his underlings to handle those sort of matters. He was – I think Abbott's job was more remote from that.

**Did World War II have an impact on Territory attitudes and approaches to Indigenous Australians?**

Oh yes, yes, very much so. The whole thrust of Aboriginal understandings and things changed during the War because the Army was in complete control, they had Aboriginal people working for them, and after the War the whole thing had changed – as far as I'm aware; I wasn't there before the War, but from what I gathered – that there was a whole new awareness with regard to Aboriginal people and part-Aboriginal people after the War, because they had become more aware of – well, I suppose you could call it the rights of people, and when I left the Territory I could foresee changes were occurring and only for the good, as far as I was concerned, yes.

**Was there any impact on the NAWU of the War?**

I don't know. I think – I only knew one member of the NAWU, the organiser who was there, but I don't know if there was any impact of the NAWU in relation to Aboriginal people.

**Let's shift now to South Australia.**

Right.

**When did you start working in South Australia in some connection with the pastoral industry?**

Well, I was sent to Oodnadatta in 1955 as Officer-in-Charge of the police station there, and as such most of our work was in the pastoral areas.

**And for how long did you stay in around Oodnadatta –**

Yes, we were there –

**– doing that sort of work?**

– we were there on two occasions. We went up there in '55, came out in '60, went back in '63 and then came out in '66. That's when I transferred out of the police to the Pastoral Board, and then I remained with the Pastoral Board until 1985. And as such I was more intimately involved with the pastoral side of things after 1966.

**And through this period, did your work bring you into contact with Indigenous Australians?**

All the time. When I was with the police.

**In what way?**

Well, the pastoral areas of the Far North of South Australia are fairly well separated from one another, and also to the North-West, from the Musgrave Ranges west, there were quite a few Aboriginal people who were living as they'd always lived, in a nomadic existence, and that was all part of my patrol area.

**As a police officer were you also a Protector of Aborigines in South Australia? (pause) Or a Sub-Protector?**

Yes. See, at that stage they had personnel whose main job was Aboriginal affairs, but when I first went up there it was also part of my duties.

**What did it involve, particularly? Can you give us any examples?**

Well, the general welfare of Aborigines. Just to put it widely. General welfare of Aborigines.

**So the area that you were responsible for from Oodnadatta, what would its boundaries have been?**

Good heavens.

**Roughly.**

About 130,000 square miles. (laughs) From Oodnadatta to the end of my patrol area to the west it was 600 miles. South it was 130 miles, north it was

110 miles and to the east God knows, because it went into the Simpson Desert.

**How did you travel in those days?**

In a two-wheel-drive ute, and I dug my way through every sandy creek in the country. (laughter) The roads were fairly rough and ready.

**Was travel any easier in South Australia than the Territory by that time?**

Yes, yes, because – well, I think about that time – South Australia had always had a vehicle on the strength, but in the Territory they didn't, but I think around about that time the Territory were issued with vehicles as well, so (laughs) things were a bit easier. They did away with the camels and the horses.

**Did World War II actually improve the travel through your area into the Territory, and through the Territory itself?**

Yes, yes, because prior to the War travel in the Territory, even between the main centres, was pretty rudimentary. It was just more or less a track along the overland telegraph line. But during the War they actually built a bitumen road between Alice Springs and Darwin, and most of the other roads were fairly rough and ready but that was a bitumen road, and from about Tennant Creek into Queensland. But, you know, off-road it was still pretty rough, pretty rough.

**The country that you were working in in South Australia, was that sheep or cattle country, or a mix?**

Bit of both. There were sheep at Ernabella, there were sheep at Evelyn Downs, sheep at De Rose Hill and sheep at Macumba when I first went there. In all those cases except Evelyn Downs, they used to shepherd their sheep. Ernabella had Aboriginal shepherds who used to take the sheep out in the morning, shepherd them all day, bring them home and yard them at night, and camp at the yard. De Rose Hill, early in the piece they used to shepherd the sheep, but then they paddocked them and used to keep an eye on them that way. Macumba, they had shepherds, but Macumba didn't have sheep in any large numbers, it was just a private flock, the manager had a private

sheep flock and he had Aboriginal shepherds who used to look after them. Ernabella was the biggest sheep project in my time there, and that was all done by Aboriginal people with white supervisors.

**And would the cattle section of the industry have been larger than the sheep section?**

Oh much, much. Most of my patrol area was cattle.

**What separated the cattle and sheep sections of the industry, geographically?**

The dog fence was the main line of demarcation, if you like to call it that, which covered the – any sheep places outside the dog fence were at risk from dingo predation, and that's why there weren't all that many there. In the very early days there were sheep everywhere, but when they built the dog fence – that in itself is a story with a history – most of them started as little vermin districts, what they called vermin districts, and they were small entities. And the government then said, 'Well, look, what we need to do is to protect the whole of the southern part of the state from dingo predation,' so they then had the fence built and then it was patrolled and inspected and it – each person who owned a place abutting the fence, it was his job to keep that part of the fence in order. But that was the line of demarcation between sheep and cattle. I can only – I don't know just in what year that sheep finally disappeared from the area, but it would have been in the early '60s when sheep finally were found to be uneconomical. And I think Evelyn Downs still had some outside the dog fence, but, oh, they had their work cut out chasing the dogs.

**Was that 1960s?**

In the 1960s, yes.

**Taking the cattle section of the industry, did you observe the Aboriginal men and women working on the cattle stations?**

Oh yes, yes. They were the main (clears throat) – no, I don't know about the main workforce, but there were quite numbers of Aboriginal people working on stations, men as stockmen and women – not many women – there might

be one or two Aboriginal women who worked the homesteads in a domestic situation. But the stockmen – the Aboriginal people mainly were doing stock work, the men.

**How did you regard the standard of their work?**

Oh, most of them were excellent stockmen, excellent stockmen. And were very well regarded in most quarters as being good stockmen.

**How reliant do you think the cattle stations were on –**

Very much so.

**– Aboriginal labour in South Australia?**

Very much so, yes.

**What were the working conditions like on the cattle stations in South Australia?**

Well, you see, you've got to realise that when there's a muster on on a cattle station they move from point to point over the station and gather up the cattle, brand them, pull the fats out for the market, and so living in a cattle camp is a fairly rudimentary process. You're here today and tonight you're somewhere else, so you live in a swag, depending on the size of the mustering camp you might have a permanent cook. If it's a small mustering camp you did your own cooking. And, as I say, rations were fairly rudimentary too, with your beef and damper and drink of tea in most – and mainly because in those days travelling was done by horse and with pack horses. So you can't carry all sorts of luxuries in a pack bag. So, you know, rations were – – –.

**Was it similar conditions and rations for the white and Aboriginal workers?**

Oh yes, yes.

**Did they eat together?**

More or less. You know, when I say eat together, the Aboriginal people are essentially a shy people and they like to keep in their own group, but they might only be ten yards away from where the other people were. They might

be just – more or less together. They wouldn't be a quarter of a mile away, or anything like that.

**Did you ever hear any of the white workers express distaste at actually eating with Aboriginal workers, and sleeping close with Aboriginal workers? Either in the stock camps or round the station?**

No. Look, they used to come – oh, you might have some, you'll always have some bigoted person somewhere who may express a distaste, but look, on my volition, I can't remember too many grizzles and growls.

**Were they paid wages, were the Aboriginal stockmen paid wages?**

As far as I'm aware they were all paid wages. I don't know to what extent the wages were. I know on would you say the Kidman places, they were on the books the same as the white stockmen. And some of the other smaller places I'm well aware of how they were paid. One that comes to mind was that each man was paid every week and his money was put in a jar at the station store so that he could see it and it was his money – he knew it was his money. But that was only one particular place I'm aware of. Most of the people who were employed as stockmen were employed – when a muster was imminent they would be taken on strength and would be paid off after the muster. And there were always several Aboriginal people – males, I'm talking about now – who were employed around the station in a variety of jobs, and as I said before there are quite a few of them who used to work with and few contractors working on the stations. And as far as I'm aware they were all paid, yes.

**Did you notice a difference between, say, the South Australian stations that you observed for wages and conditions and approaches and the Northern Territory?**

Well, of course, you're talking about a different time factor here also, and I've no doubt that in the Territory wages were very low at that time. I don't – I'm not aware if there was a minimum wage. I think in some cases they were paid according to their worth, and it would naturally have been a difference. But if you had a – I've seen it in South Australia – if you had a good man in

the camp, well, he was worth more than Tail-end Charlie who was a horse tailer or something like that.

**How did the wages and conditions of the cattle workers, whether they be the musterers or the station hands, how did they compare with the wages and conditions of white workers?**

I don't know. You see, it all depends whether your station was being run with purely Aboriginal labour. I don't know. I have no knowledge of the pay rates in that regard.

**Did you observe the Aboriginal men and women working on the sheep stations, the sheep section of the industry?**

Yes.

**What work were they doing?**

Most of the – as I say, most of the sheep places, the sheep in the early part were shepherded, so they used to use in a lot of cases a family unit, and they would go out with the sheep in the morning and shepherd them during the day, and then bring them home at night. And they would camp with the sheep all the time while they were in the yards, and they were essentially a family unit, maybe two groups looking after one lot of sheep. And I don't know what the rates of pay were, but I can only presume they were – the man was paid; I don't know whether women were paid a separate wage or not, I don't know.

**The women were actually doing some of the work as well?**

Oh, well, they would shepherd the sheep – a lot of times the women would shepherd the sheep while the main might be away hunting a kangaroo or something like that. But essentially they worked as a family unit, shepherding, yes.

**Did you come across any Aboriginal shearers?**

Not Aboriginal, full Aboriginal. (clears throat, coughs) Pardon me. They were some – ooh, I'm dredging back in my memory now – 'half-caste' fella, there were some 'half-caste' shearers, I know, who used to come up from the south, and I've no doubt that – – –. See, Ernabella used to – but they went

out of sheep fairly early in the piece. There were still sheep camps there in the 1950s, and I've got a feeling that there were some Aboriginal or 'half-caste' shearers at Ernabella. I was just – I know Doug Fuller used to shear there, he was a white man, in the '30s, but see they never had very big flocks of sheep either, not like a place like Commonwealth Hill where they used to shear 50,000 sheep. These fellows might have only had a thousand or a couple of thousand sheep.

**The bigger stations that you did see that had big flocks –**

Yes.

**– were there – the shearing teams, were they – – –?**

The shearing teams would come in, the contractor would – he'd get the contract for shearing, he'd bring his team in and that covered everybody from the shearers to the wool classer to the cook, the shed boys. They used to bring their own team in. They'd contract for the muster; once the muster was finished they were out of there and gone somewhere else to do the job.

**And did you ever note any Aboriginal members of the shearing teams, contract shearing teams, on the big stations?**

Well, it was more or less out of my area. You see, they were inside the dog fence, I was outside the dog fence – my work was.

**Right, right.**

See, the dog fence runs across just north of Coober Pedy, down to just north of Woomera and across where it used to run across just north of Marree, across to the border. So anywhere inside that – well, I was well outside that. I was two or three hundred miles north of that, you see. So my – I know there were some Abori – I do know that there were some Aboriginal or 'part-Aboriginal' teams in the Flinders Ranges, I know that, but I never – that wasn't my area, no.

**So the little bit of shearing work that you did see in your area wasn't so much as you're describing it done by local 'full blood' Aboriginals**

–

No.

**– but it was by ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal shearers –**

‘Half-caste’ or white.

**– and they’d come in with it – or whites – and they’d come in from the outside.**

They’d come in, yes.

**Right.**

Aboriginals used to work in the yards outside the shearing shed, because they were station hands. If you worked on the station, well, you worked with the sheep or the cattle – well, we’ll talk sheep – your job was to get the sheep into the shed, and from there on the shearing contractors took over and let the sheep out when they were shorn, and then the station hands would take them over again and put them out to the various paddocks and what have you.

**So generally then could we describe a demarcation in terms of Aboriginal labour with the ‘full blood’ Aboriginal workers tending to be the station hands or local shepherding and cattle workers, whereas the ‘half-caste’ workers, they might have been – if they were based, lived locally, they might have been doing some of that work. But otherwise, say, for shearing teams, they were generally – if there were Aboriginal workers they were ‘half-caste’?**

Yes. I can’t remember any truly Aboriginal shearers in the shearing teams. Look, there may have been – you know, you see a shearing team in a shed and – well, I can remember several ‘half-caste’ fellas, a couple of the old fellas, old Angas Warren and those fellas from down round Finnis Springs. They were shearers and they were good men too, very good men.

**And so the – well, how was the work of the Aboriginal workers regarded in the areas that you were operating in by the station managers and owners?**

The managers were fairly reliant on those men. They kept the station running. Generally the manager worked with them. You know, he wasn’t remote from them. They used to work together. And they, you know, if you were doing it on a cattle station, for instance, you had to do a water run to check that the bores and the wells were all pumping and the tanks were full and the troughs were full and the troughs were clean. And Aboriginal men

were very good at that, and 'half-caste' men and whites. You know, they all used to work together, they'd be a team, you know.

**And in the homesteads, even though there mightn't have been many women there, were the homesteads also reliant at all on Aboriginal women's labour?**

To a very small degree. They may have one, or if it's a big place a couple of Aboriginal women as domestics. Mainly in housework. I'm just trying to remember – yes, mainly housework, they were utilised in that way. I don't know – yes, I think if they were – – –. Look, I don't know if they paid them or not, I don't know.

**Did you ever have any cause for concern in relation to how the Aboriginal women were treated by the station management or by white workers?**

LS: Not any cause for concern which called for police intervention, no. You see, they always had the right to walk away, and a lot of them did. You know, the husband might decide to shift from this station over somewhere else so his wife would go with him, you see. But you see, they – I'm just trying to remember – of the big stations – – –. See, there weren't very many *big* stations in my area. Most of them were family-owned units. The only one that I can remember were the Kidman places. Macumba, just out of Oodnadatta, and then Anna Creek which was sort of on the border of my police area. They used to employ Aboriginal men and women, and I think they were all paid according to the Award. I know the Kidman places were paid according to the Award.

**But above the area, the fence, and in all your area, would it have been as clear as that as to whether they were paid Award wages or not?**

No, it was up to the stations to pay them. I don't know that they adhered to any particular Award in those days. They paid them according to what they thought they were worth in the particular job they were doing. But I don't know that the Pastoral Award as such was extant in my early time there. It may have been that later on, when I was working with the Pastoral Board, I think it became – I'm not sure when the Pastoral Award came in.

**As far as I'm aware, the Federal Pastoral Award covered the sheep industry in South Australia and the shearing activities –**

Yes.

**– but for a long time it didn't seem to cover the north of South Australia and the cattle section.**

No. Well, when you talk about that I can remember – it was after I left the police, it was when I was with the Pastoral Board – it was on one of the Kidman places. You know, when you went, just to say for example, there was a muster on down the Macumba Creek, and when you left the station you worked till you got back, you know, you more or less were on the job all the time. And there was a bloke who worked on the – he was a white man – worked on a station in Queensland – he may have worked for a Kidman place, I don't know – and he came and he worked on Macumba, and he was, I think he was the cook in the camp. And when he came back he claimed that he'd worked overtime and all that sort of thing and he put in a claim for it and he was paid. Now, this must have been when the Pastoral Award had come in covering the cattle areas. And I can remember this, it stands in my memory, you see. But in most cases if you went out on the muster you worked till the muster was done and then you went back to the station and time didn't mean much. You were out of your swag at the crack of dawn, and if you were holding cattle where there were no yards, well, you had to watch the cattle during the night so you're on, say, a two to three-hour shift during the night, so the bloke'd come in and kick you (laughs) out of your swag, and it was your turn to go out and watch the cattle on camp. So hours of work didn't really mean much. You did the job and that was it, you know, and you accepted that in the terms of employment.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B: TAPE 2 SIDE A

**We were talking, Bruce, about the general role of the police officer in relation to Aboriginal communities and workers. What sort of general comments might you like to make about that role, and how it might have changed, too?**

Yes. In the early days, as I mentioned before, the policeman had a set area of administration, and in those days he was the sole arbiter of what went on in

that area. He was the boss, and if there were problems he had to sort them out. And if Aboriginals had a problem in most cases they'd go to the policeman with their problem and he would be the arbiter of how they sorted things out. And I know a couple of cases where – in one case, where an Aboriginal man was killed on a station and two white people were charged with the murder of this man. The policeman investigated it and the two fellows were charged, but they got off – not because of any white-black business, but because they were able to prove that the body which was produced as evidence was a woman and not a bloke, so that threw the case out of court immediately. But the police, in my experience, acted as independent observers. They took no sides in any disputes or any problems which arose on stations. The police activity was – the means of administering their area were laid down in the Police Regulations and you stuck to them.

**If something was to – say an Aboriginal worker complained about treatment or lack of payment –**

Yes.

**– or something like that, would there have been a fair amount of police officer discretion, though, individual discretion about whether to take something up or not?**

LS: I think yes, it was up to the police officer to decide whether further action should be taken on the matter, although it was more a civil matter than a police matter. See, anything with regard to payment of wages, *et cetera*, was more a civil matter.

**So where would an Aboriginal person go to if they had a complaint and there was no union in that area?**

Well, I can remember, there was a complaint early in my police career at Oodnadatta, where an Aboriginal man complained about not being paid, and I wrote a long report on this particular happening to Clarrie Bartlett who was then the head of Aboriginal Affairs in Adelaide, and I would hope that that report is still in the archives somewhere, because I pointed out in that report – and I'm working off the top of my head here – the different ways in which

Aboriginals were paid. And I cited to you before about the man who used to give their money, put the money in the jar for them every week so they could see their wages, whereas somebody else would say, 'Well, I'll give you a cheque when we've finished the muster' and then it was up to that particular person to be honest with the men that he had working for him. But I can't remember the outcome of this particular incident, but I know that I wrote a long report on it and I was hopeful that they took it up from there, you know, because I can't even remember what particular station it was or whether the ---. I've got a feeling that the bloke was working for the station, the Aboriginal man, and before the muster finished the owner or the manager had a row with this bloke and sacked him and he didn't get paid anything, and that was used as a reason why - 'Out, get off the place!' And I remember writing that report on it and sending it on down. But to my mind it was a civil matter and had to be dealt with by the relevant authorities because it wasn't a police matter as far as I was concerned. I could only deal with matters which came under my jurisdiction.

**So if it was a civil matter on a station north of the dog fence, who would have been responsible for -**

Well, I would have thought -

**- those sorts of issues?**

- the Aboriginal Department in Adelaide, I would have thought.

**So how ---?**

See, there was no Award, no - it was ---.

**So who would an Aboriginal person complain to?**

Well, he could only complain - well, most of them would complain to a policeman in the area. He was the boss and 'Go and talk to the boss about it.' Other than that, I don't know who he could complain to. It was a pretty hit-and-miss sort of a situation. But look, and I must say it, but most of the station owners were good people. They regarded their Aboriginal staff fairly highly and treated them accordingly, and I had - to my knowledge, I had

very, very few cases where things didn't – the station didn't run along smoothly, you know?

**How did it compare with the Northern Territory in that regard?**

Oh, I think they had problems (laughs) in the Northern Territory, yes.

**What sort of problems?**

I think – this was right up the Top End – I think the, you see, in my day, this was this new awareness that was starting to come about in the Territory. Let's face it, back in the early, in the '20s and early '30s, things weren't good for Aboriginal people up there, and it was only after the War that they became more aware of what could be achieved and they were more vocal about it too, which was a good thing. But mainly down in my area they were family units and it was a different set-up to the big pastoral companies, you know. As I say, the only pastoral company in my area was Kidman's, who treated their people very well. And there's a man – I don't know whether I told you about him – John Kemp, who was a manager for Kidman's when he was that high, and in that regard he would be worth talking to. I'm sure John – and he's a very affable sort of a man, and I'm sure he could enlighten you on the relationships between Aboriginal workers and management because he did that job for many, many, many years and was later a travelling manager for Kidman's. He used to do the Queensland side and the South Australian side.

**Oh well, thanks for that, Bruce.**

I think John Kemp. He lives at Goolwa, and I'm sure that John would be – he would talk to you and it would help you, I'm sure, in what you're trying to achieve in your thesis.

**Well, look, thanks for that. And as you're talking there, one thing that occurs to me is that the means of communication between Aboriginal workers and communities, and whether it be the station management or police officer or the union, how were you able to communicate with local people?**

Fairly well.

**Did they largely speak English –**

Oh, yes.

**– or did it, did you – – –.**

Yes, or pidgin, pidgin English. We could understand each other quite well. As I said, quite often, when I was on patrol, when we went to the camps there were a lot of the nomadic people who couldn't speak English, but I always had a tracker with me who could speak the particular dialect for that area, and we used to communicate fairly well.

**So if a union was organising in an area, if that person didn't have a contact with someone who spoke the local language, would they have been able to organise?**

LS: They would have had some difficulty, I would think. But, just *à propos* that, now, on the north-south railway line, there were fettlers' camps about every 30 mile along the line, and at Oodnadatta, in the fettling camp there at Oodnadatta or the fettling gang, they had a mixture of whites, 'half-caste' and 'full blood' people, but I think the – I'm not sure who was their union people, the AWU, I suppose – well, they used to come up from Port Augusta very infrequently (laughs) – collect the money, I suppose, that was about it – and in the other camps up and down the line there were, over the years, a mixture of white, 'half-caste' and Aboriginal people. So they would have been covered by the AWU. Now, how far the AWU went outside the railway line, as it were, I'm not aware. I don't think they ever went anywhere, actually. (laughs) They used to ride the Ghan up and ride the Ghan home.

**And talking about the AWU, the Australian Workers' Union, were you aware of any activity of the AWU in the cattle section of the pastoral industry?**

No.

**In your area?**

No.

**Did you ever see an organiser?**

No. (laughs)

**Were you aware ---?**

I've got a feeling that there was a bloke came up late in the piece, but now whether it was while I was in the police or whether I was in the Pastoral Board, I'm not sure when it was. But I have a feeling in the back of my mind that somebody did come up there once and had a bit of a rattle around. But whatever transpired I don't know.

**What might have contributed to this lack of activity, in your view, just thinking about the area that you were working in?**

Yes. Remoteness would be one thing. The few places that were there, when you take it as a totality of the whole area, there were only about a dozen places. So I can only presume that they didn't feel it was worthwhile going out, you know, worrying about it.

**Were ---.**

Also, if I might –

**Yes.**

– because of the mainly transient, being a transient occupation on the cattle places – you know, you have a muster here, you only muster once a year or twice a year, muster for fats and muster for branding, and in between that time, well, there's no reason to hold the people on the station, see. And they used to just sit down in the camp.

**Well, there does seem to be a difference, doesn't there, between the AWU organising of the shearing industry, which was very thorough – which was also seasonal and did go to fairly remote areas –**

Yes.

**– and the cattle section. Now, I'm wondering why – do you have any ideas on why there might have been a difference, from your experience?**

Here again I think it was because there were so few of them. The sheep places, there were a lot more sheep places below the dog fence and it was a more organised industry overall, whereas the cattle places were – well, they were little units on their own and used to do their own thing.

**Were more workers involved with sheep production and shearing than there were with, say, cattle production and mustering?**

Yes, yes. A more labour-intensive industry in the sheep industry. (crunching sound)

**Were you ever aware of station manager or administration views of AWU contact with Aboriginal workers?**

I think they used to – if there were any, I think they'd view it with some suspicion! (laughs)

**Why might they have concerns?**

Well, I think they were pretty individualistic sort of people and considered that, you know, 'That's my little show and you keep your nose out of it. I'll run it.' And that's it.

**Would they have had the capacity to deny the Union access to the station and therefore the workers?**

I don't know that they had the capacity to deny it. On a pastoral lease, any person has ingress, egress on a pastoral lease, including Aboriginal people, and you could traverse a pastoral lease at will. So if a union organiser wanted to interview people at a station, well, he had every right to go on the place. Whether or not a station manager was amenable to it was a different thing.

**Were you aware of any, say, differences between attitudes and also legal capacity in that regard as between South Australia and the Northern Territory? Did you have the same right of access in the Northern Territory?**

No. I'm not aware, I'm not sure what the Ordinance, or their Award conditions were. There was no Pastoral Award in my day up there, and I don't know what the Pastoral Award was in latter years. I think – you see, there was quite a bit of travel from, say, Queensland or Western Australia and South Australia of people engaged in pastoral work, and I've no doubt that they brought information with regard – now, Queensland was fairly organised and I'm not sure about Western Australia. But Queensland seemed to be a fairly organised place with regard to the pastoral industry,

and I've no doubt that there was information with transient populations bringing information about things.

**So perhaps it could have been possible to unionise if there'd been the will?**

If there'd been the will and fortitude to do it, yes, I'm sure they could have. But we're talking about a very small number of people to be organised, and is it worth the trouble to go and organise those few people and then have to keep an eye on things, and so forth? Whereas, as I say, with the railway people, you'd go up the railway line and then you'd go down the railway line and it's all in one little spot, you know.

**Were there more workers in the cattle industry in the Northern Territory than in South Australia? So there might have been a greater, I suppose, incentive for a union to organise?**

It may well have been. There are more stations in a particular area in the southern part of the Northern Territory. I'm not sure about the northern part – they were fairly remote places. But the southern part, from the border up to, say, Tennant Creek, after the War there were more places. They cut up various places and not to the good, I might add, because the places all got flogged. But numbers of personnel would have been more, and – – –. South Australia seemed to be a little isolated pocket, if you like to call it that. And, as I say, a lot of it was family stuff. And Aboriginals who had been there all their lives, more or less born on the station and they regarded that as their place, you know. Later I'll tell you a little story, funny little story.

**Okay.**

But I don't think it should be put on tape. (laughter)

**Okay. Now, you were a Pastoral Board inspector in South Australia. When was this?**

LS: I transferred out of the police in – I started with them on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1966. And I worked as a Pastoral Inspector until 1970, and then I became a member of what was then the Pastoral Board, which was a statutory board who had the job of administering all the cattle and sheep stations in the pastoral areas. Our role was purely land administration.

**Did you notice any changes in government or employer attitudes to Aboriginal employment in the pastoral industry through this time?**

I think the government became more aware of the Aboriginal populations. There were great changes in the area to the north and west of Oodnadatta where settlements were created, and it went away from being purely what used to be a mission station to a government station and then the whole homelands thing followed on naturally from there. Governments – I think governments were distrustful of missions for many particular reasons, no doubt, of which I'm not aware. But they took more of a role with regard to the welfare of Aboriginal people in that particular area and had patrol officers of their own. And the role of the police then was taken over by Aboriginal patrol officers and police were only concerned with breaches of the law, whereas before, well, you were the boss and you were the Protector of Aboriginals and this and that and I had about fifteen different titles when I first went up there, and I was the Health Inspector and the – well, everything. I used to marry them and bury them and – – – (laughs)

**That sounds like enormous responsibility for –**

It was.

**– isolated officers to have.**

Well, you were the only person with the, can we say, the necessary intelligence to encompass all those roles. And the government were getting it on the cheap. You'd get nothing for it. I married several white blokes to Aboriginal women, and – oh, there was an edict came out from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to all these people who had had liaisons, had to either finish the liaison and bush the women or marry them, you see. So I had a few in the area who were open about it, and there was a lot of very dicey ones who used to sneak around corners and that sort of thing. But anyway, so I got in touch with all these people and said, 'Well, look, you've got a choice.' And one old bloke, old Brian Lennon, who had been with his partner, Minnie, they'd been together 40 years. And I had to say, 'Now, Brian, you've either got to marry Minnie or you've got to give her up.' And

they had grown-up children, you know. I sort of forgot Brian was even there. Same, he never had a driver's licence all his life, either. (laughter)

**So you used your discretion!**

I used my discretion. He used to come into town and park the old truck at the dam, and he'd walk up – it was when he had all his gear on to go home. I'd put it on the police truck, take it down, load it on his old truck and then wave him goodbye! (laughs) He never had a licence in his life. That's called 'police discretion'.

**During this time, too, did you ever notice any change in union approaches?**

As I say, I can remember one particular time – it was when I was with the Pastoral Board – where there were some mention or there was some movement by a union, and I'm not sure which one, to sort of go into that area. But I don't know what transpired, whether there was anything came of it or whether it was just an exploratory run. I've got a feeling it might have been just exploratory and they said, 'Ah well, it's not worth bothering about,' or something like that.

**Was there any concern in the Department, or did you hear it from any quarters, that this was happening?**

Well, here again I'm off the top of my head, but I had a feeling that there was some modicum of concern by station owners and so forth that they were sticking their nose in, but I don't know if there was any real antipathy towards it. But everybody was, I think, aware in those times that times were changing and this would eventually come about, you know.

**Can you recall approximately what sort of years that was when there might have been that exploration? Was it in the '50s or '60s?**

No, I've got a feeling it was in the '60s. I can't remember it happening when I was in the police, but I changed an area of 130,000 square miles to half the state, you know, and you used to hear these things when they were going around, and inspecting. Our jobs as Pastoral Inspector was to inspect the pastoral lease and report on the improvements and whether the land was

being looked after and that, and you'd hear these things as you go round, you know.

**Could that have been about the same time as the – there were moves in the Federal Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Commission for equal wages for Aboriginal workers?**

It could have been. It could have been about that time, and I've no doubt that there would have been some disquiet amongst certain quarters that that would occur. And of course the alternate event was that a lot of these people were put off the stations – when that did come in they were no longer viable units on the station, and that was a tragedy too, because before that you had a group living at the station and (a) it was a labour pool if required, and (b) that they'd been there all their lives.

**And was that the case both for, say, the sheep and cattle sections of the industry, or particular areas of the state where there was more loss than others, or there was more impact than others?**

I think the impact was more felt in the cattle areas.

**So up in the North.**

Yes, in the Far North. Because the (laughs) if you like to say down in the sheep country it was more 'civilised', as it were, you know. It had been extant for many, many years, and you didn't have, really, a transient population of Aboriginal or 'part-Aboriginal' people to the extent that you had in the Far North.

**So there would have been, say, less Aboriginal camps in the sheep section than the cattle section?**

Oh yes, oh yes, yes. And then another occurred, you see, when the government started building particular settlements. There was a general drift of people – Aboriginal people – to those particular settlements. When the government set up Amata, out west of Ernabella Mission, there was a general drift of people to there. They set up Indulkana out west of Granite Downs, and there was a general drift of people away from the station (coughs) – pardon me – to Indulkana.

**Why do you think that might have been, that they left the stations –**

Yes.

**– which was probably their country, to go to places like that?**

Yes. In that particular – say, Indulkana, there are two or three stations around which was – how can I put it? – it was their particular area, totemic area, that they lived at, say, Granite Downs when old Jimmy Davey was there, and they regarded that as their home and they camped there, and Indulkana was fourteen miles away when it was set up so they just went and moved over to Indulkana. And there was rations there. And then they – it was about the time they started paying welfare, and that had a big bearing on what occurred. I know when they started paying – what was it called? – Child Endowment, and then they started paying them pensions. They used to send the pension cheques up to me at Oodnadatta and I'd hold them in the station safe, and these old fellas – well, old Pannikin and old Jackie Branson and those fellas, they might be up to Finke here this week and they might be out at Granite Downs next week, so I'd hold their cheques at the station and when they finally turned up there might be ten cheques there. Well, these old blokes were millionaires, as far as they were concerned – more money than you could poke a stick at.

**So could that have had the effect of making station work either less attractive or less necessary –**

Yes.

**– so in fact it gave Aboriginal workers more choice?**

Absolutely. There was more money available by various means – as I say, Child Endowment and – I don't think welfare payments were in at that time, but the pensions were available. And really their wants were very simple. You know, they weren't – they didn't want expensive things. They were fairly simple people.

**And when was the – when they started to get Child Endowment and you could start to see this impact, approximately what sort of years might this have been?**

I'm not sure – there was a lady welfare officer who was appointed. It was the very, very late '50s, I think. And then I went back in '63 and it was well advanced then. But, well, just say Indulkana wasn't set up until, ooh, '67, '68, something like that. So it was either the very late '50s or early in the '60s that this change occurred. And see I went back in '63 and they were paying pensions at that stage. When that happened there was a general drift away from the stations, and I don't know when the – when did you say the Pastoral Award came in? In South Australia?

**It was implemented the end of 1968.**

'68. Yes, well, it was before that that this occurred, and – – –.

**So they were leaving stations even before the equal wages decision?**

Oh yes, yes.

**Was that – – –?**

A lot of them came into the towns. I had a lot of people living at Oodnadatta. More people living at Oodnadatta in the '60s than I did in the early '50s, and this was because there was a drift away from stations and we had a fairly big camp at Oodnadatta, and there was more money available. And – – –. (break in recording)

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A: TAPE 2 SIDE B

**We were talking about the impact around Oodnadatta –**

Yes.

**– of the bringing in of pensions and benefits, and then the equal pay decision.**

Yes, now, before the equal pay, which happened after I left there, but there was Child Endowment and pensions were paid prior to that, and there was a general drift into the town of people, but at the same time it created a pool of workers. And I can remember if a station manager wanted a muster, he would go around the town and if there were any (sound as of striking match) people – and they were pretty all well known, the Aboriginal stockmen – and he would ask them if they wanted a job just for the muster, and it was a pool

of employment which they could draw on. And it used to occur, where the families would stay in the town then and the man, the stockman, would go out and he'd work for the muster, might be three weeks, and then he'd come back into the town, you see. And that's what happened.

**And so that occurred in South Australia –**

Yes.

**– even before the implementation of the equal pay decision in 1968.**

Yes, it did. See, that was occurring between 1963 and 1966. I can remember men going out to work on the stations while there was a muster on and coming back in. And also there was a fair drift of people up and down the railway line, down, say, to – they'd go to Anna Creek, and that was a big station, they had a lot of people on the books at Anna Creek, and they would get a job at Anna Creek for, say, two or three months and come back. Well, then, sometimes – well, a lot of times – the womenfolk and families would go with them and they'd sit down at Anna Creek. Well, they would be fed at the station, there'd be rations there, and they were – the men were on the books and they would be fed. Everybody seemed to get a meal, a feed, you know.

**Were there any Aboriginal camps that remained, even if they were smaller in size, on some of the stations, cattle stations?**

LS: Yes, they did. But in effect they dwindled away because of the implementation of these settlements which were created by the government. That produced a bit of heartburn, because a lot of these people had been on these places all their lives. They were born there, you know. And station managers – with an eye to the future, of course, in the early days – if they had a little bloke eight or nine, well, they'd put him on an old tad of a horse with the horse tailer and he'd learn the job, and that's where he'd start, horsetailing with the horse tailer. And then he'd work his way up. And that's how they became very proficient stockmen, and they *were* proficient stockmen. They knew how to handle a beast in the yard when they were getting it ready for branding, and there's all sorts of different aspects of cattle work that have now gone out of existence. Nowadays they use calf cradles

and it's all done mechanically, whereas in the old days you used to send a bloke in with a lasso and you'd lasso the beast and bring him up to the bronco panel in the yard, and you'd have – two men'd hold the calf down and another bloke get in with the brand, you know, and castrate it if necessary. And the man on the bronco horse, well, he was there – and anyway, this is all a little bit of history in the cattle industry that's disappeared because it's all done mechanically now.

**I think there's two points that occur to me in what you're saying there: one is that there was seen to be some choice of leaving the stations –**

Oh, yes.

**– when benefits came in, but at the same time there was sadness at that. So was there some forcing of leaving or people decided to leave but they were still sad about it?**

Yes, I think – see, there are – the job situation – the cattle industry went through a fairly lean time, too, at about that time.

**Is that in the '60s, early '60s.**

Yes. And in some instances the jobs weren't there. And people – and also another thing [that] occurred was that the Aboriginal people were more aware of educational facilities and they wanted their kids to go to school and there were no facilities on the stations, and that's another reason why they came into the towns. The kids went to school at the local school with my kids. There were all sorts of factors which led to this exodus, if you like to call it, from the stations. And also what occurred was that stations changed their methods. They were forced to change their methods. Horse work was given away – nobody uses horses these days, only for drafting cattle out on the flat. They use motorbikes. Cattle have become used to motorbikes. These calf cradles I was telling you about, they run the calves up the race, they come into the cradle, and it's done by one man instead of three men. And whereas those Aboriginal chaps were very proficient in a branding yard, well, they were no longer required. You only wanted one man on the cradle

and one man with the brand, you see. All these things change. The whole aspect of working cattle on a station changed.

Fences came in, cattle were paddocked because they had the TB and brucellosis campaign where all cattle were checked for those two diseases, and they had to be – the cattle had to be separated into paddocks. So all the stations had paddocks, which means that you don't have to muster your cattle any more. In the old time when the muster used to go round – no boundaries, no boundary fences. When you had a muster all the neighbouring stations sent a man – and most times they were Aboriginal fellas – to attend the muster and bring home your cattle. And that's all changed, you see. The whole aspect of running cattle on the stations changed.

**When was the disease program in the fencing coming in?**

In the '60s.

**Would it be early '60s or late '60s?**

It came in around about the time I transferred to the Pastoral Board, in the late '60s that started, and the early '70s, and the government were forced to do that because we couldn't sell our beef overseas because of the disease aspect, and all South Australian herds had to be checked (clears throat) and there was a lot of work there just at that particular time for stockmen on stations. But then when the fences were built and the cattle were clean, declared clean, different thing altogether, you see. All these things added up to a general drift away. And the settlements, they were provided also. Interesting, it was an interesting time, although in a way it was a sad time because people who had lived at a place for years there was no work for them and if the settlement was down the road 40 miles, well, they caught the train and went up to the Finke or went down to Anna Creek or Port – a lot of them went to Port Augusta.

**I mean, legally they would have had a right under the lease, in my understanding, to remain on the property if they wanted to –**

Oh yes – – –.

**– but would it be physically in fact impossible for them to do so, just in terms of getting access to rations – – –.**

Well, if they did they were on their own. They had to look after themselves, you see.

**And would that have been possible?**

No, no. Unless the station manager or the owner was a sort of bloke who didn't mind people camping on the place and they could get rations – either buy rations or get rations, you see.

**So the government, in fact, could have administered such a scheme?**

Well, they did. They had a ration scheme, you see. Each station, when I first went up there, was a ration depot, and if they had a camp of Aboriginals living at the station the station owner or the manager used to issue rations. And it was only fairly basic – flour, tea and sugar, jam, sauce, you know. It was just a very basic ration. And I used to issue them at the police station, because I had a camp of aged Aboriginals living in the town at the time. But then, see, they changed the whole system and then, as I say, Child Endowment came in, pensions came in, and eventually welfare came in and that was it.

**So the ration system ceased.**

Ceased, finished. And, well, even then, before I left, in the '60s I had a ration book. I never used to issue – yes, I did issue some rations at the station but very little. But I had a book and I could issue a chit and they'd take it down to the store and get rations at the store. So the government was changing the system all the time. But when we talk about the usage of Aboriginal people on the stations, it was about that time that this great change occurred. And there were two or three factors in it: one was that the government, the federal government, issued the money; (b) the state government started to set up the – I think 1961 they set up Amata, which was out in the Western Musgraves and about '69 or '9 they set up Indulkana. And then Coober Pedy – see, Coober Pedy grew in size and stature as a town and they had an Aboriginal set-up there, and a lot of people went to Coober Pedy because

there was provision of rations at Coober Pedy, you see. And, with all due regard to the old Aboriginal bloke, he knew just where to go to get the next feed, sort of thing, you know. So there was a general drift away from the isolated stations to a more central point. And that occurred in the '60s.

**Now, the equal pay decision was actually made in 1966 for the Northern Territory and about 1967 or so for the Federal Pastoral Award, which covered South Australia, with a delay in implementation until –**

Just on that point.

**– sorry, go on.**

Which Act took precedence – Award took precedence? The Federal Award or the State Award?

**In South Australia there was only the Federal Pastoral Award operating –**

Right.

**– but in the Northern Territory it didn't operate at all. It was the Cattle Station Industry Northern Territory Award –**

Oh, I see, yes.

**– that operated. And they both – the North Australian Workers' Union was the union for the Cattle Station Industry Award –**

Right.

**– and the Australian Workers' Union was the union for the Federal Pastoral Award.**

Right.

**Now, in fact the AWU *claimed* for equal pay first in about 1964, and then the NAWU lodged a similar claim. It just turned out that the NAWU claim was *heard* first –**

Oh, I see.

**– which was the big claim –**

Yes.

**– and there was a three year delay till the end of the December 1968, and a similar decision was made, when the AWU Federal Pastoral Award case was heard. Now, the Aboriginal workers in the Northern Territory appear to have been not happy with that delay at all –**

Right.

**– and of course numbers of them walked off stations in the Northern Territory.**

Yes, I remember when the walk-offs – – –.

**Now, I'm wondering whether – were you aware of any similar walk-offs or expressions of discontent with that decision, that it was delayed, in South Australia?**

No. No, I don't – I can't recall any discontent or walk-off by Aboriginal people because of the delay in the Award. I don't know that they were actually aware of it. There might have been some drift of information from Alice Springs, because we used to get Alice Springs people down and come into the places along the border. And there were – actually, there were quite a few 'half-castes' used to come down from the Alice and work on the stations for a while and then they'd drift back again. I know Jim Davey at Granite Downs, he used to have quite a few 'part-Aboriginal' – not so much 'full Aboriginal' but 'part-Aboriginal' men come down and work at Granite Downs, which was a fairly big place but privately owned. And they would drift down and come and work for two or three months and then drift back to the Alice. They mightn't have been doing all cattle work; they might have been fencing or windmills and all that sort of thing.

**Would he pay – would have paid and provided conditions on a – well, there was no set South Australian standard, but, say, according to the Northern Territory Ordinance?**

I think Davey would have, because he was – his main thrust – no, not his main thrust, but he worked in the Territory more than he did in South Australia, more or less. Alice Springs was his base, as it were, and he would have adhered to their requirements up there, I'm sure.

**Now, the Awards didn't cover Aboriginal workers in any case, even after the decisions, unless they became union members, because**

**they were – they weren't common rule awards, so I'll just finally ask that question: did you, *after* 1968, notice any increased union activity for recruitment? Because unless there was recruitment the workers still wouldn't have been covered.**

Well, I can't recall any. I think it was that same thing, the tyranny of distance and the few numbers involved. I can't recall any thrust by the union movement to rattle around and get some new members in. But of course, here again, they were so transient, the people involved were so transient. They were here today and they might up stakes and be gone tomorrow, and they mightn't work in the industry now for, say, another six months and then they'd potter back and ask the boss for a job. (laughs) It wouldn't have been a financial situation for the unions to worry about, you know.

**Could it have raised issues about just contacting them for the purpose of organisation? Or could there be ways around that?**

Well, could have been ways around it, I think. You know, the – well, of course, in order to achieve what they wanted to achieve – I'm talking about the union now – they had to get it through to these people what it was all about. Well, most of the blokes that I knew up there wouldn't have cared two hoots what it was all about, the ethics of it all. All he was interested in was filling his tummy, I suppose, three times a day.

**It's an interesting comparison, though, isn't it, because the feedback I've been getting in relation to Aboriginal workers in the shearing industry –**

Ah, different.

**– was that they *always* joined the union, they were very –**

Yes.

**– proud of their union membership –**

Yes, yes.

**– and if one starts from the premise of, you know, people aren't biologically different, there's things that happen that develop attitudes or approaches or differences –**

Different mindset.

**– yes, so it occurs to me, or suggests to me that it wasn't inevitable that they wouldn't be interested or they ---. So I'm wondering what other factors might have been operating?**

Well, I think around about that time the whole way of life changed, and then the settlements were created and they didn't have to work so they went down and sat down there and could get a feed down there, and it was as simple as that. See, money didn't really matter. God, I've seen old Jackie Branson with a roll of notes'd choke a horse. But it didn't mean anything. Money. And, of course – oh, Jackie and his tribal mob was – they were pretty inveterate gamblers, too, and that money'd change hands, (laughs) go round the table pretty quick! But money as a means of sustenance and that didn't really impinge on them as it would to you and I. They could always go out and get a kangaroo, anyway. You know, you've got a different mindset altogether in that country.

**What values did they express to you or were apparent to you, in terms of what were important for their life, that perhaps should have been taken into account, say, by whether it be unions or administration?**

LS: My mob – when I call them 'my mob', the people I was concerned with – they were still tribal Aboriginals, and that was paramount. Although things were even changing there, insomuch that, see, the younger ones were coming on and they were going to school, and the old tribal values were no longer as relevant as they were before. The totemic society wasn't as strong as it used to be, and that ruled their whole existence at one stage. And there was a hiatus of that, and now suddenly it's coming again, you see. Everybody's 'my people', 'my country', all that. See, that's coming back. But in those days there was a drift away from it all, and most Aboriginals that I had experience with with regard to regimentation by union means or anything like that, that was alien to them. They were individualists, very individualistic people. And they were a cohesive bunch when they lived in their own tribal situation, but over the years, as they sort of drifted away from that, they weren't cohesive as they are again now. So there was that general drift in that particular time frame. And I think if you'd – as you say, you talk about the members of the shearing teams were very union-conscious, well, of course, there was another

reason for that also, that if they didn't join the union they didn't get a job, and they were well aware of that. I think if they'd have tried that up in Macumba, 'Right, well, if you don't join the union you don't get a job,' they'd say, 'Oh, I'll go and sit down.' Simple as that. Individuals, you see. Different mindset altogether. But it's interesting how it all happened, you know, from that business where each place had a little camp of people who were, if you like to call it, 'their people', and that was their employment pool and they regarded them as family, most of them, you know. They knew them from when they were 'piccaninnies' in the camp. Until you came to the general sort of dispersing of that particular facet of life, and once dispersed it was very hard to get them back and I don't think it ever *did* come back. There was a few still hung on at the stations, but eventually they drifted away.

**Well, look, thank you very much, Bruce, for your time –**

My pleasure.

**– and sharing the information about your longstanding contact with the pastoral industry. It's been fascinating, and it's wonderful we've got that down for the record. Thank you again.**

That's okay.

TAPE ENDS