

Herman Diederik Huyer (1920–1998)

Herman Huyer was not your conventional visitor to Australia who subsequently decided to settle here. He was sent to Australia in 1969 to become the managing director of Philips Industries Ltd, the Australian branch of the huge electrical and electronics group based in The Netherlands.

He brought with him a competitive edge that had been honed from doing business around the world and drew attention to what he considered to be shortcomings in the practice of Australian management.

In particular, he was critical of the handling of industrial relations, believing local managers were outgunned by more competent, better-trained union representatives and tended to take easy options for short-term gains. He conveyed his forthright opinions on economic management to governments of all persuasions without hesitation.

Within two years of arriving in Sydney, Huyer had been invited to join the Council of the Chamber of Manufacturers of NSW and became president for three years from 1977. During his presidency, he expressed great concern at the level of youth unemployment due to the declining demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour.

He deplored the community's complacent acceptance of high youth unemployment and warned of the impending technology revolution in manufacturing which would reduce employment numbers but increase opportunities in new skills.

Huyer was born in The Netherlands in 1920 and was a teenager during the Nazi occupation when life was far from easy. A member of the Resistance, he was arrested briefly by an SS detachment after attempting to avoid their attention. Unfortunately for young Huyer, his captor was a fleet-footed Dutch SS member who had won a medal at the Berlin 1936

Olympics. On his release, he returned to work with the Resistance until the Germans were driven out.

After completing his compulsory military service in 1946, he joined the Philips Group and was to spend the rest of his working life with the same organisation, although, unlike many of his confreres, only the first three years were in his homeland. The other significant event of 1946 was his marriage to Gezina (Ina).

The first of Huyer's many overseas postings was Lagos, Nigeria, in 1950-52, when it was still a British colony. In 1953, he moved to Singapore, also a British colony faced with uncertainty due to the communist guerrilla war in nearby Malaya. The next year, the Huyer family moved to Johannesburg for the next three years where Herman became assistant general manager of Philips' South African operations.

His next posting, in 1957, was as managing director of Philips Orient in President Gamal Nasser's Egypt in the midst of the Suez crisis. At one stage, the Egyptian government expelled Philips' non-Egyptian management along with many other western businessmen following the abortive invasion of the Suez zone by British and French forces.

Without international support, the British and French were forced to withdraw in humiliating circumstances. Later, the Philips management, led by Huyer, was allowed to return.

Karachi was home to the Huyer family from 1962-65 where Herman was managing director for Philips Pakistan. In 1965, he moved to Athens to head the Philips organisation in Greece for the next three years.

When Huyer arrived in Australia in 1969, he found a situation quite different to anything he had encountered in other countries. He found the nation's complex three-tiered system of government created unnecessary competition with no long-term objectives, let alone policies, for industrial growth or economic development.

He believed the rigid centralised industrial relations system destroyed any

incentive for management to be innovative or, for that matter, to behave as proper managers. He decided that this must be real democracy at work as his previous management experience was in colonies, dictatorships, or, at best, examples of "guided democracy".

In 1984, Huyer accepted the temporary position of president of the Council for Manufacturers & Employers Ltd, which had been formed to facilitate a merger of the Chamber of Manufactures and the NSW Employer Federation. Like a similar attempt to merge in the early 1970s, this venture failed due to irreconcilable differences. He was also active in industry bodies aligned closely with the interests of the Philips Group, one of the biggest producers of lighting products, television receivers, whitegoods, audio equipment, communications and defence equipment in Australia.

He was president of the Australian Electronics Council (1972-80), a director and president of the Australian Electrical and Electronics Manufacturers Association (1977-80) and a NSW councillor of the Metal Trade Industries Association (1972-80).

After his retirement from Philips, Huyer sat on a number of company boards, including the Commonwealth Banking Corporation, MMI, Pacific Mutual Australia, Clyde Industries and Holec.

Apart from his extensive business connections, he made time to be involved in a number of community bodies, particularly the Association of Netherlands Ex-Service Men and Women in Australia of which he was made a life member.

He was past president of Save the Children Fund NSW and a councillor and president of the Foundation for Physics at the University of Sydney.

In 1981, Huyer was awarded the Order of Australia for his services to industry and the community and received a Dutch award, Officer of the Order of Orange Nassau, in 1977.

He is survived by his wife Ina and three sons.

