

SUPPLEMENT TO THE HISTELEC NEWS

MARCH 2009

HISTORY OF THE ELECTRICITY COUNCIL

by Chris Buck

Member Chris Buck, who once worked for the Electricity Council, has researched the subject in depth and also added his own personal memories. He describes it as a brief overview of the nationalised ESI with particular reference to the role of the Electricity Council.

Introduction

Although established as the focal point of the Electricity Supply Industry (ESI) many in the industry never really understood the role of the Electricity Council (EC) or even were completely oblivious to its existence. Sometimes the EC became the topic of job interview questions, such as in engineer interviews held in the mid 1970s in connection with progression to 'trained engineer status'. The organisation was also frequently confused with the Electricity Consultative or Consumers' Council!

In spite of its important role, the EC had a very late birth in becoming a part of the ESI and an early death in the lead up to privatisation of the industry. It was somewhat detested or, at the very least, viewed with suspicion by many of the industry's managers, as well as suffering from the whims and fancies of successive governments. Nevertheless those of us who worked for the organisation felt we had a useful co-ordinating and supportive role to play.

The early years of nationalisation

The nationalisation of the ESI formed a part of the post war Labour government's programme for nationalisation of all the fuel industries. The legislation to achieve this was the 1947 Electricity Act for which the promoting Bill was granted Royal Assent on 13 August 1947. Under this Act the plethora of private companies and local authority undertakings then existing (approx 560 in all) and the Central Electricity Board (CEB), plus nearly 300 power stations operated by these organisations, were to be transferred to a new central authority - the British Electricity Authority (BEA). The Act also provided for the creation of 14 Area Electricity Boards covering England, Wales and southern Scotland. Two of the new Boards covered southern Scotland – South West Scotland and South East Scotland, but these were subsequently merged into one. The north of Scotland had already been dealt with under the Hydro-Electric Development (Scotland) Act 1943 which had established the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board.

The BEA was given responsibility for generation and transmission whilst the Area Boards had responsibility for distribution and sales of electricity to consumers.

The BEA also inherited the negotiating machinery which had been in the ownership of the CEB. In fact machinery for negotiating pay and conditions of employment for industrial staff (NJIC) and engineers (NJB) even predated the creation of the CEB in 1927, having come into being in 1919 as wages in the Industry had started to rise rapidly following the 1914-18 war.

Parallel advisory machinery, in the form of the national and district joint advisory councils (NJAC and DJACs), did not come into being until after nationalisation, the inaugural meeting of the NJAC being held on 27th January 1949. The administration and secretarial support for this negotiating and advisory machinery, both at national and district level, later came to form an important part of the work of the EC.

Implementation of the 1947 Act represented a significant concentration of power from around 560 organisations prior to nationalisation into 15 thereafter, with most of the power and finance needs resting with the BEA. The personalities of those heading up the new organisations had a part to play in these 15 organisations not settling down to become members of one big happy family!

Following the neglect and deprivations brought about by the 1939-45 war, compounded by the severe winter of 1946/7 it had quickly become apparent that there was a severe shortage of generation capacity and a need to build new power stations quickly. The then Minister of Power was anxious to ensure that the right person was selected to head up the new BEA. Although the CEB chairman, Harold Hobson, had been expected to get the job this was not to be the case and he resigned in disgust. Instead, outsiders were appointed to the top posts, Lord Citrine (formerly TUC general secretary) as chairman and Sir Henry Self (a civil servant) as his deputy. In the case of the Area Boards, the chairmen and other board appointments were made mainly from within the industry, drawn from well-respected engineers and managers from the major supply companies and municipal undertakings.

Thus a certain amount of antagonism existed between the Area Board chairmen and the BEA from day 1. This was compounded by the fact that only four Area Board chairmen were permitted to serve on the BEA board at any one time, the remainder serving on rotation. Furthermore, although the BEA had been given powers relating to co-ordination of the whole industry the members of the Area Boards were appointments made by the Minister, to whom therefore the Area Board chairmen were ultimately accountable! This anomaly even continued after the creation of the EC. As early as 1951 difficulties with the nationalised structure seemed to be surfacing, for the BEA deputy chairman gave a paper at a British Institute of Management meeting that year titled 'Problems of Decentralisation in a Large Scale Undertaking – The Organisation of the Central Authority and Area Boards of the Electricity Supply industry'.

Although at nationalisation industry representatives had suggested to government that the new central authority should be called the British Electricity Supply Authority this advice had been ignored, with the result that in the first few years there was the inevitable confusion with the other BEA (British European Airways). The opportunity was afforded to correct this confusion under the Electricity Reorganisation (Scotland) Act 1954 when the BEA was renamed the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), which took effect from 1st April 1955. However, the primary purpose of that Act was to transfer to the Secretary of State for Scotland all matters in relation to electricity supplies in Scotland and the establishment of an 'all-purpose board' (the South of Scotland Electricity Board) to cover those parts of Scotland not already covered by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board. Thus from 1st April 1955 England and Wales was to continue with its 12 Area Board structure, which remained unchanged right up to privatisation.



Fig.1 Lord Citrine opening Electricity House, Bristol in 1948

Also during 1954, for the reasons possibly already mentioned and probably many others, it was considered timely to review the organisation of the supply industry in England and Wales. The then Minister of Fuel and Power appointed a Committee of

Inquiry, under the chairmanship of Sir Edwin Herbert, 'to enquire into the organisation and efficiency of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales in the light of its working under the Electricity Act 1947'. The Herbert Committee reported in January 1956 following which a Bill was tabled, which led to the 1957 Electricity Act. This provided for two new statutory bodies, the EC and the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB), to replace the CEA. On 1st September 1957 the EC and the CEGB were constituted by the Minister of Power under the 1957 Act. They reached agreement by 1 November on how the CEA should be divided between them and the CEA was dissolved on 1st January 1958.

The Electricity Council

Thus from 1st January 1958 the EC took over certain functions and responsibilities previously discharged by the CEA under the 1947 Electricity Act as well as being required to perform functions assigned to them under the 1957 Act. This new arrangement embodied the principle of leaving full autonomy to the Area Boards. As a 'statutory body' (or in modern parlance a government quango!) the 1957 Act established Council as comprising :- A chairman, two deputy chairman, up to three independent members, CEGB chairman plus two other CEGB Board members and twelve Area Board Chairmen.

On the face of it the balance of power between the generation and distribution parts of the industry had now changed but in practice that was not to be the case!

The 1957 Act prescribed terms of reference for the EC, some of which were quite specific but others 'very commendable words' constrained by implementation being at the discretion of the Minister! Examples of the specific terms of reference were, in relation to the ESI as a whole, to:

- settle a general programme of research;
- furnish the Minister with such returns, accounts and other information as he may require;
- prepare consolidated annual accounts;
- establish and maintain machinery for the settlement by negotiation of terms and conditions of all staff;
- establish and maintain machinery for the promotion, improvement and encouragement of measures affecting the safety, health, welfare, education and training of all staff;
- raise finance (with the consent of the Minister and the approval of the Treasury!);
- promote and assist in the maintenance and development of an efficient, co-ordinated and economical system of electricity supply.

To achieve these terms of reference the statutory body required a supporting organisation, the major part of the EC. This was divided into a number of departments, initially being four: secretarial/legal, financial, industrial relations and commercial. In later

years further departments were established – public relations, marketing and engineering in 1978, which was removed from under the wings of the commercial department to become a department in its own right. Each department was headed by an advisor – presumably named so on the basis of the role being to provide advice to the Council members. The secretarial department included an ‘intelligence officer’ – perhaps the ESI could have done with a few more of those! Seriously, ‘intelligence covered things such as library services. A very extensive library and translation service was maintained by the EC. With its closure, when the Millbank offices were finally vacated, some records went to the museum of science and industry at Manchester. Other books and documents of interest to SWEHS were ‘saved from the bin’ by two of our diligent committee members and are now in our archive collection.

Understandably, the industry representatives on Council were at pains to keep the size of this organisation as small as possible since they had to pay for it! ESI statistics show that, at March 1959, 535 staff were employed by the EC compared with 53,128 in the CEBG and 133,495 in the Area Boards, i.e. just under 0.3% of all ESI employees. Of course, for this reorganisation to be a success presupposed the active co-operation of the CEBG and the Area Boards. However, for several reasons the EC was probably doomed from day one. Firstly there had been two changes of Minister (including a change of government) since the setting up of the Herbert Committee and the Minister, who ended up with responsibility for implementing the new structure apparently didn’t think very much of what had been devised by his predecessor. Secondly that the new CEBG would be controlling two thirds of the industry’s capital expenditure, although having less than a third of the staff. Thirdly that as the reorganisation progressed, the civil servants came to view the CEBG Chairman as the key player in the new ESI structure.

Finding the right person to head up the new CEBG was also found to be difficult. The view was that Lord Citrine was now too old to be appointed to this important role and the Minister considered that no one within the industry was capable of doing the job, although Lord Citrine had strongly recommended one of his senior members of staff, Josiah (Jack) Eccles, for the post. In the event Sir Christopher Hinton, a member of the Atomic Energy Authority, accepted the job but only after extracting a verbal agreement from the Minister that, although the legislation implied supervision of the CEBG by the EC, he would have virtual independence. The civil servants recognised that it would not bode well to remind Sir Christopher too often of the Council’s new powers!

Appointing the right person to head up the new EC also proved tricky and, in the event, Lord Citrine’s deputy at the CEA, Sir Henry Self, then 67, was appointed as a caretaker chairman. Again, an outsider, Ronald

Edwards (Professor of Industrial Organisation at the LSE), had been favoured but it was felt that the appointment of yet another outsider would have had a bad effect on morale within the industry. Ronald Edwards had served on the Herbert Committee and this was felt to be a further reason for excluding him. In the event, he was appointed as a part-time deputy chairman to be groomed for the top job. Although Jack Eccles had declined to continue in the new CEBG under Lord Hinton he was appointed to the EC full-time deputy chairman post, but it being made clear that he was not going to get the chairman’s job later!

Salaries had proved to be a tricky issue in appointing the key people, just as they had at nationalisation. In fact the salaries of the CEA and Area Board chairmen had remained fixed since the 1947 nationalisation. Although the salary for the chairman of the new CEBG had apparently been envisaged as being less than that paid to the EC chairman, in the event both were paid the same - £10,000 per annum. Once again, the top salaries languished at these new levels determined by the government for a number of years thereafter. In fact, as former NJB staff will well remember there was often pressure being exerted on the NJB salary scales from both ends – the ever rising NJIC salaries overlapping at the bottom and the fixed salaries of government appointed senior staff preventing adequate increases at the top end. However, one compensation for the poor pay received by the EC chairmen was that if you were not already a ‘Sir’ when appointed you were awarded a knighthood following your stint of service!



Fig.2 Millbank Tower

Although a new organisation, the EC grew out of what was already there, in particular what had up to then been the centre for the ESI, namely the CEA. For the first few years the EC (always a London centred organisation) was based at Trafalgar Buildings, 1 Charing Cross (the former CEA HQ) but with some staff outposted at Winsley Street, these offices being shared with some of the new CEGB staff (the CEGB had established their HQ at Bankside House, Sumner Street). Initial EC staffing levels were low, but as new responsibilities, particularly research, were undertaken on behalf of the industry the organisation started to grow. By the mid 1960s a new headquarters was established at 30 Millbank, next door to Thames House South where the Minister for Fuel and Power resided, and convenient for Parliament just up the road at Westminster! This was a seven storey modern office building known as the 'Y' block because of its shape. It was adjacent to Millbank Tower, a 30+ storey office block in which the EC also rented accommodation on floors 3 – 5. The engineering staff mainly occupied the fifth floor of Millbank Tower which thankfully meant that we only had to walk down five flights of stairs during fire drills! To facilitate easy staff movement between the two buildings an interconnecting corridor existed at 3rd floor level. Both buildings looked out across the River Thames so those of us fortunate to occupy offices on the front of the building had a nice view!

Because the EC had a co-ordinating role, many meetings were held at Millbank and the conference/meeting dining facilities located on the second floor of the 'Y' block gained a reputation for free flowing alcohol, with pre-lunch drinks as well as unlimited wine during the meal. That was until an undercover newspaper reporter infiltrated the contract catering team, which resulted in a Sunday newspaper expose of the 'goings on' in this part of a nationalised industry!

Millbank Tower was also occupied by various government departments, resulting in occasional visits of overseas dignitaries. One morning, when approaching the Tower my way suddenly became barred by a security guard as a lady alighted from a black limousine that had drawn up at the front of the building. On looking up, I recognised her as the then recently retired former Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Mier, who was known as 'the iron lady' – long before that title was ascribed to Margaret Thatcher.

Certain of the Council's functions required close liaison with the Area Boards and CEGB regional offices and for this purpose a number of small 'outstation offices' were established around the country. That for the South West was located in Bristol, in later years occupying the 2nd floor of St Lawrence House, just across the road from the SWEB HQ on the Centre. The main role of the outstations related to industrial relations, acting as an important link between the national negotiating and advisory machinery located at Millbank and local arrangements

in the Area Boards/CEGB. Some of the outstations, such as Bristol, also included staff dealing with education & training and health & safety, both these functions being organised on different geographic areas to those for industrial relations. Industrial relations was organised into numbered districts (12) corresponding to Area Board boundaries – that for SWEB being the No 4 District. The role of the EC outstationed industrial relations departments was to service and provide the secretarial support for the District Negotiating and Advisory Machinery comprising the DJIC, DJC, DJB and DJAC, plus various sub-committees such as suggestions. In later years some of the outstation offices were amalgamated and Bristol took over the work of the No 8 District (South Wales), originally located in Cardiff, and not long before closure the No 3 District (Southern), located in Southampton.



Fig.3 Sir Ronald Edwards and his Wife in Bristol

The British Electrical Development Association (EDA) had been formed in 1919 and in 1964 their testing house at Leatherhead was taken over by the EC, being renamed the Appliance Testing Laboratories (ATL). These laboratories, not to be confused with the Central Electricity Research Laboratories (CERL) under the ownership of the CEGB and also located in Leatherhead, were concerned mainly with the testing of domestic electrical appliances and certification under the British Electro-technical Approvals Board for Household Equipment (BEAB) scheme. In 1966 the EC took over responsibility from the EDA for all national promotional work carried out on behalf of the Area Boards, creating an EDA division (in 1968 this was to become the EC marketing department).

In 1965 an EC research centre (ECRC) was established at Capenhurst in Cheshire. This establishment undertook research and investigative work, on behalf of the Area Boards, relating not only to distribution

plant and systems but also to creating new marketing opportunities for the sale of electricity. The facilities included a high voltage laboratory. The ECRC facilities were never as extensive or grand as those operated by the CEGB which, in addition to CERL, also operated Marchwood Engineering Laboratories and Berkeley Nuclear Laboratories. In 1966 an EC demonstration of battery electric vehicles created wide interest, two vehicles being conversions made under an EC research contract. Although battery vehicles are very topical in to-day's concern about climate change this shows that the idea is by no means new and a lot of pioneering work was carried out years ago by the EC.

A farm electric centre was also established, by way of a permanent building sited at the national agricultural showground at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire. In 1969 the EC took over the commercial catering centre established by the London Electricity Board, renaming it the Electric Catering Centre. This was located in St Martins Lane, London.

In 1965 the Electricity Supply Industry Training Board (ESITB) was established as a result of the Industrial Training Act 1964. The EC had an important role as custodian of the ESITB, thus ensuring that statutory requirements prescribing training requirements for apprentices, etc were tailored to meet the needs of the industry rather than being administered by an external body.

Some readers will have recollections of the EC training establishment at Horsley Towers in the village of East Horsley, Surrey. This grand Victorian House (architect Charles Barry and built between 1820 and 1829) was used as the CEB war-time headquarters, when a number of Nissen huts were erected in the grounds to provide temporary accommodation. At nationalisation the property passed into the ownership of the BEA who converted it for use as a training centre. Ownership was then transferred to the EC following the 1957 Act. Even in the early years of EC ownership student accommodation remained in the war-time Nissen huts which had communal washing facilities (no such thing as en-suite in those days!) In later years a purpose-designed training and accommodation block was built in the grounds, the infamous Nissen huts then being dismantled and removed. Courses were run mainly for Area Board management and supervisory staff since the CEGB had their own management training centre at Buxton in Derbyshire, also inherited from the CEA (later relocated to Bricket Wood on the northern outskirts of London). In the early years, a characteristic of the Horsley Towers courses was that since they commenced at Monday lunchtime (to allow attendees to travel to Horsley on a Monday morning) it was deemed necessary to finish Saturday lunchtime (presumably to get a full five days work in, and no, we did not get paid overtime for the Saturday attendance!).

Following ESI privatisation Horsley Towers was sold off and is currently in the ownership of the De Vere hotel group, providing upmarket accommodation,

function facilities and a management conference centre.



Fig.4 Horsley Towers (now a hotel)

In 1976 British Electricity International Ltd (BEI) was established as a wholly owned subsidiary of the EC to strengthen the overseas consultancy services then being provided by the industry.

In the years following the creation of the EC there were several attempts at further reorganisation of the ESI. In July 1969 proposals were put forward by the then Minister of Power for reconstituting the EC and renaming it the Electricity Authority (echoes of the CEA?) with new powers to plan and control the policy of the industry as a whole. These proposals were embodied in the 1970 Electricity Bill but this fell at the 2nd reading because of a change of government. In December 1974 the Secretary of State for Energy set up a committee under the chairmanship of Lord Plowden to again consider the structure of the industry. This resulted in a white paper being published in January 1976. The main recommendation was that the ESI should be unified under one single statutory body. The Secretary of State announced that the report provided an opportunity for all concerned to have a wide discussion on the future shape of the industry. On the expectation that change would happen, Francis Tombs, then chairman of the South of Scotland Electricity Board, accepted the post of EC chairman from April 1977. Needless to say, nothing came of these proposals and the status quo remained. Francis Tombs resigned (reputedly in disgust) before the end of his term, moving on to become chairman of Rolls Royce.

With the Conservative party succeeding to government in 1979, privatisation quickly came onto the agenda. At the 1984 party conference Cecil Parkinson made a speech stating the intention of government to privatise the ESI. Rather than privatising the industry as a whole, as had been the case with BT and British Gas the proposals put forward were to privatise as a number of individual companies. Thus many of the functions previously performed by the EC (e.g. centralised negotiation of terms and conditions of employment for all staff) would not be required following privatisation. Nevertheless, there was considered to be a need for a trade association and some functions of the former EC

were transferred into a successor organisation – the Electricity Association (EA), which continued occupation of a part of the Millbank Offices. There being no future role for them, all the outstations closed early on in the lead up to privatisation, the Bristol office closing at the end of March 1989, a year before privatisation and the birth of the EA replacement. A couple of years ago the EA was, in turn, replaced by a much smaller organisation – the Electricity Networks Association – which left Millbank for smaller premises elsewhere in London. However, as a legal entity alone, the EC continued to exist long after privatisation, finally being abolished by The Electricity Council (Dissolution) Order 2001, which came into force on 9th November of that year.

The ESI reached a maximum staffing level of 228,520 in 1967 of which the EC accounted for 1083 (just under 0.5%) Thereafter, although total staff numbers started to decline, EC staffing continued to show a slight increase. By 1989, at the start of reorganisation in the lead up to privatisation total ESI staff numbers had dropped to 131,179, of which the EC accounted for 1257 (just under 1.0%).

EC Engineering

Unlike the Area Boards and the CEGB, engineering was never the major part of the day-to-day work of the EC. For many years it didn't even warrant its own department, being simply a division within the Commercial Department. Nevertheless, although not directly concerned with the 'nuts and bolts' of engineering at the sharp end, the EC engineering function still had an important role to perform in engineering policy formulation and co-ordination. In this respect, an important role of the Head of Engineering was to chair the Chief Engineers' Conference (CEC) – quarterly meetings of the Area Board Chief Engineers and senior CEGB/EC staff. Similar meetings had been held from nationalisation, under the auspices of the BEA/CEA.

The purpose of the CEC was to provide a forum so as to ensure co-ordination between the Boards and engineering specialists, as well as with the other chief officers of the Boards (commercial, accountants, secretaries and lawyers). The detailed work of conference was delegated to a number of main and sub-committees, the main committees being plant, mains, system design and development, operations, resources and performance and, lastly, distribution research. These committees were staffed mainly by Area Board HQ engineers but also had CEGB representation where appropriate. They drafted a range of policy documentation, ESI Standards (successors to the British Electricity Boards Specifications, BEBS), Engineering Recommendations and Area Board Chief Engineers' (ACE) Reports, which were then issued under the authority of the CEC and implemented by the Boards through their own procedures. In later years this committee structure was reformed into topic consultancy groups, each being chaired by a Chief Engineer. That covering health and safety was known

as the Safety Liaison Group which for a time was chaired by Dr Carson, SWEB Engineering Director. The EC also co-ordinated ESI representation on committees involved with the development of electrical standards at national (BSI), European (CENELEC) and international (IEC) level.

From June 1974 the EC, on behalf of the CEC, published a quarterly journal 'Distribution Developments' which was issued to every engineer in the ESI. This contained articles on pioneering and development work carried out nationally and within the Boards as well as on the work of the CEC (copies are in our archives). Each Board had an appointed correspondent, that for SWEB initially being Phil Lavis, an engineer based at Head Office.

In the early years of the EC, as has been said, engineering was not a department but existed as a division, headed by a distribution liaison technical engineer, within the Commercial Department. With the expansion of its activities it soon developed two branches of activity – distribution and technical research – under a 'head of engineering', who in turn was accountable to the commercial advisor. In spite of his title, the head of engineering was still a senior person in the industry, on a salary commensurate with that of an Area Board Chief Engineer.

Distribution Branch serviced the CEC and provided technical secretaries for the committee structure previously described. It also provided the secretarial and administrative support for the National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) and the Joint Radio Committee (JRC). NJUG was a committee comprising senior representatives from all the service utilities (water, gas, electricity and telecommunications). Its work included co-ordinating policy on the laying of services in the public highway (e.g. depths and positions of the different services). NJUG also provided a joint approach on matters of common concern in dealings with central government (e.g. relating to street works), as well as preparing guidance documents, targeted to third parties involved in highway excavation work, on the dangers of buried services and safe digging practice. The JRC, set up in 1956, was a committee comprising representatives of the nationalised power industries to facilitate negotiations with the Home Office Radio Regulatory Department. With greater reliance at that time being placed on the use of private radio communication systems by operational engineers it was important to ensure that waveband allocations were such that radio use in one Board did not interfere with that in another or with those being used by another utility. Nowadays all this seems quite archaic with the ready availability of public mobile telephone systems which are so taken for granted.

Technical Research Branch was in some respects a misleading name, perhaps originating from the emphasis on research in the EC's terms of reference. No research of a laboratory nature was undertaken at Millbank, although much data was collected and

analysed on behalf of the Area Boards in relation to the performance of the national distribution systems. From 1st April 1965 a National Fault and Interruption Reporting Scheme (NAFIRS) was put into place, which required all system faults and other unplanned supply interruptions to be reported to the EC to be recorded on a central database. The database was held on the CEGB computers at Park Street, London and the information submitted on the standardised report forms had to be transcribed at Millbank onto punched cards (this was in the relative early days of computing!). Following a basic clerical check, data was input to the computer which then subjected the data to a basic checking programme. Rejects were returned to an engineer (at one time, myself!) to sort out. Sometimes this was easy, e.g. where only one voltage had been specified in relation to a transformer; in others it was necessary to seek clarification from the relevant Board HQ each of which had a designated NAFIRS contact engineer (Jim Lees in the case of SWEB). Over the years a mass of data was collected on the performance of the national distribution system which helped in the formulation of future system design policy. Some Boards added circuit monitoring features to the basic NAFIRS scheme which enabled them to identify rogue circuits and implement measures to reduce the number of outages brought about by adverse weather conditions.

A parallel national equipment defect reporting scheme (NEDERS) was later put into place for the reporting of high voltage (HV) switchgear failures. This provided a useful forum for exchanging information between Boards and with HV consumers, as well as the means for a united approach in dealings with the switchgear manufacturers to ensure that common problems were identified and remedial action quickly put in hand. In all likelihood, this scheme prevented a number of potentially serious incidents (and possible consequential fatalities) involving HV switchgear failures during the course of operations by field engineers.

In 1978 the Safety Branch, which before then had been a part of the Industrial Relations Department, was transferred to join the two existing branches under engineering, which was then removed from under the commercial wing and established as a separate department in its own right. Safety Branch had its origins back in the days of the CEA when a headquarters and regional safety officer structure had been established. Although such staff were transferred en bloc into the new EC some continued to work for a while from their original offices. The CEA regional safety officer for the South West of England had been based at Oakfield Road in Bristol and, following transfer to the EC, for a time continued to be based there in what had become the CEGB SW Region Office. This was an interim situation until an office was acquired by the EC for its Bristol outstationed staff.

One role of the Safety Branch had long been to provide specialist input to the health and safety committees operating under the advisory machinery at national and district level. The advent of the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974 required a more formalised approach, with health and safety issues dealt with in a committee specifically for that purpose rather than through what were in effect sub-committees of the consultative machinery. This new legislation also prompted staffing levels in the branch to be increased with the appointment of an additional assistant regional safety officer to each outstation (which is how I came to arrive at Bristol from Millbank!). The EC Chief Safety Officer became an adviser to the national Health and Safety Advisory Committee (HESAC) whilst the outstationed EC safety staff were advisers to the District (joint Area Board/CEGB) HESACs within their region (three in the case of the Bristol – Nos. 3, 4 and 8). Generally, safety branch staff were recruited from within the ESI, with power station and/or distribution backgrounds and thus comprised a mix of electrical and mechanical engineers. Training opportunities were afforded to gain professional health and safety qualifications. Staff provided technical support to both Area Board and CEGB safety personnel as well as enabling co-ordination between the two parts of the industry on health and safety issues when required. They also represented the industry on BSI, CENELEC and IEC committees concerning electrical safety and other relevant safety issues. One aspect of Safety Branch work more widely known was the quarterly publication ‘Safety Review’ which again had commenced publication back in CEA days. This booklet, circulated throughout the ESI, contained accounts of accidents from across the industry, specialist articles and a digest of accident statistics.

EC Chairmen

1.1.58– 31.8.59 Sir Henry Self	1.9.59 – 1.12.61 C R King (later Sir Robertson)	1.1.62 – 1.10.68 Prof. RS Edwards (later Sir Ronald)
1.11.68 – 1.3.72 Sir Norman Elliott	1.4.72 – 31.3.77 Peter Menzies (later Sir Peter)	1.4.77 – 30.11.80 F L Tombs (later Sir Francis)
1.1.81 – 31.3.83 Austin Bunch (later Sir Austin)	1.4.83 – 31.3.89 T Philip Jones (later Sir Philip)	

Bibliography

This article draws upon a number of information sources, in particular:

1. The books written by Leslie Hannah: ‘Electricity before Nationalisation’ and ‘Engineers, Managers and Politicians – the first fifteen years of nationalised electricity supply in Britain’
2. The EC book: ‘Electricity Supply in the United Kingdom – a Chronology’
3. My recollections through working for the EC for 12 years, first in the Technical Research Branch at Millbank and later in the Safety Branch at the Bristol outstation.

Photographs – Generally from SWEHS Archive.