

Interview with Jack Jones

[SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED]

Well now, Mr Jones, we are going to start, because I think it is nice to start talking about the early days, and I know that you can recall those very vividly. Would you like to tell me about your early family background in Liverpool and your father and your family and what they did. Your father was in the docks?

Yes my father was a docker, my grandfather was a boilermaker who lived very close by. We lived in what you call a slum street in the south end of Liverpool. My mother had had a hard life. She had been a widow and I had two brothers and a sister who were half, and a brother who was the son of my father. So, that was the family but it was hard going because the docks were not a very lucrative job at the time and the family generally were struggling along in pretty dire conditions. But that was typical of the neighbourhood. Most people were either working at the docks or, like my grand father, he was a boilermaker, people like that peopled the street. They were the nature of the street: dockers, seamen, seamen especially. Some of course were unemployed, a number of factory workers, because a lot of factories were about. We lived at the street right close on to the docks, the last street as it were in the slum area, and we could walk along when I was a kid down to the river, a very muddy river at the time, and we enjoyed it playing in the mud and the sand and the river. With all sorts of items passing you by in the river ... excrement of all kinds.

Work in the docks in those days must have been very irregular. I mean, was you r father sometimes in work, out of work, casual labourer?

He was fairly regularly employed, yes, but it was... there were occasions when he wasn't. It depended on the nature of the shipping at the time. In the main, he managed to survive, we managed to survive because of his wages.

And you went into the docks when you left school?

Oh no, not immediately after. I went into a factory after I left school. I was 14 and I worked in a factory, an engineering factory, and started an apprenticeship there. I left because the firm went bankrupt, and I left. I'd be about 17, 18.

Were your brothers working in the docks too?

No, my brothers were on the railway. They were working on the railways and they became ultimately locomotive drivers and members of the ASLNEF. When I was a lad, they were already members of the, what we called the ASLNEF. People call it ASLEF now.

So they were older brothers?

Yes, I was the youngest of the family. I had a sister, and three brothers. One of them went to sea, the other two were on the railway.

So when your engineering firm went bankrupt and your apprenticeship presumably was sidelined then, is that when you went into the docks?

Shortly afterwards. I had to look around for other jobs. I did a lot of sign painting, things like that, and then I got a job on the docks, followed my father. That was in a sense a major help with entry to the docks. If your father worked on the docks, and was a regular member of the

Union, then that enabled you. It wasn't a guarantee, but it certainly helped me...

Had you already joined the union when you were fourteen?

Yes. Well no, I joined the union when I was about 16.

You joined the Transport and General Workers' then?

Well it was the power section of the transport union I first joined yes. And I was in the engineering industry, indeed I tried to join the AEU, but I was told I was too young.

Are you pleased you didn't?

I am not sure.

Tell me about working in the docks then. We were talking about when you were 16 or 17, working in the docks, talking about the 1920s. Well, post first world war.

I went to work in the docks when I was 18 or 19. Yes, not 17. You were not allowed to work under the age of 18.

What was it like working in the docks then?

Pretty hard and quite dangerous and this danger struck me immediately when I was, well both in the factory and in the docks the problem of not adequate protection from falls from unsafe rigging and that sort of thing. And in the case of of the factory the same thing, the fact that many machines were unsafe. That is what struck me and I felt the need for a union to be active in that aspect.

And what were the employers' attitudes towards unions in those days? Were they resistant? Strongly opposed to trade unions, or was union strong enough to...

In the case of the factory they were opposed to the union, but of course a lot of the men were members of the AEU. But they were not strong enough to speak up for themselves. That is what struck me, and I felt the need to encourage people to. 'Why don't you do something about it?' And I was amazed that unions were so weak. When I got on the docks, frankly I was concerned that the union officials tended to be more favourable to the management than to the men. They were responsible, they felt responsibility for seeing that the men had to be in the union, you had to have a regular badge change every three months if you were a member of the union. You had to show for work and the official would be there, and he would check to make sure that people were paid up members of the union before they were employed.

Change of badge every three months?

Every three months.

What was the reason for that ?

Quarterly badge to make sure that men were in financial compliance of membership of the union on the docks.

That didn't apply generally through the union, but particularly on the docks?

Yes, certainly in Liverpool docks.

At that time of course, Ernest Bevin was General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Yes, well I didn't know him when I first went on the docks, of course, but I had heard of the name because, don't forget in the mean time the general strike had intervened and I had been very active with the general strike. As a lad of 13 I was running messages. My eldest brother was a member of the local council of action. As I told you, he was an ASLNEF man. And I felt that I was almost running the strike to be honest with you. I was asked to run messages round, and I was very interested. I got to know all about scabs, and the need to stand together, words like solidarity, all that had quite a lot of impact on me and I just hated the idea of some of these men, for example, trying to take the jobs of men on the railway. They didn't get very far, but I learned later that they were university students and people of that kind.

Was that the moment of great impact and influence on your attitude towards the trade union labour movement?

Oh, I think that the general strike period was uh, very much made an impression on me. Cause I had heard Ernie Bevin speak. My father took me to a meeting that Bevin had addressed before the strike. I wasn't all that impressed by Bevin at the time, to me he was a big fat man, and I didn't understand what he was saying much and I had also heard A J Cook speak. My father and one of my uncles took me to a meeting of theirs, just outside of Liverpool, near Wigan, and that I was impressed with. He was the sort of fellow who seemed to be vigorous and preaching, punching the air, that was quite impressive

He must have been a captivating figure, Arthur Cook.

Yes, he was in the sense he was impressing the audience who were mainly miners and the feeling that one had to help the miners, prevailed in my family. I remember when the strike started my mother talking about whatever we have got to put up with we have got to help the miners and their wives and kids. That sort of thing. We have got to go on short rations, we may not have much money but we have got to help. And that was the atmosphere that prevailed in the neighbourhood. Don't forget too, I had some experience too as a child of what a strike meant because in, I think, 1924 there was a dock strike, and I remember going to a soup kitchen, actually it was in a little chapel in the next but one street to where I lived, and getting soup that the local butcher had made from ham bones or whatever else it was. But it made marvellous soup and as a kid, that was also very impressed upon me.

Your whole family was involved in a sense in the general strike.

Oh yes, yes no question about that.

Your brothers were involved...

My father was on strike, the two brothers at home were on strike, the other was at sea. My sister wasn't on strike, but she wasn't at home at the time. She was working in a shop.

And were people actually, literally starving in those days around Liverpool because of the poverty in some areas?

I think the word starving is relative, but certainly people were short of good food and good homes. I mean in our street there was lots of both young and old people suffering from consumption. Scarlet fever was endemic. Diptheria, diseases of that sort of thing were quite common in the street mainly because food was short, and general provisions were. Housing conditions were pretty terrible. But I can say I felt that at the time. I just, in retrospect recall that they were very bad conditions that one suffered as children and all the people in and around the neighbourhood. I mean there were many children in the class that I went to at school.

Because you were 13 at the time, about 13 weren't you?. At the time of the general strike you were about 13.

Yes that is right. But I meant even prior to that when I was going to school some children didn't even have boots on their feet. One or two went with just their bare feet. Well in those cases, the children were sent to the local police station and the police station would give a chit to the mother to go and get a suit of corduroy, and corduroy smelled to high heaven, a suit of corduroy, and a pair of clogs. And so the kids who turned up at school with clogs and corduroy, you knew they were very, very poor. With us we were poor, but not so we had to get corduroys and clogs.

When the TUC called off the general strike, was there a feeling of, among you in Liverpool, even though you were very young, a feeling of being let down?

Terrible. I was involved. I was running round. I attended meetings and I remember the end of the strike, one of the local strike leaders, Billy Beaulieu, who later became a trade union official, but he was saying we have been let down, there are men at the top who have been traitors and they have sold us out. That sort of attitude. And that stuck with me. What is a unionism about, what is a trade union about, why does it not act together and stand strong? And why is there not some sense of the members having a say? And that stuck with me frankly all my life. And of course at that time, some of the industries wouldn't take the men back. Victimisation was the word. And of course later I knew that Bevin, Ernie Bevin had made an effort to try to get some understanding about the getting the people who were victimised back to work. And that was one of the reasons he participated against much criticism in what was called the Mond Turner talks. But that is another story.

That was around 1927 period when the TUC...

There was still the problem, you see, people had not got back to work even then in some cases and of course never did get back after that. In some cases because they were victimised.

What about the political climate, the Labour party and people like Ramsay MacDonald. Were you aware, and were you involved and active even at that young age?

Well, not so much active, but at a young age I remember going along to meetings with my mother and father on a Sunday night, you know there was no television, no radio then. But if anybody like MacDonald, people like that came to Liverpool, then usually there was a meeting in one of the big theatres like the Pavillion in Edgehill, or the Son Hall in the centre of Liverpool, or the picturehall, and people would queue up for a long time, hours on end, waiting to go in and listen to Ramsay MacDonald for example. So I heard Ramsay MacDonald at quite a young age. I am not saying I understood what he was saying but he looked a very impressive figure and sounded very good. Later of course I read some of his speeches and he was a very strong Socialist, MacDonald in his time. But that is by the way.

At that time, I was simply impressed by the look of the man but equally, occasionally I would listen to Tom Mann. Now perhaps one of the first meetings I attended was a meeting at the end of the street. A strike was on at one of the local factories and the strikers were addressed by Tom Mann and Mary Bamber, the mother of Bessie Braddock, who also impressed me at the time. I got to know her very well of course later. They were very impressive figures who talked about stand together boys, we have got to win and attacking the local employer who they called the Tsar and that sort of thing. So that was impressive for me and began I suppose helped to encourage me to take an interest later.

Did you join the Labour Party?

Yes, I joined the Labour Party when I was about 15 or 16. I was secretary of the local ward of the Labour Party before I was 17... just about when I was 17.

Was the family active in the Labour Party?

Not really. My father was a member of the Labour Party, but he wasn't what you would call active. He was interested he was interested in Unionism and of course he had actually worked with Jim Larkin. And I didn't know much about that. He told me about Larkin on the docks, what a good man he had been, some years before of course. And he was quite an admirer of Tom Mann. Tom Mann was a legendary figure in a way in Liverpool. He was well known. My father told me about what they called Bloody Sunday, that was the 1911 strike when all Liverpool was stopped. Tom Mann had been one of the leaders of that. So, in a sense, bit by bit, one absorbed something about trade unionism. I did anyway.

You have mentioned Tom Mann. What about Ben Tillett?

Well Ben I got to know more later, and heard him speak. Of course in his old age he was still a brilliant speaker. Silver tongue as it were. I think that would be correct. Nice soft, but very interesting to listen to. Tom Mann on the other hand was a fiery figure who could walk up and down the platform and really convey the feeling that something really mattered, and he'd almost, you know sometimes a little bit of acting on his part. He could suddenly stop his speech and say 'That is the trouble' Some people just want to sit down and do nothing. Sit down and have a cup of tea.' And that sort of stuff. All that impressed one because there were no mikes again, nothing like that. People had to speak out across the crowd to get heard.

Must have been an amazing political climate, industrial political climate then. Did you feel you were actually moving towards some sort of political objective?

Well, the general strike certainly one felt was a tremendous thing and everywhere you went it was apparent. People were, well in the neighbourhood where I lived, they were all united in the sense of supporting that, yes. I don't think we felt much beyond that. I remember the 1924 election of the Labour government, as a kid. You know there were posters were about, all the activity, people canvassing, singing the songs in support of the local Labour candidate.

And 1929...

And then 29, yes. I think that is when I first set about Ben Tillett Because was it 29 or 31 he was knocked out at Salford? Round that time, Salford was a bit way away, but on the, I think it would probably be the, it could have been 29. Wireless would be coming in, radio, and I remember that one of the news announced that Tillett had lost the election in Salford.

And then of course the 29-31...

But I did get to know later... 28, what?

1929 - 31, MacDonald, the second Labour Government which of course ended in disaster in 1931 and the great crisis. You were then of course active in not only the union but Labour party.

I was. I was a delegate in the Liverpool Trades Council Labour Party. The youngest delegate which would be about 1931. Because I remember very well the delegates talking about the way in which MacDonald had gone over to the national government. People were calling him a traitor and I remember one man named Chadwick who was an official of the Electrical Trade Union, and he was decrying the fact that people were criticising MacDonald because he had been such a wonderful man and he had sat at the feet of Ramsay MacDonald. I remember the phrase because I wondered what the hell you doing sitting at the feet of a man?'. But that was an indication of the feeling, but in the main everybody, the delegates were all against MacDonald and the traitors, not least Jimmy Thomas. And of course Jimmy Thomas was the ogre of the General Strike. Everybody in our locality blamed him because he was already a man that was disliked in the railway system certainly by my brothers who were members of the ASLNEF. and Thomas was regarded as a traitor and decried as such everywhere in our locality.

In 1931, after 1931 when the Labour Party was decimated really at the election then and MacDonald went into a national government, Ernest Bevin, General Secretary of the Transport Union in a way I suppose rescued the situation by rallying what remained of the Labour Party and the trade Unions didn't he?

Well I think you would know more about that than me. I mean from the record I am sure that is correct. Bevin to me was a name that was conjured in the household by my father, he talked about him being the dockers KC cos he had won a great victory for the dockers earlier in the early 20s and had led the strike in 24 and that had been successful as I understood it. He was well known at the time of the general strike and appeared to be the man that was trying to make something of it to try and get something for the men that is how it appeared. He wasn't the man who sold out the general strike. Now he may have been, but as we saw it then, as I saw it then as a kid, he wasn't. Certainly Thomas was. In that situation I suppose there was a degree of admiration for Bevin, yes. Certainly in the case of my father, he was quite an admirer of Bevin. But I did get to know Bevin later.

That was rather later, even in the middle of later 30s when you got to know Bevin well. At that time, now we are on to the 1930s, here was a rise of fascism, in Europe in Germany and Italy, in Spain...

Yes, well in 1931 you had the massive cuts in pay. Unemployed pay was cut by 10%, dock wages were cut pretty well everywhere, there was a mutiny in the Navy. That was heard about, was in the newspapers. The Invergordon mutiny as you say. So the atmosphere there was that the world was changing that something had got to be done about it. But just what? And one felt that the Labour Party had to be stronger in fighting back and bring the workers round to it. Even talk of whether we could have a general strike then but at that time the unions were so obviously weak they were accepting cuts in pay. This to me and I was beginning to understand things then, you know I was already a Trades Council delegate, attending meetings of the Union and that sort of thing before I was on the docks. But I felt that something must be done to strengthen the ranks of the Trade Union movement, and I

began to read and take an interest. Around about that time I started to attend classes of the Labour college, the local and National Council of Labour College and ultimately I became the secretary of the local Labour College. And I was 18 or 19.

You remember which books most influenced you at that time?

Well, I suppose it was quite natural that one of them was *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* which Bill Beaulieu who I mentioned earlier leant me the first copy. Subsequently I bought copies and borrowed copies and over a period of time passed them from hand to hand. The other one, while I was almost still at school was a book called *Our Noble Families or Our Old Nobility*, one or the other, and an old ship dockyard worker who lived in our street who was a friend of my father, he gave me this book as a matter of fact and I was interested to read all the shenanigans of the our old nobility including of course the nobility of Liverpool - the Derbys and the Seftons who had been part of robbing of the land from the people and I began to understand that things were terribly wrong with the society that allowed a few to have a lot of land and a lot of wealth and I was one of a number of poorer kids who used to walk down to the centre of Liverpool and stand and look at the Adelphi Hotel which was then a really posh hotel and you'd see limousines or what ever they were called then, draw up outside and Lord Derby and others get out and go in and one felt these were the wealthy bastards that were robbing our people.

Did you read Marx? [this bit is not clear]

Not at that stage. Later yes, of course. I began to take an interest in Marx because of the Labour College and we had an outline of economics that leant on Marx and people passed around copies... second hand copies often. They were sold cheaply - one of the members of the class was responsible for lending, well not so much lending as selling second-hand books often produced by an American publisher called Kerr. And one of the smaller pamphlets I think was *Wage Labour and Capital* by Marx and similar. And we would look at these and were encouraged to read a page and then discuss it in the class. So I got a little idea about the Labour theory of value and that workers were robbed at work and so on.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, you were still working in the docks were you?

That's right. Prior to that, although I was still working in the docks, I in fact took part in the Hunger March from Liverpool because of the massive unemployment and at that time the means test was atrocious. And, as I told you, unemployment benefit had been cut and wages had been cut and I felt, because I was quite fit at the time that I should take part, this hunger march, and I got branch support, the dockers branch support that I should take part in the march. This was in 34 by the way. And so I actually took part although I was still technically working in the docks on the march from Liverpool. Amongst those who marched was Bob Edwards the ILP leader and ILP MP but well known in the locality. He had been a Labour councillor in Liverpool and then later moved out of Liverpool but still very active in the Independent Labour Party.

And later became the Chemical Workers leader didn't he?

Yes, he later became an official of the Transport Workers, but he was always a friend of mine, I knew him from a youth upwards from me, he was a bit older than me.

Tell me about the hunger marches. You marched from Liverpool.

We marched from Liverpool. There would be about thirty or forty from Liverpool. A few of them had come over from Belfast to take part with us. We were going to be part of a national march. We marched from Liverpool to Wigan ... to St. Helens first, then on to Wigan ... stayed at a workhouse in Wigan. Demanded the right to sleep there. Then marched, marched from Wigan to Manchester. Manchester we slept in the All Souls Church. The Church of England parson there was very supportive, allowed us to use the church to sleep in, and then we marched all the way down to London, stopping at places on the way. We stopped at Macclesfield, and Hanley, then down to Birmingham and so on.

How long did that take you?

About a fortnight.

Who was leading that? Was it Wal Hannington?

When we got to London, he was the leader of it yes.

And of course, he was an engineering workers leader wasn't he, Hannington?

Well not at that time. He had worked in engineering. Later he did become an organiser for the AEU. I got to know him then as a joint negotiator, but I did not know him very well at the time. He was a national leader, although I was elected a delegate from the Lancashire marchers. Liverpool then was joined with Lancashire and the Manchester people and so on, and I was elected to go to a conference ... two of us from the Lancashire section to take part in a national conference on unemployment, at the Battersea Town Hall, I think. Either the Town Hall or the Baths in Battersea for some reason or other. And at that time I believe Tom Mann was in jail. He was supposed to be a speaker but he was arrested.

You must have been in trouble with the officials of the Transport Union and Bevin in those days, getting mixed up in the Hunger Marches. You must have been regarded as a rebel.

I don't think they knew much about the Hunger March. And I wasn't then involved directly with the Union. I was a member of the Union, but not involved in the fight. A little later yes, certainly, because I was opposed to the cuts in pay and began to demand that they should be restored and that sort of thing. And this was in 1934 of course. There was a beginning of a movement in the docks to try to get a restoration of the 1931 cuts and I was engaged in a discussion on which Bevin took part in Liverpool. And of course I was a young fellow and he was a bit disdainful – but he defended the grounds he had agreed to cuts in pay because the cut reduction in pay in 1931 was less than other industries had accepted, so he claimed. Seven and a half per cent as against ten per cent. However, the result of the hunger march was to get a restoration of the 1931 cut surprisingly because people like the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time spoke out in our support. Attlee was very favourable. I met Attlee then. He was leader of the Labour party and very modest little fellow but we met him and he spoke up in our support in the House of Commons, urged MacDonald the Prime Minister to meet a deputation of the marchers. But MacDonald of course didn't. However the result of it all was that the cuts were restored and this was used as an argument by the dockers, many of the active older men who were delegates to the national docks conference picked up the idea that I said look, the unemployed have got to have a restoration of the 1931 cuts. We should get it in our pay'. And they fought this, and then Bevin did then press for that and got it.

Would you regard that period as fundamental to your whole training, experience and what you later became, trade union leader, leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union. Looking back on that period, would you say that that was the foundation stone?

Part of it. Don't forget I was working on the job and I found things to put right there. There was the question of safety regulations on the one hand, because I saw a man killed and other men very badly injured working down in the boilers[?] of a ship - they were gassed - and so I began to understand something had to be put right on that score with the docks regulations and the Factory's Act, or what was called the Factories Act. But above all I saw the need to organise and I led one or two little strikes on pay because we were then piece work. And because of that, certainly I felt that there was need for more and more democracy. Not a word I often used then but the right for people to speak out more and take part more in the union. The slogan I used was let's make the union work for us'. So we would get them to the branch meeting and I could organise hundreds of men to attend a branch meeting that at an earlier stage, when I first started to attend a branch meeting was perhaps twenty. Perhaps twenty at most in some cases. They even elected the foreman as the Chairman of the branch which we shouldn't was soon cleared out eventually, but that sort of thing came, partly because of me, but subsequently because I was able to build around a number of active friends and colleagues - mates - who would attend. I had to organise classes on a Sunday, educational classes which the union said was alright, until they found out that I had a lawyer named Papworth who used to come and talk about Labour law and you know, I was criticised because Pugh, who was the earlier secretary of the union, he accused it of being nothing but a bloody rank-and-file movement. You've got this class Jones,' he said. Young Jones he called me. However, we still ran the class.

Did you regard yourself already...

Papworth of course was the name of a notorious man in London who was a busman, who was a rank and file pawn unto Bevin. But he was no relation. But you would understand the connection my friend Mr Pugh was making.

Now what I was going to ask you...

He typified the old trade union official - cigar in the mouth and all that you know. Although he had been a militant in his time but he gradually became part of the system and felt that the interest of the employer was more a priority than the interest of the members.

Did you mark yourself as a socialist then, at that time?

Oh most definitely, yes. I was already in the Labour Party, active and had taken an interest in socialism.

And were you already aware of what was going on in Europe, in nazi Germany, Mussolini in fascist Italy, even before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War?

Yes.

You were aware of all that?

Yes very much aware.

And Mosley of course in this country leading his fascist Black shirts.

I recall Mosley and Cynthia Mosley speaking under a Labour party platform. Cynthia Mosley was a very impressive speaker for the Labour party. But then of course Mosely appeared with the Black shirts and and the Black shirts were to us anathema and wherever we could I joined forces with those who tried to shout Mosely and company down and over in Manchester, my wife later, I vaguely knew her then, was put in prison for shouting Mosely down. Only for not paying a fine, but she wasn't in for very long, but the fact is it was a general feeling amongst people that Mosely should be challenged and of course he had the support of a lot of middle class people. I was in the Territorial Army at the time and one of the officers I found out turned up at a Black shirt meeting. Needless to say we didn't make his life very comfortable after that. One of these typical university-style people, probably working as a cotton brokers firm or something like that, automatically a commission in the Territorials and presumably automatically feelings towards Black shirt fascism. So we knew about the dangers of fascism. Refugees were coming in from Germany, Jewish people particularly. And a great deal of sympathy was aroused for those who were victims of fascism and who wanted to oppose it and I think it was 1935 I was able to attend, as a young man, a representative from the dockworkers in Liverpool at an international conference mainly to talk about dockers and seamen's conditions, actually it was held in Paris - the first time I had been abroad actually and there were men there who had come in, refugees from Germany telling about the concentration camps, the imprisonment, that sort of thing, and incidentally one or two from Spain too who saw the dangers of what was happening there following the victories in 1931 and the Republic that was established. But it was the fascists that were showing their heads there too before the Civil War in 1936. So yes, that impressed me and I was then talking to German seamen and Italian seamen and Spanish seamen particularly, ships that I worked on, and got to know people quite well. One or two Germans particularly. Yes I knew plenty... quite a lot about the dangers of fascism and preached it to my mates.

So when the Spanish Civil War broke out and Franco tried to overthrow the Republican government, you were drawn into that struggle very early on.

Yes, yes, I knew the Spanish community who were full of the talk of what was happening in their country. The Spanish community was quite strong in Liverpool by the way. You know, they had been working for shipping companies who had trade with Spain and Portugal. So I got to know a lot from them. Bevin himself supported the Spanish elected government. At the beginning, the Executive Council granted money for food for Spain, that sort of thing, and I was taking a very keen interest. At that time I was already a member of the National Docks Committee of the Union, which Bevin attended regularly, and I was conscious that something should be done. I was shortly afterwards elected a young Labour councillor and one of the first things that interested me, a ship called the Linaria, refused to sail from the port of Norfolk in Virginia, because it was carrying nitrates for Seville in Spain where Franco had just landed or landed shortly before. They refused to work the ship. They were charged with impeding the progress of the vessel which was the equivalent to mutiny in the merchant navy, and were brought to Liverpool under arrest to begin proceedings against them. And I was called upon, I was only a young fellow, but I was asked by Sidney Silverman and others to do what I could to organise the legal support. Silverman was prepared to act but he wanted to raise money so we could find digs for them, that sort of thing. Although they were from North shields or South shields, from the North east they were brought to Liverpool for the commencement of the trial. So that was immediately something. Here were ordinary seaman who had refused to support Franco because some of the stuff was nitrates which would be used against the Republic, against the workers. And incidentally, their stand subsequently was sustained when the case went to the Liverpool Assizes the judge said that he accepted that... Of course the prosecution argued they were simply nitrates for commercial purposes. He said they were nitrates alright, but they were intended for explosives. Instead of fertilising the fields, they weren't fertilisers, they would have fertilised

the fields of Spain with blood. This was his words. Mind you, he was subsequently known to be a Labour man named Hemerday but I suppose they would have ruled him out now.

Tell me about your involvement with the international brigade in Spain when you joined...

I was already active in recruiting and I wanted to go quite early, because I had got a knowledge of arms. I was in the Territorial Army. But I was young and very fit then, not like now, and I wanted to go quite early and they said no, you are on the national committee of the docks. You are an active man, you're a councillor' as I was very active in the Labour party, and we would like you to stay, like you to use contacts to get one or two recruits' because they wanted some men for the Navy for example, for the Spanish Republican Navy. Well I was able to do that sort of thing. And of course I did quite a bit of propaganda, but I kept on insisting I should go and subsequently did. Unfortunately in the process I did recruit men and some of them were killed, so I had the nasty thing along with other colleagues of going and seeing the widows or members of the families of men that were killed. Just to give you an example, in the Battle of Jarama one of the earliest battles to defend Madrid, we had recruited shortly before then about twenty men, twenty two men I think. Sixteen of them were killed in that battle, from Liverpool. And you can imagine the problem what with their wives and children involved, because there was very little money to give them, very little help. All we could do was try to explain that their sacrifice was not in vain, that had been made, and it was not so easy, and I am bound to tell you I thought that those women were very great heroines if you like, very courageous in supporting the people at that time. So it wasn't just fighting, it was also the problems of those who were sacrificing at home. And one has to bear that in mind in whatever takes place like that. I did then quickly learn that you had to respect the needs of the wives and the children and the loved ones - mothers and fathers and so on. Not all were as supportive, but in the main they were very supportive and sacrificed a great deal. And when I got there I was mindful of that. If they were prepared to sacrifice themselves, then so was I.

You were wounded in one of the big battles.

Yes, the Battle of the Ebro.

Tell me about that.

Well that was a major battle where we were trying to retake the ground that Franco had gained and had split the country. There was no doubt that we had managed to assemble a massive force and although we did not have enough arms, certainly not enough heavy arms, not enough machine guns and inadequate weaponry generally, the fact is we assembled a fairly massive force to take back the land and we were able to regain a very considerable area that had been held by Franco only to be repulsed at a place called Gandessa, as we were trying to take a hill commanding the heights over Gandessa. And in that we lost a considerable number of men because it was hazardous first of all to climb the hill in very hot conditions, in the middle of summer, and we were short of grub as well. I remember on one occasion just as an aside, because I was then the political officer of the Major Attlee company, which meant I was responsible for the welfare of the men. And as long I could keep an eye on the military aspects of the situation with the commander, who was a friend of mine named Paddy O'Doer [CHECK], but at one stage we managed to get a mule up with some food only to find that when it got to the top the mule slipped and fell down with all the food going down the steep hillside. Which meant we were hungry as well as short of weaponry. However, we had to face the prospect of trying to get the height of this hill to capture the heights, despite the fact that grenades were being thrown, there were all sorts of

hazardous conditions. Some of the Franco forces had tied grenades ready to go off as it were as we touched the trees. And as we got to the top every possible hazard, and they had command of the heights, so that they would fire down at anything they saw moving, and in that situation I was quite badly wounded. Along with others. Of course others, for example a very well known person and friend of mine, Lewis Clive a descendant of Clive of India, who had been a guards officer, he was killed in that battle. Another friend of mine was Paddy O'Sullivan who was the son of a newspaper editor in Dublin. A very fine young socialist, a very fine soldier. He was killed also. Many, many were killed in that battle.

Were you taken to a field hospital?

Yes, when we eventually got me down to the bottom I was taken to, well what do you call a field hospital, a temporary ambulance in the middle of some trees, and then got away back to Barcelona for hospitalisation. The first thing to do was to inject with tetanus, anti-tetanus.

Did you return to the front after that?

No I didn't, the wound never properly healed for some time afterwards, and so shortly after that, well some weeks after, I was returned back to Britain. It was towards the end of the war anyway. It was shortly before the final end.

Because we are talking about, what, 1938 period?

Yes, yes, September 38. September/October... September.

Is it not so that in fact it was when you brought back the news of a very close friend of yours who was killed that you met your wife Evelyn?

No, my friend George Brown was killed early on. Earlier than that occasion... yes, before we went to Spain we knew that George had died. But I was already going to Spain. I did know Evelyn before then. I knew Evelyn quite early on because I used to go over to Manchester for the Trades Council meetings where George was also a delegate. George was a member of the Communist Party in Manchester, very prominent, but always a very fine man, very friendly. So I had a friendly connection with him. I used to go over there for meetings. And also Labour college classes in Lancashire, and Evelyn was a member of those so I met her. I knew her, but of course I was not her boyfriend at that time. It was afterwards.

Now we are really at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. You became a full-time official of the Transport and General Workers' Union and then from Liverpool you went to Coventry. What period was that?

I went to Coventry in 1939, probably August and at that time of course the car industry was still operating. There was talk of the war had been declared and shortly afterwards it was declared, a month or two afterwards. I found a considerable degree of disorganisation, to put it bluntly in the motor car and aircraft industries and set about trying to organise and build up a union from very small beginnings. A union which we were weak and even the AEU was weak, although it was primarily an engineering city. And then of course the war started, almost immediately the war was declared. Very shortly afterwards, a few months afterwards, we had the very big raid in Coventry in the period that was called the Phoney War. Well, it wasn't a phoney war for Coventry because bombs were being dropped almost from the beginning by Germans on the way over. But in November 1940, there was a massive raid. I think it is true to say that around 70,000 houses were virtually destroyed. About six to seven thousand people were killed and a large number were wounded in that virtually mass

destruction operation of the Germans on Coventry. And it was a situation in which we lost our home. Our home was virtually destroyed so my wife and my eldest son now, now approaching 60, he was just a baby, I was able to get my wife and baby and her sister away from Coventry and continued to try to organise something from the ashes so to speak.

You were district secretary then, weren't you?

Yes, district official of the Union.

And you were organising...

Shortly afterwards I formed the District of the Confederation of Engineering Unions to unite all the unions. So I was acting for all of them as well as for my own union.

And this was the time that the car factories were being turned over to produce tanks, aircraft...

They were being turned over and then were turned over to make aero engines mainly. Some were making bofor guns, anti-aircraft guns, but primarily aero engines and aircraft.

What was the scene like trying to organise the union then from the shop floor. Did you find a lot of resistance or help from employers?

No, very little help from employers. The employers were anxious to retain all the control they had in the unemployment period of the pre-war years and they were resentful of anything that gave the unions any sense of strength. Well, on the one hand we had the very bad conditions to be repaired in the factories, but we also had the beginnings of legislation which was going to be helpful to us. Bevin, if you remember had gone in to the government, well just about gone in. [DROPOUT IN TAPE AT THIS POINT]

But technically they were part of the republican army, but a very rebellious little part. Bob Edwards served with them for a period, but he was very critical of Orwell although Orwell himself said later that what the POUM did at that time was wrong which was a bit of opposition to the time when the main war was going on. The issue was whether you defended the Republic and democracy, or just had a revolution. Lost both in that case.

We are now in Coventry during the war. War had started. Coventry had been devastated. You were district secretary. Your first full-time official job and you are trying to build up the union from the shopfloor creating a shop stewards movement which of course...

Well, the first thing was to try to get people organised in the union, to get branches established, find contacts who would help to distribute recruiting leaflets and because employers were not encouraging the approach at all. Then of course to try and get shop stewards recognised which was not very easy with employers who were suspicious and aggressive. But at least Bevin introduced legislation that began to be favourable. It is true that they legally outlawed strikes unless there was adequate notification and all that sort of thing, but they did provide whatever conditions of employment had been established by collective arrangement they virtually were lawful and should be operated by all companies, and it provided for opportunities for arbitration. And although arbitration was regarded with some suspicion at least the employer could be forced into talking to a degree and that helped a great deal and I proceeded to study what aspects of legislation were favourable to the unions, to my own union particularly, and to how far we could use that to get some

acceptance of the trade union position but it did involve a lot of surreptitious activity getting people together at nighttime. We were already working 12 hours a day but still finding ways of getting them to come to a little meeting, maybe in a pub or somewhere and getting them to tell me what the problems were and how far we could help to... work out with them how far we could make some progress. And to demand to be met by employers who first refused. In some cases I would call in the local Ministry of Labour official. At this time there were Labour officers being established by the government who would keep an eye on conditions in the factory and to use their services. I remember on one occasion in the Coventry Gauge and Tool Factory, the owner and managing director was a man named Harley. I had organised a very important department called the Standards department. These would have to be secretive because they were engaged in the process of examination of very important tools in the manufacture of weapons and I demanded to negotiate on their conditions. Harley sent for me and said 'You are in possession of secret information. I am going to arrest you.' So I said 'I am trying to negotiate for my members.' But you have got information that is dangerous - you shouldn't have it.' and so on, this sort of argument. He said 'I'll send for the police' and I said 'Don't do that. You send for the National Service officer because he is responsible. If you read that document - Protected Establishments - on the bottom it talks about the National Service officer. He said 'All right, I will bloody well send for him.' And he looked and turned to somebody and said 'Who is he?' and I said 'I can tell you who he is. He is the manager of the local Labour exchange, Mr Richards.' 'Alright we'll, send for him then.' Well, he came up and I was in clover wasn't I? He said immediately that I was in my rights and we began to negotiate. But that sort of atmosphere was prevalent.

Often from the employers?

Oh absolutely and because many were trying to get the message across weren't exactly assisted by management at any stage. Apart from me from the outside, those inside were even at greater danger. But we managed to get moving and I cracked a number of successful cases, in some cases men were dismissed or suspended. One aspect of these new regulations of Bevin, was that you had the right to appeal, and if a man was dismissed you could appeal to the local Court of Appeal but it was really the Court of Referees of the old days. A local solicitor would be in the Chair and a trade union representative and an employer's representative. But you could appeal to that and they could actually make a decision to reinstate. Not like today, you can't get reinstatement now. You may get some compensation. But then you could actually get your job back. Don't forget we were at war. And so I got a number of cases where men were reinstated who had been dismissed. where they had been suspended to get their suspension lifted and although they had had days off from work from the suspension, to get payment for the days they had been suspended. So the employer wasn't very happy to have to pay for something that he had determined upon to discipline. Some awkward people. I don't say we won every case but mainly we did win because the employer was trying to ride roughshod over the workers, typical of the pre-war years and he wanted to continue that into the war situation. In the war period, he wanted still to try and discipline masters against man, the right to govern. After all, the engineering employers had fought and involved the lock-out in 1922 to enforce that principle. They were determined that they were going to keep it during the war years. One way or another we had to overcome it in order to build trade unionism. We began to talk about joint production committees. The idea that workers should have a say with management in looking at problems of production, if there was misuse of labour for example. If there was misuse of material, and there was a lot of it. Employers were keeping material on the side against the end of the war. They wanted to be sure that they would be in production again on civilian equipment. And some of them were still building parts of buses and the war was on, and that sort of thing.

For their own private profit?

Of course, for their own private profit. Plus the fact, of course, whatever they were doing was on a costs plus basis. So they were making plenty of money. The top manufacturers were making money that everything they produced, the costs of that plus their costs was paid for by, or their profit, was paid for by the government. So they were in clover in that respect.

At the same time you were then building up foundations of a very strong shop stewards movement which was post war was perceived, I mean you were one of the great pioneers in establishing that during that war period in Coventry.

I had an implicit belief in the idea of shop stewards. I had been one myself so I knew the importance of it and to try to give men and women, women in this case particularly, confidence to stand up and speak on behalf of their fellow workers. But to really get going one had to get the employers, the management accepting the idea, that at least people had a right to speak for themselves. And eventually of course they were more inclined to talk to the shop steward than they would be to me. They didn't want me to go in there too often. By this time I had got the right to approach management. I had got a pass issued by the TUC specially for trade union officials in my position so that I could prove who I was and gain entry and that helped a great deal. Didn't give me the right to negotiate, but it certainly enabled me to make access and that plus the general feeling that the government wanted peace in industry assisted very greatly in making some progress. But we did have the occasional strike, we did have occasional problems and this meant that we had to use the machinery of negotiation that was often long drawn out in the engineering industry. You know you had to seek a conference, if you failed to agree there you could go to a local conference in the district. If you failed to agree there you could go to a central conference at York, but all that took months. And the people who were being unduly disciplined or there was a very bad wage situation and the piece work rates were inadequate, there was a sense of chafing at the lead. And in some cases there were strikes, short strikes, and I would step in there and try and get a settlement quickly. All of which helped to sustain and develop a feeling that trade unions counted, that work people's voices counted and I stressed, and it was accepted, the need for more collective understanding. It wasn't easy to have branch meetings but there were occasions when I would ask for meetings in the canteen during the meal hour and some cases with some time allowed from work time in order that we could get an understanding on the part of the shop floor that this was a war, we wanted to make progress, but on the other hand there were things wrong and they must be put right too.

Did you meet Ernest Bevin at that time?

Yes, Bevin came down, I think it was around about 1940 to visit the factories. He came round then and later, he was... he moved around as Minister for Labour quite a bit. I remember at the time they had stopped manufacturing normal cars. They were just a few very small cars, relatively small cars being produced and I remember he came down once and couldn't get into one very easily because he was a big fat man you know. He had more dinners than dinner time, I think. By and large he was very supportive, and of course he supported the idea that I had advocated that men who were in highly skilled jobs on time work should have the equivalent wages who were on production piece workers, so that there wasn't this disparity. You had the difficulty of some men coming off highly skilled time work and going on to piece work where they would exercise similar skills but got a lot more money, and that led eventually to jobs of highly skilled inspectors and tool makers. Later the AEU stepped in on that and got a district agreement and a national agreement which provided for that principle. It was a very important principle because people other wise were

denuding areas of absolute responsibility in order to make more money on the piece work basis. I understood that very well. And I was still negotiating good piece work rates.

You stayed in Coventry throughout the war, till the end of the war?

Yes, right through then and afterwards.

When did you leave Coventry?

I didn't leave Coventry until 1955 and became the engineering group secretary and operated from the Midlands, from Birmingham. But I covered a big area of the Midlands. Of course, prior to that I was the engineering officer and the district Secretary of the Confederation of the Engineering Unions.

So you were also in Coventry as the first, um 45-1951, the Attlee Government, the post war Labour government when they were transforming the whole scene. The first Labour government in power. What was it like, a full-time trade union officer in Coventry, post-war in that period. Was it exciting?

Very exciting, first of all in the run-up to the election because the Beveridge scheme had been announced. Most of us wanted to see that idea put into action. The idea of national scheme, improved pensions, things of that kind that were implicit in Beveridge that they should be put into law. We wanted to see a Labour government do away with the Trade Disputes Act, any restrictions on trade unions to encourage trade unionism and to tackle the big problems of what would be post-war reconstruction. The problem of employment. What would happen to jobs after the war, that sort of thing. So, one was certainly very interested,. I was, and tried to encourage my mates around me. By this time I was the Chairman of the Coventry Labour party and as we approached that election, the 1945 election, of course we had Crossman who was already adopted as a candidate for one part of Coventry. Edelmann was putting up a new seat, and I was the Chairman of that, and he was selected, Edelmann was the Labour candidate. There was others in the field, but he was the handsomest one, and got the support of the women amongst others and became the Labour candidate and was elected. Tremendous. We had two Labour MPs where there had been a Conservative MP before. And that was typical of the country. And so enthusiastic were the factories that, on the day of the election, we managed to have marches from some of the factories down to the polling booth. And I led one from the Standard Motor Works down to the centre and some of them were dropping off on the way in places where they lived, with roughly made banners which I helped to paint by the way, marching down, VOTE LABOUR, and gaining a lot of recruits and supporters on the way.

Was there a big increase in trade union membership after 1945?

Well if we call it fully strong after the war, then yes, definitely. That had grown during the war years undoubtedly. In Coventry especially.

There were already tensions building up, even with the Labour Government.

Because the war, that period, the last six months or so they felt the war was finished anyway, and employers were beginning to plan for post-war situation. They were looking at all models they had had hidden away and bringing them out. That situation was already apparent and it began to be tougher to negotiate piece work prices and that sort of thing. Employers were beginning to draw in, because up to then they had been getting costs plus, and they knew that that would be coming to an end and they wanted to make sure that they

were going to remain in control. On the other hand, we wanted to make sure that the agreements were being reached that would be carried over into the peace-time conditions that recognised progress had been made by workers during the war years. And would be enjoyed by workers coming back from the forces. And of course there was reinstatement of legislation and that was beginning almost immediately and we wanted to make sure that the lads when they came back were reinstated into jobs that the conditions were right, and that women and others who were displaced in consequence, that they would have some measures of compensation.

There was of course at that time, and we are now talking about 1945 - 51, the beginning of waves of industrial disputes which of course later became a major area of controversy. The miners, the car factories, had a reputation, rightly or wrongly of being the centre of a lot of unofficial industrial action.

A little later, I think, there were occasional unofficial industrial actions towards the end of the war. But after the war, the big problem was trying to negotiate post-war conditions and making sure that full employment was maintained. And here we looked to the government to help in that respect. The government was saying yes, they would do all that was possible, in terms of trying to ensure reasonable employment possibilities, but they laid down conditions of rationing of material. Don't forget that rationing in other ways was being continued long after. As was the war-time legislation. The arbitration arrangements. Which helped alot. We'd still take cases to arbitration. Still had conditions of employment that had been negotiated recognised as being as part of the law. And that continued in to the immediate post war period. But employers generally began to want to change war-time collective agreements in to peace time collective agreements and go back to peace time arrangements. For example, during the war years, our arrangements about piece work was for 100 per cent, the basis for negotiating a piece work price would be 100 per cent above the basic wage. Now that sounds a bit peculiar to you but it meant a good base for negotiating piece work. The employer, many of them wanted to go back to the stage where a very small percentage, 27.5 per cent above the base rate was to be the criteria for piece work.

To keep wages down?

Exactly so. So when you were negotiating piece work on motor cars and civilian aircraft that sort of thing, then you would be in a much more disadvantaged situation than you were during the war years. We were able to get one or two collective agreements that held to the war time conditions, the Standard Motor Company in particular. I was able to negotiate an early stage of five day week of forty two and a half hours which was a revolution in the industry, in the Standard Motor company, which was a non federated firm. And that idea spread so eventually we got a five day week of forty four hours. But the idea of a five day week itself was an a situation that caused amazement because everyone was saying, the employers were saying, the men don't know what to do on a Saturday morning. That was before DIY and the rest, but they soon learned that people found what to do on a Saturday morning without going to work so long as the wages were right. But in that period we did have a number of strikes because employers wanted to go back to pre-war conditions. And in some cases wanted the right to dismiss. You know, redundancies were introduced, no redundancy pay by the way. Large numbers were dismissed as being no work for them.

If I remember rightly, that brought you into conflict with Arthur Deakin who was then to become General Secretary of the Transport Union. Bevin was...

Well , he was acting general secretary during the war years.

Bevin was Foreign Secretary in the Labour government. Deakin was in charge of Unions. You had problems then with Arthur Deakin, and perhaps with other TUC figures too.

Generally speaking not with TUC figures, although where two unions were involved there were problems. I had occasional difficulties with even Jack Tanner who was a militant in his time, but became relatively reactionary as President of the AEU and joined forces occasionally with Arthur Deakin, when I and others were out of step in Coventry. You are quite right, but Arthur was insistent that any time we had any disputes, his instructions were get the men back to work. Which didn't seem to me to make much sense, until we had got some agreement. And I was frequently threatened with all sorts of discipline if I didn't do it. They sent down people like Harry Nicholas to put me in order. I usually used to smarm him off and persuade him it was sensible to listen to the men. I suppose he did any case, because we managed to get some very good agreements.

Am I right in assuming that had you not been so rebellious, you might have become General Secretary at an earlier stage?

I don't know about that. I do know that when it came to the appointment of an Assistant General Secretary I was persuaded to apply. I was then the Coventry district secretary and to my surprise, I was put on the shortlist. I was very well known at the time. My membership record was very good, building up, strengthening the Union, and I think I made a good contribution to the war effort despite the fact a major consideration was getting good conditions and so on. Anyway, I landed up there, and I was one out of two on a shortlist. Jock Tiffin was the other one. That was in 1948. It was a surprise because I was quite a young man then. Probably 35, something in that order. But I felt, at least I knew what was being talked about. They were talking about restoring peace time conditions. Of course I was involved in mass industry. It wasn't just a narrow industry. However I was told that I would be called before the General Executive Council with Mr Tiffin, who I met for the first time at the examination. He always seemed a decent lad to me, much older than me, but a nice, decent fellow, and I was brought into the executive council, thought I was going to address the council and then was told - the full council that is of 32 men - and I was told Brother Jones, we have appointed Brother Tiffin to the Assistant General Secretary's position, but we want to thank you for your attendance this morning.' Well, I felt like having an outburst saying what the bloody hell did I come for?', but I thought, well I have got to work with this fellow Tiffin, so I said well, thank you, and I wish to congratulate brother Tiffin on his selection. I will assure him that I will work with him and do my utmost best to cooperate in any undertakings he's taking part in and develop the union...' something like that. I wasn't disappointed, but I was surprised, that's all. On the other hand, I didn't think that Deakin had any friendship at all to me - he didn't. He was a very reactionary, very bigoted man.

And I am saying this, because I got to know you at that time, but it seemed to me that Deakin was determined because you had already established a very powerful reputation as a district official in Coventry, and you were building up the union in that area [PAUSE] It was my perception that Arthur Deakin was determined not to have you promoted to where you ought to have been at national level even then.

I am absolutely sure of that. In fact I am sure that Arthur Deakin was surprised that I was remaining an official. Surprised that I was ever appointed an official.

Nonetheless, a great change took place in the Union in the mid 50s.

Yes I think that the beginning of the change was to have a man like Tiffin there, who at least was an honest sort of fellow, who wasn't so violently disposed against what I would regard as progressive rank and file trade unionism.

And Tiffin of course succeeded Deakin briefly, in 1955.

I think he was sick at the time.

He was a sick man, largely for about six months. And then of course, Frank Cousins became General Secretary. And then the whole scene began to change.

Undoubtedly. The appointment of Frank was a very definite mark of progress in the Union. I didn't know Frank very well. He was not well known throughout the union, probably in the haulage section. But I had heard that he was at least a man who had stood up against Deakin on one or two things and I thought this was progress. I had talks with him at the time of the examination and I was satisfied that out of all of those applying, he was closer, we were both closer to each other's point of view, which was to make a strong union in the interest of its members. And Frank proceeded to work in that direction and I was very supportive of him, yes.

A tremendous change took place with you and Frank, and then you came to London, between you politically and industrially, it seemed to observers like myself, that you moved the union forward in a way that had not happened since, well, the early Bevin days.

Undoubtedly, Bevin had had a tremendous influence on the early development of the union. And was a very able leader. Perhaps not over-confident in himself, but he was a very able leader. Perhaps he didn't take the same point of view of having confidence in the rank and file that I did, but then he grew up in a different period. Frank on the other hand had very similar views, so we set about trying to create a union which reflected the membership point of view. That was the view that I had held from the beginning, that the union must work for its members, it should be a members' union or it was nothing, and I still take that view. A trade union that is not centred on the participation of its membership and the defence of its membership and the total involvement of its members as their property and so on, it is not worth the candle. There is a danger of unions being used by employers as employment agencies, and that is what developed for a period, not because of Bevin, but under Bevin, that's what I found when I was a young man, that unions were being used almost as disciplinary agents for employers and I wanted to change that and I thought a great deal of stress ought to be placed upon the ability of members to come together to elect shop stewards that that would be the foundation of negotiating in the factories, that there should be more local negotiation upon local conditions, and at the very top, that negotiations should never be separate and apart from the membership. It should be ordinary people there in any negotiation, and ultimately the decision as to whether the agreements were satisfactory, and should be put to the membership. Explain to them in detail, preferably verbally and then, yes if necessary by ballot voting. And some of the experiences of things that I did in Coventry were on that principle.

You have always regarded the trade union movement, it seems to me anyway, as the most powerful voluntary force for democracy and broadening popular awareness in society. A liberating force for working people, that is how I see your role and leadership in the trade union movement.

Well, it is still my view. And when you asked me if I was a socialist that's my view of

socialism in a sense. A society in which ordinary people participate in the running of society in which we are all together. I often recall that slogan of the Cooperative Movement: Each for All and All for Each, and I think society should be based on that, and trade unions. And in the Transport and General Workers Union, I preached that throughout my period as General Secretary. The union was a family, of which we were all equal, and should all participate. And decisions shouldn't be taken behind the back of people. It should be open and above board.

I am leaping ahead a bit, through the 50s, you and Frank Cousins changing the whole nature of the union. Coming up now through that period of Tory rule, thirteen years. 1964, Wilson government. Frank Cousins joins that government. Harry Nicholas is acting general secretary and you are chief lieutenant. Some people would regard it that you were filling the position, potentially anyway, of leader of the union. Tell me about 1964. You were critical, I know, of Frank Cousins going into the government, and certainly you were critical of the wages policy later adopted by Harold Wilson and George Brown in that period. There were terrible tensions there even though this was a re-election of a Labour government. There were tensions between the trade unions and the Labour party and the Labour Government, even then.

Oh yes, well there were doubts about the leadership of the Labour party, particularly certain leaders. There was never any doubt in the minds of a number of us that people like Roy Jenkins and George Brown, although he had been an official of the Transport and General Workers' Union, his views were quite distinctly different and the outlook of trade unionism as we saw it. When I say we, I mean Frank Cousins and I, and others around us. And I was very much involved in the leadership of the industrial side of the union from the time we went to London. Frank accepted that. So that I knew how workers in industry were feeling. And they wanted better, not worse. They didn't want to see restricted pay policies, and restrictions on the unions and so on. They wanted to have encouragement. So, that is how I saw it at the beginning of the 1964 Labour government and if you recall I was elected to the Labour party executive at that time. And I found that the attitude of the executive was to my point of view, highly dangerous, because it was so pro-the establishment. I was in effect to overlook the old vote with the leadership. The trade union representatives from the national executive from the Labour party would stand together. There were twelve of us, and we all vote the same way. I said, 'Well, I'm sorry, I'll vote on what the evidence is, vote on what the discussion reveals.' And that is how it proceeded, and I got one or two - Danny McGarvey I think and people like that, who joined forces with me and at least were prepared to be critical if necessary. Of course on the government side, and by this time it was government, you had people like Barbara (Castle?) and Tony Benn and others and although sometimes they entered a different view than Harold Wilson and George Brown, ultimately they would vote with their leader. They were expected to do that. And they were told that it was expected that if the Prime Minister was there, members of the Cabinet certainly, and government ministers would not vote against the leader of the party.

When Frank Cousins resigned in 1966 and came back to the union, you and he in that partnership, a very special partnership, were in much conflict with the Wilson government over wages policy, incomes policy, and the Transport and General Workers' Union, the most powerful union in the country then, I think, already with two million members, were regarded as a thorn in the flesh of the Wilson government, weren't they?

Well, in parts. I mean we were participating. After all, Barbara Castle was Minister of Transport, in the early stages, and I was negotiating on issues of workers', what I regarded as industrial democracy in industry, and I wanted to see that in transport. Of course, I wanted

to see the docks nationalised for one thing. That didn't come immediately. It wasn't attempted immediately. What was attempted was an extended municipalisation of the passenger transport industry - buses - and area regional authorities were set up, and I was involved in negotiating with Barbara Castle then on the idea of worker representation. Well I was told that yes - a bus worker on the board of the Liverpool, for example, passenger transport authority, but he musn't be from Liverpool. And vice-versa, in the case of Manchester, or where-have-you. And so I said 'what sort of industrial democracy is that?' We would like to see a man like Len Fordham, who was then the Chairman of the Executive, but a busman in Manchester, we would like to see him using his Manchester experience on the board covering the Manchester area. And they said 'Oh no we are prepared to put him onto the Liverpool board.' And that sort of view prevailed. And when it came to the steel industry, the same idea. A man from heavy steel would be put on the lighter steel side on the galvanising, but not on the heavy steel side. And I said, 'but that is not industrial democracy. You want men who come from the industry, who have got actual working experience who will bring their knowledge of that side of the industry to the management and the development of policy for that section of industry'. And I was called an anarcho - syndicalist. Incidentally, I was pleased to be so called because I have never been very far from that myself, but I don't know whether Barbara understood what it meant, but she said I was an anarcho -syndicalist, and therefore my views should be discounted. However, she didn't take them altogether badly because I was then appointed the Deputy Chairman of the National Ports Council, and I hope helped to prepare for the attempt at the nationalisation of the docks, but we didn't succeed ultimately, although we tried very hard.

But you were running into all kinds of trouble with Barbara Castle by 1968 and certainly 1969 on her introduction of something called 'In Place of Strife', a White Paper which intended of course, not only to curb unofficial strikes, but to impose penalties on rank and file trade unionists. You were wholly opposed to that. You had a great battle with Barbara over 'In Place of Strife'.

Well, I and others. Hugh Scanlon took a similar view, that is quite right. And Frank had taken a similar view too. And others. Yes, the issue was really whether you could penalise collectively working men and women for taking industrial action even if it was unofficial industrial action and after all I had been a workman myself, I still felt a workman, I identified with working people, lived among them all my life and still do incidentally. And I put this view to Barbara but she couldn't see that. She thought it was essential to have legislation. But that legislation would stop what they called unofficial strikes. And unofficial strikes, as I pointed out, and others pointed out, Hugh especially, that that could mean thousands of people, and if you try to penalise thousands of people, you were bound to get a reaction. And you wouldn't achieve your objective of getting a peaceful development in industry. But this, unfortunately, Barbara couldn't understand. Much of her document was quite good. The 'In Place of Strife' wasn't all bad. A lot of it was drawn from documents, some of it from the Working Party on Industrial Democracy set up by the Labour Party on which you and I were members - I was the chairman I think. A lot of the points that were put in that document were repeated 'In Place of Strife'. So we weren't attacking all aspects of their proposed legislation, but the idea that you could penalise large numbers of people was totally unrealistic and wrong and bad and couldn't surely be introduced by a Labour government. Her idea was that there would be fines, but there would be no question of people being sent to prison, but their goods could be restrained. So I said 'so, you would send bailiffs in and put people on the streets,' and that situation, in my view, meant that we could not reach agreement on 'In Place of Strife'. Whatever government, but certainly not a Labour Government. People say 'oh well, it would have been better if they had accepted it, we wouldn't have had Thatcherism,' but frankly it would have been the mark of evil to have accepted that from a Labour government and I was opposed to it totally. And remain so. I don't think we did wrong, I think we did right.

[PAUSE]

You and Hugh Scanlon at that time were called the terrible twins because together you fought Barbara Castle, forced her and the Wilson government to retreat. Looking back on that period, as you have already said, you have no regrets, but that was a tremendous fight which probably led to the defeat in the 1970s of the Wilson government. Would you agree that that had an influence on that election defeat of Wilson?

No. No I think the defeat for the Wilson government in 1970 was due to the very tight budgetary policy being imposed by Roy Jenkins as Chancellor of the Exchequer. I don't think there is much doubt of that. I don't think the question of 'In Place of Strife' came in to it. After all, there was no great popular opinion about a piece of legislation that had no direct bearing. It wasn't a terribly strife-torn period. There were unofficial strikes here and there, but in the main, the bulk of people remained at work, and unions were still fairly popular with working people. So I don't accept that. But I do feel that we lost the election because of the rather tight policies of the Chancellor and that of course reflected itself in not having adequate provision for public services and that sort of thing. There can be differences of view. But let me just say this though. When the 'In Place of Strife' was defeated, it was withdrawn, it wasn't a total defeat, because we had given certain assurances on behalf of the TUC general council. And I explained very carefully, and so did my colleagues that if we ensured that in the event of a dispute involving one section of work against another, where this often caused trouble. A small number of men going on strike created problems for others who had to lost the work for that period we explained the TUC should have power to go right in, deal immediately with that situation. And a lot of strikes were being related to those sorts of problems. So we gave those understandings and it is a fact that a number of strikes were averted by virtue of the new powers given to the general council of the TUC. An extension of what was called Bridlington. It meant that unions would have to take a decision from the TUC, they couldn't just please themselves where there was a dispute between one trade and another.

That was known as the Solemn and Binding Agreement, the famous agreement.

I know, people like Dennis Healey who would never work in his life in terms of industry, and could joke about that. It was a Solemn and binding undertaking made by us and carried out by the general council of the TUC. And I don't think that there is any instance where we failed to make the necessary move. At least the TUC general council didn't.

And of course at that time the trade union membership - the Transport and General Workers' Union in particular, had risen to record levels.

That is correct. We had reached a level where the TUC had about 12 million members. More than 12 million members. And the Transport and General Workers' Union rose to 2.1 million by 1977. But in the meantime, we had, after Labour was defeated in 1970, we had the Heath government, where you did have a number of strikes, where the government was trying to impose legislation if you remember. And we had problems of dock workers, railway workers and others who were revolting, opposing legislation, the Industrial Relations Act of the Conservative Government which was in effect applying somewhat similar restrictions as the 'In Place of Strife' might have done. Worse in some respects.

I was wanting to come on to that period of the Heath government - 1970-1974. First of all for the first two years of course they tried to introduce an Industrial Relations Act which in the end failed completely. Opposed by you and Hugh Scanlon particularly.

But it remained in law. They didn't withdraw it. But it became ineffective towards the end. It remained in law until they were chucked out in 1974.

But around the 1972 period, you began, you and other TUC leaders, began to negotiate a different kind of relationship with the Heath government. And I think in your book you talk about a close relationship that developed between you and Ted Heath.

I wouldn't say close relationship. What I say is that Heath made very strong efforts to bring the TUC into a reasonable understanding between him and the CBI. He was very patient, listened to our views, encouraged us to state our views, met us on a number of things. I though he made considerable efforts to get agreement. I was all for having strict controls over price movements. Controls of price increases, which incidentally was the policy of the Labour party and became the policy even after that of the Labour party to have a strict control over the movement of potential prices. I wanted that as a condition before we started to talk about incomes policy, or anything in that direction. I wanted to see an easing of a lot of the Labour legislation. And he was listening very closely to that, and even to the extent that at one stage of virtually saying to the CBI 'well you stay out of it, I'll deal directly with the trade union' So he was sympathetic, yes. But there was a sticking point. The sticking point was undoubtedly the Industrial Relations Act, which was hampering the trade unions. The Transport and General Workers' Union had been fined £55,000, we were threatened with possibly all of our funds being seized at one stage, and that in itself restricted our operation on behalf of the membership, and we thought that was wrong. So we wanted that withdrawn. He clearly was not, although the Act was going out of operation in effect, employers were not using it so much, he wouldn't take responsibility to withdraw it, and said anyway 'I am not negotiating.' That was his line ultimately. In all other respects, he made a strong effort. In the process I got the Christmas bonus for old pensioners out of it. That was one little thing

Which remains...

Which remains, but it still remains at £10. It was £10 then in 1972. He was very adamant in wanting to get some incomes policy and he moved a long way in that direction to have a policy which had an element of restricting prices, which would have given recognition of the movement of the cost of living in terms of wages and allowed some measure of negotiation above that. A long way. Not all the way, but a long way, and he really worked hard at that. I had some sympathy for his efforts. I knew it would not be easy to persuade members to accept that, but had he come the final step of withdrawing the Industrial Relations Act, I think that Heath could have easily won the next election and we would have probably had a reasonable relationship, because he had become very sympathetic, at least appeared to be very sympathetic to the trade union movement compared to his very hard line at the beginning of the Conservative government in 1970, when he was Selsdon man on behalf of his fellow Conservatives who weren't prepared to take the trade unions on very much.

Are you saying that if, if that had succeeded, Heath had won the next election, we may not have had Thatcherism?

I think that is probably true, but then it really is a waste of time to say it might have been, you know that we could engage in a lot of discussion about what might have been in many things including that one. But I am saying that he was very sympathetic to the trade unionism at the end of his reign as Prime Minister than any of the Conservatives in recent times anyway. After all, people like Macmillan, perhaps he was alike, Macmillan wasn't antagonistic to the trade union movement.

After all he was a minister under Macmillan and there were other along with Macmillan, who were not quite so sharply anti union as Thatcher proved to be. And that was going back to a period that we have not talked about, but 1956, when the British Motor Corporation then developing, Morris and Austin, sacked 6,000 people overnight, with no redundancy pay without notice. 6,000 people overnight. Men , women in Coventry, Birmingham and Oxford. And that typified the nature of management at the time. And all I am saying is that some members of the Conservative government, Macmillan in particular and others, were very critical of the management involved. And so was I. So I called a strike. I had no authority to, but we had a strike for a fortnight and it changed the mind. It didn't win totally what we wanted, but it changed the whole thinking about laying off people without compensation, without adequate notice and so on.

Let me move you Jack to the election of 1974. The first one which returned a Wilson government. You were very strongly entrenched as General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union. indeed in 1975, I think it was, a national Gallup poll returned something like 52 per cent of people in the country regarded you as the most powerful figure in the country, even more so than Prime Minister Harold Wilson. So you were a pretty important figure then and you were working on something that later became known as the Social Contract. And you and the Wilson government, you in particular, devised this after the 74 election, the Social Contract. Looking back on that period, how did it happen and why did it fail? If it did fail. Perhaps it didn't fail?

The Social Contract wasn't born in 1974, it was born from about 1972 onwards in what was called the Liaison Committee on the TUC and the Labour Party. I was very anxious that both should work together on industrial matters and other matters, and we established a joint committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party leadership, the executive of the Labour party and the TUC, and we worked very hard at trying to find solutions, including what a Labour government should try to do. And what we worked out was the basis of what we later called the Social Compact. I think later somebody called it a Contract. Well it was in the sense that we were parties to it and we said that not only was it a question for us trying to understand each other about wages, but above all, on a whole range of things - changing the law more in favour of the trade unions, for example what became known as the Employment Protection Act. The Employment Protection Act, I call it, to some extent the shop stewards charter. It was introduced by Michael Foot, a very good friend of mine and one I have very proud to have known because he was a very decent and honest man, then and now. But at least by becoming Minister of Labour, he carried through the spirit of that what I call the Social Compact, in terms of the delivery to the trade unions and working people the right to have information, the right for trade unions to function. Things of that kind written into the law, along with it, conditions about arbitration which laid down that workers could take their employer to arbitration. If there was a going rate in that locality, then that going rate should apply. And ultimately, ACAS became part of that approach, to have some form of arbitration which allowed workers to conciliate and have arbitration on the views without the need to strike if it was possible. All these were things we dreamed of in the past, that Labour was able to move into in the early 70s, and it was part of the Social Compact, yes.

You regard that as a very positive period, working in that stage of the Wilson government, and later with the Callaghan government, when Jim Callaghan took over...

Yes, yes, and we tried very hard, the trade union movement initially, when the Labour government came in. They came to us, Dennis Healey and others, about the problems of wage inflation which they had inherited from the Heath government. because at the end of the Heath government things went up in the air. Houses were selling at very high prices, then

they dropped, there was a very inflationary situation. Wage applications were reaching 25 per cent and that sort of thing, and we would appeal to and took the view that we should try to take account of the cost of living in putting your wage claims forward. That didn't succeed in allaying the degree of inflation at the beginning of the Labour government 74, and then I put forward the idea of a flat rate across the board. One that I had operated in industrial negotiations. Flat rate across the board and the idea was - it was £6 eventually - and it worked. That and the subsequent arrangement brought inflation down and wage claims down from about 21/22 per cent to about 8 per cent. So it wasn't something that we were not cooperating. We proved that we could do things with the goodwill of the working class. Goodwill of the membership of the trade union. But of course, when the IMF was brought in, when things of that kind happened, public services began to be cut, the cooperation that we had offered and had been carried through could not be sustained any longer.

By the time of course that Thatcher came into office, you had retired. You retired in 1978. Looking back now, you were the architect of so much. Most of us regard you as the architect of the Social Contract or Social Compact. Certainly the Health and Safety legislation, ACAS, you were seen as one of the great trade union leaders of the century, and you still are. Looking back over that tremendous career and creative career of yours, what do... it may be silly to ask you to single out one or two things as the highlights, the changes that have taken place in that period, and maybe some of your disappointments.

Well, disappointments. The Health and Safety Act which was conceived on humane terms because of the problems of accidents happening to workmen and women, industrial diseases, the power of the Health and Safety Act is not as strong as it should be. It was weakened, so that even people suffering from asbestosis, although now it is an industrial disease, recognised as such, there is still a lot of pain, many deaths, untimely deaths involved. Inadequate compensation, and often delays on the part of employers in trying to arrest the problem or help workers in making a claim. That is just one aspect. In so many ways, I always regarded health and safety regulations, the operation of health and safety shop stewards who must be members of recognised trade unions. Something I was committed to from the very beginning. We must have... trade unions mean independence and to have somebody on the ground who could study an industrial process and if it was unsafe step in and report it. Indeed I argued for it to be stopped on the say so of the health shop steward, but they wouldn't agree that. But at least, to do something about it quickly, all that was good and human. It has been weakened, not entirely eliminated, but weakened because of the weakening of the trade union movement. which is part of the Thatcherism situation. So that I was proud of, my participation on that, proud of my participation in trying to get the development of a closer conciliation and arbitration machinery, particularly local arbitration, local conciliation, to try to ensure that ordinary men and women would find it easy to have little problems resolved where there was difficulties, that the trade unions would be assisted in functioning. Again, that still exists, but it is a long way from the original conception of an arbitration and conciliation service. I would like to see it restored to where it was in the beginning and even improved upon considerably beyond that. And of course the trade union movement. I believe implicitly in the idea that ordinary working people have rights. Ordinary working people to have information about the circumstances in which they work, and the right to raise issues, the right to refuse to operate under bad working conditions, or inadequate wages, which means the right to strike if need be. And legislation which would favour work people rather than other wise, rather than restrict them. I don't think that view is shared today, even by a Labour government, as much as I would like it to be. Partly because so many people rule our society who don't have the experience of having lived in ordinary circumstances of work people, in bad housing situations, or difficult and bad working conditions. And often in many cases these politicians have not worked for their living in the

sense of having to grasp in manual terms a livelihood.

One final point: you were the most powerful figure in the trade union movement at its peak in this century. What advice would you offer to young trade union officials now to rebuild and develop the trade union movement in the next century? A very different period.

It is a very different period and it would mean to some extent reconstructing the trade union movement. I have a feeling the TUC can still play an enormous part if it recognised that job of unifying the trade unions and unifying work people, making sure that where we don't have any trade union centres and localities, we aim to create them. Because somehow or other, workers don't know where to turn to get advice and assistance from the trade union movement. The trade unions themselves being much weaker than they were have closed offices, have reduced the number of representatives in so many cases, and one way and another, must begin to fight back, to reorganise. It does mean certainly helping people to help their fellow workers still, and that won't be done by pure academics of organising young people who have never worked for a living. By all means they can assist in passing the message around, but you need to give strength and confidence to ordinary men and women at work themselves. And particularly workers from the ethnic communities who are often the worst exploited and women certainly, particularly from the ethnic communities. They must be assisted to have confidence. And all the legislation on the world won't give them confidence unless you have contact in getting together. So we have got to find ways and means of giving greater opportunities for people to come together, and that goes for old people too. To assert the rights to speak up. To assert the right to disagree with authority, and to get their point of view across. To do it without victimisation.

And do our future leaders perhaps need a bit more idealism, the kind of idealism that you had throughout your life time?

Yes, I think they do, and I... well I still have. I think that leaders must have that view if they are going to make any progress in the world of globalisation and new technological developments. But we haven't talked about that. But that is the big challenge - how you overcome these things and maintain the human factor. Instead of having extended hours of work, we should have reduced hours of work, we should have better conditions of employment. After all, Bertrand Russell talked many years ago of a four hour day, and a few days a week, three or four days a week as being possible and desirable. And I still think it is possible and desirable, and technically, very much more possible now than when it was when Bertrand Russell talked about it in 1932. So there is lots to be done, lots more confidence to be built. And the idea of the dominance of capital encouraged by government is wrong and we have somehow got to begin to restrict the uncontrolled operation of capital. The globalisation that is taking place must be challenged internationally, as well as on the ground, but at the point of production, at the point of living, where we live and where we work, that is where we have to rebuild, make the start. Rebuild there and then. The superstructure can be developed from there internationally.

Mr Jones, thank you very much.

[SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED]