



# Developing a National Employment Policy, Australia 1939-45

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## ABSTRACT

Public policy development in the field of government-funded employment management is a matter currently under political review and inviting historical scrutiny. The historical subject of this doctoral dissertation is the development of national employment policy in war-time Australia. Its examination of the documentary evidence concentrates on South Australia even while analysing national events through themes with international significance. The work shows that the Commonwealth Government intervened in the war-time labour-market through new institutions, the Manpower Directorate and the Women's Employment Board, because customary labour distribution practices proved inefficient in conditions of total war. However, the thesis shows that even in the highly regulated milieu, employers resisted unpopular central decisions—sometimes abetted by government ministers.

I argue that the close relationship between government and business amounted to a form of captured étatism in which the commercial manufacturers who both managed and performed the procurement and production of war materials, functioned as an arm of government while avoiding accountability to central government employment policy. This experience encouraged Australia's federal government to establish a centrally controlled employment service as a lynchpin of its post-war reconstruction policy.