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School of Manchester University of Nottingham reasonable to say you might just have easily have gone into business as into the TUC?

Well I did go in to business. My first job was as a management trainee and as a junior manager with Plessey Radar, the big Electronics Company of the day. I was the youngest of 25 first cousins, all of whom worked in the public sector - they were all teachers, librarians, one was a district park superintendent. I was rather taken with this Harold Wilson stuff about export or die, white hot heat of technology, and I thought I'll be the one that goes into export for the good of the country and I went to work for Plessey's after I left university. I worked there for two years before I came to the TUC.

What was your way into the TUC?

Two things. One was Plessey. I was responsible for overseeing a radar contract for the Australian airforce. It was two weeks late. I went to see the production manager and said we are going to be two weeks late and that there is a penalty clause of £25,000 per week on it. So I said we'll have to sue the supplier who was also two weeks late. He said: "No they'll never pay up. You'll spend more on legal fees than you'll ever get from them." So he said leave it with me. That was on a Friday night. I came in on the Monday morning; there was a picket line. So I said to the sheet metal workers steward: "What's happened?" and he said, "they've sacked Charlie the convenor." Then I realised that you could get out of a penalty clause because of an act of God, which is still the case. Or in those days a labour dispute. It invoked this particular provision to get out of paying the penalty clause. I went into see him and he said the strike was going to last two weeks. "After a week, I'll get the employers association in, they'll get the union in and we'll do a deal and I'll still get rid of that bastard Charlie, the convenor. We'll pay him off at the end of two weeks." I said to him "I don't want to work for an organisation that does that." So that was the motive for moving out of management. The motive for coming here was - The fellow that was best man at my wedding got a job with the Labour Party with exactly the same degree as I had and a similar sort of background. I'd never remotely thought that I was qualified to aspire for a union, or the TUC or the Labour Party. Then I thought if he can do it then I can do it. I applied for a job at the TUC; they were looking for somebody who knew something about productivity bargaining at about half the price that any body in industry that knew about product bargaining was getting. I was single, I applied and I got the job. I never did anything with productivity bargaining after that.

Who was General Secretary at the time?

Vic Feather was the one who employed me in 1969. It was just before the congress when he was made general secretary. George Woodcock had gone earlier in the year. So I was interviewed by Vic Feather, who was of course a great character.

So you clocked up 30 years at the TUC but going back to '69, what was the kind of TUC you found when you came in at the fag end of that Labour Government?

It was a real culture shock. Firstly it was far more rigorous than I'd been used to in the private sector. People worked a lot harder, they were a lot more conscientious, a lot more competitive. They were sharper and they didn't get much money but the desire to do things well was very strong. There was a credo of excellence around, rather than a sense of jogging along, which I had encountered over much of the private sector in those days. I think it's

changed a fair bit in the private sector but none the less that was the atmosphere then. So to establish myself in the TUC was a major challenge and I can remember my head of department saying you've got to do better or you'll be out after the probationary period, which was a year. It was as big an educational lesson as I've ever had in any other way and I was determined to do well at the TUC. And I had to up my pace and up my effort to be a success at the organisation. [The TUC was] very much shaped in the Woodcock mould of good intellectual content, rigorous supervision and a sense of intellectual honesty. I hope we've still got those qualities around the organisation today.

In that first year governments changed?

Great change, governments changed and my job changed. I mean after I'd been here about three or four weeks three people left and they were looking for someone who knew something about employment law. Well I knew a little bit, not much but I knew a little bit. I was shoved in to do employment law and after a few months that was the area that I began to specialise in. So the end of "In Place of Strife" was the time I came in but then almost immediately there was the 1970 general election and they were into the Industrial Relations Bill. I was the bag carrier and minute taker on a lot of that as I was through the next two decades on the shifts and turns in Trade Union law, which was of course essential. National Political issue for certainly at least two decades.

Did they colour your thinking about the place of law in industrial relations?

I took the traditional view in the TUC - and it wasn't just in the TUC, it was in a lot of other organisations as well - it was that you keep the law out of industrial relations. And you do things through collective bargaining and so I was happy with the Donovan report. I was influenced by the Woodcock message of self regulation rather than state regulation. We fervently believed that that was the way of doing things.

1970, that was the time of the Heath Government coming in with the Industrial Relations Act. I suppose the first really serious attempt to introduce legislation to curb the Trade Unions lasted two years, tremendous turmoil at that time. You were involved in that particular period. What was it like then?

Oh it was wonderful. It was heady stuff, the adrenaline was flowing. Once the Bill had been enacted and once the TUC had taken up a position of defiance of the new legislation, with a reasonable degree of confidence that we could get away with it without running foul of the law, we thought that we were winning. And we did. It was the Dockers in Pentonville - whether it was some of the action that was taken against the AEU at that time where we know now that some of the largest employers in the engineering industry paid the fines, and recompensed the union to make sure there was no further difficulty and trouble. We knew we were winning and the law in industrial relations at that time was discredited and of course the belief was then around that you couldn't shape industrial relations by legal change. So the view of Donovan, the view of Woodcock, the view of the Oxford School of Industrial Relations Experts was confirmed. Self regulation, collective bargaining was the only way you could run industrial relations. Times have changed since but it was a powerful brew and it was an extremely exciting time to be around the TUC.

You've mentioned that some employers came to the rescue, helping to pay huge fines. Things like the official solicitor emerged from the woodwork. Nobody had ever heard of the official solicitor. It has been said that on of the big employers, still anonymous, came up with I think a £50,000 fine for the engineering union was Lord Weinstock. Has that ever been established?

I've heard the same rumour as you but I've never seen it substantiated. He certainly never confirmed it to me when I've discussed it with him and so I'm afraid that still remains a mystery and a rumour.

Quite fascinating. If you look back now, before the Thatcher period. Employers were actually prepared to do that because they wanted to protect the relationship with the Trade Unions. That was still very much in the post war, from '45 right through to the period you're now describing. That was the ethos of the age wasn't it then?

Very much the ethos of the age. Heath was really going against that ethos when he legislated in the way that he did. He was taking on the prevailing intellectual climate and he was taking on the views of many employers as well as virtually all Trade Unions. In a sense it didn't work. Partly because of the oil crisis and very high inflation and a miner's strike of course in 1972 and 1974, which were nothing to do with Industrial Relations Act, but which show the power of organised labour and the need to come to agreements with organised labour. And of course that was up against the background of the shortage of the main alternative fuel of that time which was oil. So the things taken together discredited the idea of legal regulation of Trade Unions and things swept away in '74 without any significant opposition, the Conservatives didn't even oppose it in the House of Commons. It was buried, I don't know if you remember but the director general of the CBI, I think just before the '74 General Election, the first General Election, did say that the whole thing would really be fairly useless and could be scrapped. He got himself in a lot of trouble with the Heath Government of the day.

Heath himself changed about half way through, about 1972, he did a complete U-turn and started a dialogue with the Trade Unions, Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon and the TUC, which if you look back at that time was probably quite unique for a Conservative Prime Minister. In fact I think Jack Jones has said in his book that the negotiations that he had with Ted Heath were more impressive in his mind than any he had with a Labour Prime Minister. Were you involved in those negotiations?

No, not really because in a sense the action then shifted to the other side of the TUC house, which was economic policy and incomes. There are two major strands that run through the TUC and its history. One is what the TUC does about its own organisation and the related questions of industrial relations law. And the other is what it does about macroeconomics and incomes. These two things tend to be on top at different stages and once Edward Heath had executed his U-turn, he lost interest to be fair in the industrial relations legislation. He was much more concerned with trying to conquer inflation, which was induced by the Arab-Israeli war and the after-math of that - the quadrupling of the oil prices. And so the action shifted to the TUC economic department and the official there and the industrial relations side went rather quiet. Except for some major disputes, particularly the miners' dispute of 1974, so in a sense I was no longer quite so much at the centre of events after 1973 and the U-turn and I had been before.

Then came the collapse of the Heath Government in the 1974 election over the miners' strike when they defeated. Who runs the country? Who governs the country and Harold Wilson comes back and we immediately move into the social contract period. By 1975 we have the six pound policy etc with the TUC again very much in the centre of relations with the Government. That was a time when the Trade Union movement was regarded as absolutely central to helping to run the country.

Absolutely indispensable. I mean it was common across both parties that the TUC's consent

was necessary to control inflation which had rocketed because of the effect on the oil price. We saw then that the Government would go to extraordinary lengths to bring Unions in to a whole range of economic and social policy. Edward Heath himself had created the Health and Safety Commission, the Manpower Services Commission. I mean I'd written a paper on the Manpower Services Commission for the TUC and I was quite surprised to see it speedily adopted as Government policy because it was something they felt they could give to the TUC in exchange for an understanding on pay. Pay became the central issue. We already, after the Tory U-turn, commissioned work from Lord Wedderburn on repeal legislation, in fact he'd drafted a bill which was the basis of the Trade Unions Labour Relations Act of 1974, which Michael Foot put through straight away when Labour came to power. So we were confident that we were going to be at the centre of things. And the idea of Incomes policy in particular was the central negotiating point around which other things tended to radiate. When there's been no income policy then Union influence and TUC influence has been considerably less than it was at that time.

There were critics of course in those late 70's, who felt that the Trade Union movement had become too powerful, too strong. I'm sure that wouldn't be your view but how would you react to those criticisms?

Yes, it wasn't. I mean sitting here you didn't feel strong, you felt under a lot of pressure. Because the TUC had entered into some commitments on six pounds or what ever, the job then was to hold the line. There were always companies around who were prepared to offer more and such was the nature of British Trade Unionism, very decentralised bargaining, something to Union competition. Some employers who were extremely profitable, short of labour. That the notions of an incomes policy being calmly accepted across the whole of the labour market, which has been the position in some Scandinavian countries and in Holland and one or two other places. I mean we've never had that luxury. It was a battle to try and maintain the understandings that we've made with employers at National level and with the Government. So in a way we felt we had a lot of responsibility, we felt sometimes a bit weak in terms of the powers we had to command this huge stage that we found ourselves occupying. So no it didn't feel too powerful, we felt too weak. But of course if you look back at the course of the 70's we didn't see ourselves enough as others were seeing us. And the idea of arrogance, being too powerful of corporatism, which is a terrible concept, I mean Mussolini was the corporatist not the TUC operating with either Edward Heath or the Wilson and Callaghan Governments. The idea that it was a bit undemocratic, it was closed doors, beer and sandwiches, deals and so on, we got presented by the right wing as the enemies of freedom and liberty and I don't think we saw that coming early enough. It was coming from the mid 70's and I think we didn't really realise its import until after the 1979 election and of course of the coming to power of one Margaret Thatcher who believed every word of it.

So when in fact the winter of discontent occurred, followed by the election and the Thatcher election. If you look back on that now, from what you've just said, it's not surprising that Thatcher was a beneficiary of the 70's and the winter of discontent.

No not surprising at all. We knew we were living a disaster through the winter of discontent dispute. The sense of everything falling apart, the piles of rubbish. Often what is forgotten is the Rodallings dispute which economically was the one which did the most damage, more than any in the public sector. But the accumulative effect of the things together was, in a country that likes order, that things were out of control and I sense that a price would be paid for that both electorally and in the standing of the Trade Union movement. That is in a sense why we were too weak to deliver the kind of arrangements which I think we would have liked to have made to have sustained the incomes policy and the social policy that the Labour Government were carrying through as part of the understanding on incomes.

Would you say now that was the watershed for Trade Unionism, may be if not this century, certainly post-war from 1945. That 1979 period and Thatcher coming to power was a watershed?

Two watersheds I think. That was the first. The second one was the miners' strike of '84 and '85. But that was the first for sure. I mean in retrospect she had a very considerable programme to carry through eight different pieces of legislation, all of which reduce Union liberty and enhanced employers. She didn't know that at the time and nor did we but we knew that she was going to do something and a combination of her Jim Prior, Norman Tebbit in particular, did come up with a programme which had a massive impact on Trade Union and Trade Union power. But perhaps even more importantly was the economic policy she persuaded when she came in 1979 with Geoffrey Howe as the Chancellor. It was called monetarism in those days, more familiar perhaps today. But there were three million jobs lost in British manufacturing over the period of 1980 to 1982 and in a sense a lot of Trade Union regiments were mown down in the carnage of jobs in British manufacturing. We were never to be quite so strong again. 1980 was our zenith movement in Trade Union membership. Twelve million - but with the carnage in manufacturing, that then took place with a very high over-valued pound - unemployment was 3 million of course - that in a sense weakened Trade Unionism and a lot of our areas of strength, not all of them, but a lot of our areas of strength. I would say that was even more important than the legal changes.

Was there a feeling then that with membership falling like a stone, TUC having no influence at all at number 10 and the Tories having prepared the ground quite cleverly on Trade Union Reform, a stage by stage process, much more cleverly than Edward Heath had done, was there a feeling here that the TUC might as well pack up shop and become a mutual - Or had to change direction.

No, not so. We had a sense of great confidence that there would be a U-turn and that things would turn our way. The pendulum would swing away from Thatcher back to Labour and back to the values of Trade Unionism. After all who thought that 3 million people unemployed would be tolerated, we didn't for one. We thought we'd be in the middle of revolutionary conditions if that was the case. You remember the 1981 riots in Brixton, Toxteth and places like that, that was what we thought was the precursor of what would happen when unemployment continued to rise. I mean it wasn't much over a million and a half when those riots took place and that was very high at the time. So we were in a sense waiting in a way like Bonnie Prince Charlie for the call to come back and talk about the economic situation. We can't go putting unemployment up to keep inflation down, we need income policies. At the time it was more model than it looks in retrospect because Jim Prior was arguing something similar. As we know the wets, Carrington others were in that area. They didn't like the economic harshness of the Howe/Thatcher policy and we were fairly confident that there would either be a U-turn and we were fairly confident that there would be a Labour victory shortly. Despite turmoil in the Labour party, we thought the political pendulum would swing towards us.

But the call never came.

The call never came and the elections were lost successively right down to 1997 and that 18-year period in the political wilderness that resulted is the cross to bare for the problems of 1979.

The call never even came from your own people because the miners strike was a shambles. The TUC wasn't involved.

Well. If I just take you one step back from that. The first impact of the law and the key change that was made in the law with Norman Tebbit in 1982 removing Unions immunity from actions in tort. So if a Union official committed an unlawful act, the Union as a corporate entity became liable. That was the key change. Before then the individual had been liable but not the Union as a corporate body. So the way it worked was the Union does something unlawful or may be unlawful, the judge grants injunction, Union says we're carrying on, Judge hits them with big fine for contempt of court. Union carry on, seek restoration of the Unions funds and assets. Loses control of its money completely and some Price Water House type body was earning thousands of pounds commission a day at the expense of the union, to administer their affairs. Now that was a very, very potent attack on Unions, the first people to feel it were the National Graphical Association, dispute with Eddie Shah over the Stockport messenger and the TUC backed the rule of law against back in the NGA's call to go illegal and have wider action in breach of the law. That was a defining moment in the TUC, it was a very narrow vote but it was a recognition by Len Murray who was then the general secretary that we had to live within the law in a democratic nation however much we didn't like it. So when Arthur Scargill got going with the miners strike, he was reluctant to bring it to the TUC in case we as we would have done insisted it was done with the law and not in the murky areas around the law which took centre stage in a lot of that miners strike. So he didn't come for six months, he did come to the congress when it came up in September. But I would say that the miners strike was in a sense the defeat of the group of workers of whom the conservatives and many employers were the most frightened. That was losing the brigade of guards as Roy Mason had called them earlier. It was very much a signal that employers looked around our cast list of unions, they thought is there anyone here we're really scared of and after the miners, the answer was no. I think they made mistakes but I think that was there judgement in Government. It was the judgement of many employers too and of course Wapping followed on from the miners dispute and there was an air that we can win this, we can recapture a lot of ground and they did in a number of areas.

And you became general secretary in 1993, the year after yet another Labour defeat in an election. Did you think you might never see another Labour Government or were you beginning to take the TUC in a different direction anyway?

When I came to power in 1993, I had been astonished that the election was lost in 1992. If I can take one step back, after the collapse of the miners' strike, I would say that the TUC/ Union strategy was waiting for Labour. We've not managed it industrially, we're going to have to do this politically and therefore get behind Kinnock and get Labour electable again and give him the maximum degree of support. I was very much a get behind Kinnock man on employment law, give him scope, don't make him accountable to everybody all the time. Let him have his head and so on. The defeat in 1992 was again something of a defining moment. I certainly thought that we should start building some new alliances, so I looked at the Wets at that time tending to be led by David Hunt, who was the secretary of state, had been for Wales where he'd been well regarded by the Unions. He'd been a Trade Union solicitor in an earlier job and I began to look at the liberal Democrats and see them as a balance of power holders in the future. We set out in the early days of my director general ship on a across the spectrum type political influencing thing, not just with the labour party but with those elements of the body politic that weren't avowedly anti-union. We pursued that policy, we still pursue it to some extent.

Did you feel, I mean you mention David Hunt, who was then employment secretary. Did you feel that there was an opportunity then, we're talking about after Margaret Thatcher, John Major had become Prime Minister, leader of the Tory party, may be you felt that the TUC, with people like David Hunt and may be even John Major, you could

begin to make a little bit of recovery in relations even with a conservative government.

Yes, the answer was that I did think that we did stand a chance of doing that and I was encouraged by quite a few Conservative politicians to think that. Apart from David Hunt, some of the older politicians in the party, Whitelaws, Carringtons and so on that we had won our particular major victory over Scargalism and now it's time to look at a better relationship with the Trade Union movement. The big disappointment was John Major, an ordinary fellow from the back streets of Brixton, former Union member in the bank and industry and an active member. But he decided that he would do two things. One was that he would see the social dimension of the European Union as a vehicle for the reincarnation of British Trade Unionism and therefore it he wasn't going to have that and the reason he wasn't going to have that and this was the second thing, this was the one area where he was going to be true the Thatcher faith. He was going to continue the style that she had set and when he need to rally the party, I think he calculated that a anti-Trade Union measure, and anti-Trade Union rhetoric and anti European rhetoric, anti-Jacques Delors rhetoric was a sure fire way of doing it. So it was a disappointment to me that the olive branch that the TUC was putting around wasn't picked up by him and not just by him, not by Michael Hestletine either, who was a real battler against Trade Unions - didn't differentiate between militant and pragmatic Trade Unionism. The leadership of the party was pretty solidly against us ever though there were quite a lot of individuals in the party, who wanted a much more consensual and relaxed relationship.

Did you have any one to one meetings with John Major in Downing Street at that time?

No. I wrote to John Major as a new general secretary, asking to see him, to say what I was hoping to do with the TUC and he referred me to the secretary of state for employment, who I already knew very well anyway. So I never saw John Major, never spoke to John Major apart from in the company of others on either social or formal occasions.

There was never any formal meeting?

No, I asked for a private meeting just to brief him on the direction that the TUC should go and he said not.

Do you think that one of the reasons that Major was frightened to engage in that kind of dialogue because TUC had already established a partnership with Europe. Jack Delors, You'd had Jack Delors over in 1988, which Thatcher of course immediately reacted against. Do you think Major was frightened, given the kind of split over Europe that was already showing itself inside the Tory party he was frightened to come to close to the Trade Unions on that basis.

Maastricht was a defining moment in 1992. When he had rejected the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty and got the British opt out and I think that defined his views domestically as well. He did see a lot of advantage in maintaining the Thatcherite view of Trade Unions which was we've got to keep them in their place. We've got to legislate for them at fairly frequent intervals, after all he legislated against Unions in 1993, so he didn't have the confidence, I don't think to be himself and say Mrs Thatcher did what she did and thanks very much but I'm going to have a different approach. He never did. I think it would have been important for him to have done a Disraeli and a Macmillan and been friendly to the Labour movement but he didn't do it. He kept the Thatcherite faith in that area and he wasn't his own man. I say that from not knowing him very well.

You also had at that time John Smith, having succeeded Neil Kinnock as leader of the

Labour Party and John was a very strong pro-Trade Union leader of the Labour Party, who I think at Trade Union Congress set out a platform which offered a considerable programme of benefits to the Trade Union movement if he as Prime Minister came to power. That was a much more hopeful period wasn't it under John Smith's leadership.

Yes, I think that Neil having had the two reverses, when John came to power there was renewed confidence that Labour would do well under John Smith. His popular ratings were very high, he didn't carry the problem that Neil had had which were that his own views had travelled a considerable way across the spectrum whilst he'd been leader of the Labour Party. John had always been pro-European, traditional right-wing Labour, a social democrat in the European sense and pro-Union. He was comfortable with those beliefs, he hadn't had to change any during his period. They had been his views from being a young man in Glasgow. There was a lot of confidence that he would do well. He did do well more or less straight away. That speech was almost a bit too good to be true if you were sitting at the TUC. It was a traditional Labour leader speech. The more cynical of us might have divided it by half, we tended to do that when some previous Labour leaders gave speeches like that.

Then there was of course the tragic death of John Smith. Tony Blair comes in and the agenda is shifted again.

Very much so. I'd been an early admirer of Tony Blair. He'd got the job of employment spokesman around about 1990 and he had been extremely quick on learning how to cover the territory. Technically he was adept - very good at relationships. He was quick to be on the attack, he was very popular in and around the TUC at that stage. People like John Prescott had done the beat before him, Michael Meacher had done it, but I think that people recognised here was a man who understood it and understood us very well indeed. So what ever has been said subsequently the feeling that we had a real expert and a possible future leader was strong around. That was particularly the case when he was faced with, somebody bayed on Maastricht or other when he was asked to say did he support the European social charter by Michael Howard. The social charter says you have the right to be or not to be a member of a Union and it clashed with closed shop which at that time Labour was committed to re-establish. Blair floundered when this was chucked at him and because of that the Conservatives called a debate on the matter for the following week. In that week, Tony Blair turned the TUC's position on its head on the closed shop and virtually when he got up a week later and said we're going for social Europe, we're not going for the restoration of the closed shop, he had 90 per cent support for that position across a wide spectrum. I assisted him with some of that. But it made his name as a courageous politician who was prepared to take on some of the chivillists of his own side. Then of course when he came to power, I'd lost track of him a bit, he'd been in the home office briefly, in the shadow cabinet and when he came to power of course he began to shed a lot more. He proceeded to do that extremely vigorously and so on. This sense of going away from Trade Unionism developed. But that was in his period as leader, certainly not in his period when he was shadow employment secretary, where he earned a lot of admiration.

Has Labour done just that, gone away from the TUC?

What it has done and he's made no secret of it is he's expressly made his appeal across a much wider spectrum and explicitly so that Labour had ever done before. So he ditched class politics, he's ditched the emotional link if not the practical links because there are still strong practical links with Labour. He's made clear he wishes to be business friendly and he's keen in symbols of Government to put the business community very much up front in a whole range of areas. Not so keen to put Unions in that position though we've got a position. I'm one of those, I've got a good memory and can remember what it was like under the

Conservative and I can tell you it's a lot better under Labour for the TUC, a lot better. But none the less, he had a different appeal, Labour was going to win by occupying Conservative territory and he did so with brilliant success. Now the Conservatives are scrambling around for some territory of their own that is remotely popular. I rather like the quote by some Tory back bencher who said he's sitting in our seat, but he's also got things going along which are popular in the Labour movement. The minimum wage, the working time regulations and the Employment Relations Bill which as we speak now in the Spring of 1999 is before parliament. These are substantial measures and they've got a lot of employers looking anew at Trade Unions. There are things that we haven't got that we'd like but it would be churlish to say anything other than we haven't got a major spring board for further development.

So to some extent you have lost an empire but haven't yet found a new role.

We have lost ground. The Trade Union membership is down to just under seven million in the TUC today from its high water mark of 12 million in 1980. The collective bargaining we cover is only about a third of the working population, as opposed to nearly twice that in 1980. Young people in particular tend to work in areas where they don't come across Unions. Unions are strong in manufacturing, they're strong in public services but these are areas where employment has not grown. Indeed, manufacturing in particular has shrunk through privatisation in many areas of the public sector. So I mean I think we are in a sense finding ourselves in a very rapidly changing Labour market, one where the steady job is for the minority and certainly for the minority of young people who are coming in to work. The challenge in the future is more akin to our predecessors in the 1890's than the 1970's, which is to rebuild a regard for Trade Unionism and make Trade Unions the place where workers think they should be. That's the challenge to us but the Government are helping with that, they're not hindering it and they're giving us through these new laws quite a lot of help.

You're saying part of that challenge is to look again at structure. Seventy unions or so in the TUC, you'd like to see far fewer.

I've just started a debate. It's fashionable - a lot of organisations at the moment talk about the millennium challenges but my concern is to try to establish three things in the mind of Trade Unionist this year. One is, let's look at our structure, is it right for the next surge of organising that we need to be relevant in the new Labour market. We've got rather a lot of unions in manufacturing, we've got quite a lot of unions in public services, haven't got too many in the private service sector, which is the biggest employer. Have we got the resource there, do young people know what our different sets of initials mean, is there some way in which we can devise, and information and technology helps all this, where you join a union once and you kind of get passed on as you job changes to the relevant union in that area and you don't have to be recruited every time. I'm particularly interested in the Dutch structure, they're down to three big Unions plus some smaller specialist ones with good boundaries. We can't re-write our history and tare up our structures like they did under the German occupation, we haven't got that luxury but in a sense the challenge around is that because we can't do that doesn't mean we can't do anything. We can if I can get a lively ferment of ideas coming up, a millennial challenge about our structure, we can get a better structure than the one we've got now. I would say the other two related parts of that challenge are firstly, let's be honest about what we do offer to employers, we offer a partner, we offer someone who helps avoid problems and then sorts them out when they come along. We're not really in the class war game and join us and fight the boss is not a resident cry. With most people in this country, there are a minority of exploitative who we must fight and we must combat, we must have the power and status and influence to do that but for the majority we've done our surveys and have found that 1987 was a bit of a Damascus road experience for me. We did a survey of what people wanted from work and number two was to be held in high regard by the person

for whom they work. Well, put that in the class war perspective. We did find too that most people were proud to work for the particular job and the particular employer that they were working for at the time. We've got to adapt to that reality rather than the realities of the teaming thousands in the smoke stack satanic mills, which is the Lowreyesque of much Trade Unionism. Now, there is a lot of exploited people but they're in restaurants, they're in care homes, they're in areas where frankly Unions have not yet got the reach and that's where we must have the reach for people in the future.

The language is quite different isn't it? You're talking about a Union having to offer something to an employer, having to add value to a company. Quite a new language isn't it?

Absolutely. It's not new practice because I've grown up in my childhood days with Union officials in Manchester who would never have used that language but that is in effect what they did. In terms of being straight forward about what we do, I think some people in British Trade Unionism have got to face up to the fact that that is what we do. And if you think that it's somebody whose struggling against tremendous competition in their product or service market is going to react kindly to major competition with someone whose organised his or her work force and there is going to be a good relationship built with them on that basis of making things more difficult and that is not the future of Trade Unionism. The future of Trade Unionism is good productive relationships with a bit of care taken in those relationships and a bit of respect and trust. We've got quite a few examples around about that, examples we're proud of in Tesco and British Aerospace, most of the British car industry, Legal and General in the finance sector. These are super examples of partnership agreements and relationships and I want to see a lot of those.

You're describing a social revolution. The Trade Union movement in the century that's going out now is devoted to protecting workers pay and conditions, health, safety. The whole of the ethos of the Trade Union movement this century has been based on that. You're now describing a completely different, not completely but substantially different agenda. Don't you also feel that the nature of job insecurity is perhaps as great as it has ever been with the rapid development of technology, the uncertainty whether you're a young worker, male or female, or a middle aged worker. Job insecurity is arguably as great as it's ever been.

That's absolutely right. Not a day goes by without somebody saying that a job for life is a thing of the past. We can see final salary pension schemes, which a significant part of the British work force have enjoyed in the post war period. They have been reduced. The job tenure, the amount of time people stay in jobs is getting less, a lot of young people expect to move around particular jobs and try different things. Not so good for the more mature worker with family responsibilities. I think we're living through the post-industrial revolution, just as the industrial revolution sucked people from the land into the factories and mill and mines of urban Britain, now we see people leaving those areas of employment and going to work in private services of one form or another. Some well paid but insecure, others poorly paid and mostly insecure as well. Either professional services, computers and so on or cafes, hospitality, care and these kinds of things. So we're seeing a social revolution and Unions have got to respond to that. We can't hope that we're going to go back to 1950's Manchester, which I grew up in with 85,000 men working in Trafford Park, nearly all of whom were members of the AEU. And they were a massive force politically, industrially and in every other way in that city. It's not like that now, smaller work forces doing highly competitive work with the world, no British Empire to export to and take what ever good were made, got to be good. As I've said to some before, people have got to work for Manchester United, not Manchester City.

Can you operate this revolution on a national basis anymore? Haven't you got to operate it on an international basis because what you're describing now is a global problem not just a British one. You're deeply now involved with Europe, do you see the future of the Trade Union movement UK more and more involved in what is developing through the whole of Europe?

I think Europe is very important for British Trade Unionism. The major reason why I'm pro-European is that I think that the model of society or the models of society, its fairly diverse, the things that stand out from Europe for me are decent welfare states, decent public services including transport, a sense of worker dignity and rights and Trade union influence. I look across the Atlantic and I don't see those things in the United States and since the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Communist challenge to Capitalism the new ideological struggle is between this welfare Capitalism of Western Europe and the more wild west variety of the United States and North America. That's putting it very very crudely and Britain is perched somewhere in the middle of that. So we want that model, the European model, to win and we want it to become that model for the rest of the world. The model that's exported by the world bank and the IMF and the World Trade Organisation, rather than this combination of Chicago economics, American multi-national philosophy as portrayed by American and British business schools, maximising gains for share holders at the expense of working people and communities, in some cases of the environment as well. So I think Europe is crucial to our future and we've got to win that battle in Europe for the future of workers and Trade Unions. A colleague of mine in the AFLCIO said recently "I wish we could apply to join the European Union" and I know exactly what he meant. Having said that, there are wide range of experiences in the different European countries and we've got a job to do here to get our own house in order, nobody from Europe is going to recruit young workers in care homes in Cornwall, or young professionals in the City who are very insecure but are paid at the moment with a career as long as your average footballer. Nobody is going to do that abroad, no British Government is going to do that - that's a job for British Trade Unionism. And that's what we should be - workers best friend.

What hope to have now of getting increasing help from the Blair Government. You've described the relation of the Blair Government as quite different from relations with previous Labour Governments but you have now got welfare to work, you've got fairness at work, legislation coming in, do you hope to get increasing help from a Labour Government this term and perhaps a second term of a Labour Government?

Well we're already thinking about the second term. The Prime Minister has told us that you've got the minimum wage, you've got the working time, you've got the employment relations Bill, that's your lot this parliament, you won't get any more. OK well we don't bang our head against a brick wall but we do have an agenda and that agenda includes information and consultation rights, such as are standard in the rest of the European Union, full compliance with ILO conventions. It's embarrassing for Britain that we don't full comply with them. And I hanker after some kind of fair wages resolution which would protect out sources workers, out sourcing is one of the grey managerial devices of our age. When people are being out sourced just to get lower wages, to escape from agreements, I don't think that's right. I think we should ensure that the agreement goes with the worker on basic terms and conditions. So that's my thinking ahead to the next election, that's my public policy agenda in the field of employment law. Having said that I'd say the Government's got quite a lot of support in the Trade Union world, as it has in the country generally as we now speak but people are thinking that the changes in education and in welfare and in the health service are for the better by and large. There's quite a lot of support for the new deal, there's quite a lot of support for people needing to work and not being welfare dependent. It they're able to

work a surprising amount of support for that compared to some of the historical attitudes. The TUC was never quite as liberal on some of these things as some people in the Labour party were. The feeling that if people could work they should is a strong one and part of our policy of full employment which we still seek and still believe in as necessary. Not only should the jobs be provided but people should work. I've come across this more and more strongly so there is quite a lot of appreciation of Government policy, not in every area but in far more than perhaps there was a year ago. I think the Government is riding pretty high at the moment.

To get substantially more members in Unions will depend to some extent on these Unions gaining recognition of companies, in many cases anyway. You've got legislative help coming up recognition from this Government. But if we go through the business of 1970's with several Unions contesting for recognition it's going to be a shambles isn't it?

We're aware of dangers. It's interesting that during the recognition legislation of the 70's, Trade Union membership went up two million. How much of that was due to the legislation and how much of that was due to the social contract and how much of that was due to high inflation and people joining Unions to insure that they kept up in a sort of pay escalator that was around, we will never know. There has always been a danger that recognition legislation would become a vehicle for inter-Union problems. I think the Government have been very much aware of it as have we and you will see that in the new legislation if there is a smell of an inter-Union problem around, the new body that will be implementing the legislation, the Central Arbitration Committee, won't touch an application with a barge pole, so the Unions will have to resolve any matters between them before they go anywhere near the Central Arbitration Committee which puts an extra responsibility on the TUC to sort out the problems before they arise.

And you're doing your bit towards that?

Yes. Within the TUC at the moment we're doing two things. One - I've got this millennium challenge around about better structure which cuts out some of the over lap duplications which are around at the moment. Secondly, we are looking at some sort of process where we are checking out the claims that are made to ensure that there is no inter-Union dimension. I agree that if there is significant inter-Union problems that will damage the standard of the legislation and equally that will damage the standard of the TUC and Trade Unionism.

Right going in to the next century. What is the great challenge, there is a slogan two years into a Labour Government - Unions are back - but they're back in a quite different way. What is the mixed transfiguration as it were? What shape do they take? Do they become like mutual societies, more like that than the old fashioned Trade Union?

We talked about job insecurity a bit earlier and if you look at the Labour market today, actually it is much more like the late Victorian labour market in terms of inequality rising quickly, job insecurity being a feature for most people, a sense of managerial power around the place. Much more like that era than the post-war era certainly up to the 1980's. So some of the lessons of that time have got to be re-learned and Trade Unions grew in those conditions. I think we can grow in these conditions. The structure that we've got now to some extent reflected the industries and the kind of trades and occupations that were around then. Since I'm keen not to see us just take a few steps back from where we are now and just look at where we want to be and then perhaps we can work out how we can get there. Unions which are strong, with a lot of members, with good resources with good services in a range of

industries and services where people know what the appropriate union is for them, that seems to me to be important. If in terms of where the Government is withdrawing at least a bit from provision as it is in some areas of education, like student fees, as it is as far as some people second pensions are concerned then I think that the old principles of mutuality, unions as friendly societies are relevant. I'm not saying that they're the main thing but the idea that when people have got a problem at work that they can't get satisfaction from their employer, that they should turn to their Union seems to me to be crucial to the future of Trade Unionism. There is nothing new about that. That's age old.

Tell us about some of the fascinating people that you've worked with and some of the people that have influenced you most profoundly.

There has certainly been a rich catalyst of characters that I've worked with over the years. The general secretaries of the TUC in my time, Vic Feather, Len Murray, Owen Willis, all very different. I've enjoyed working with them all and have learnt from them all. Some great characters in the unions and in giants - Jack Jones, Hugh Scanlon and Harry Irwin who was Jack Jones' deputy, nothing like as famous but a wonderful man - sincere, tough, pragmatic and very effective. Some real characters - Danny McGarvy, president of the Bowlem Makers. An employer was telling me only the other day in a meeting I had in Birmingham that he opened a new factory in the North East of England in the 1970's, he gave a single unions deal the Bowlem Makers society, signed it with I think McGarvy, invited McGarvy to open the new firm and unveil a plaque and then McGarvy was to be the guest of honour at the Christmas dinner dance where he was expected to say a few words on the same evening as the opening. He introduce McGarvy, very privileged to have him there, they'd know each other as children in Glasgow, and McGarvy had been the big lad in the street when he'd been a little lad. McGarvy gets up and he says I want to address my remarks this evening to the women who are here and that is stock up your fridges, stock up your cupboards, prepare for a long strike because we're going to get more money out this bastards pocket and we're going to run a wages campaign. The whole thing was a call to arms and as he sat down he said to this employer: "How was that George?" What a character. That was the way of some trade union officers in the 1970's. Of course there has been such a huge change. He was a pragmatic official, he wasn't revolutionary but he was a hard man and he'd grown up in a hard school and of course he was used to those regiments of labour which made up these huge manual trades which characterised the world of working Britain in those days, sadly no longer today.

It does show you that change has taken place in the whole social ambience of Trade Union leadership and the whole Trade Union movement.

Well, we're not all Perrier water drinkers even today but the style has changed and to deal with people on an honest and professional basis, on a basis of good relationships and being able to see people when you've got problems and helping them when they've got problems. I think the best Trade Union officers have always had those skills but they're at a premium today. They're the kind of things I look for in a good Trade Union officer today. Can they keep those relationships going even when the problems are tough and difficult? Can they work in partnership? Do employers trust them? Do the members trust them? And can they make that gap smaller with good agreements. That's the test of a good official. Different style though today.

Some of your predecessors as TUC general secretary have been constant visitors to Downing Street, they've been in and out of the Prime Minister's room, having one to ones. Ever since 1945, may be even before. Has that been you experience?

Well the first Prime Minister I had was John Major, who wouldn't see me. He refused to see

me so I never went anywhere near Downing Street. Apart from when I think we were both vice-presidents of some charity, along with the great long list, I was a guest at some do in Downing Street for some charity connected with disability. I'd never been to Checkers until Tony Blair became the Prime Minister and I've been his guest there since he came to power. I'd say we are fairly frequent visitors to Downing Street now for discussions about employment law, the state of the economy, the European cause and how to handle that and so on. There is easy access in the relationship now and quite a relaxed way of dealing with things. Of course we're aware that he's doing that with other organisations too and I don't think we claim a special relationship but we do claim a relationship.

It used to be beer and sandwiches, is it Claret and smoked salmon now?

No, no. The first time we went after the '97 election, there was an Irish tea lady on duty. She walked in and put one cup of tea down in front of the Prime Minister so as a spokesman of the TUC, I said: "Wouldn't mind a cup of tea, we don't expect the beer and sandwiches Prime Minister." And she turned to us and she said: "You're a cheeky lot." And when he said is it possible to get a cup of tea for this lot, she was on the point of turning us down but she's a character. You have to negotiate a cup of tea out of her every time you go in. But no I would say our Prime Minister is a great tea drinker. And that characterises the way he deals with people to a large extent.