

# ORAL HISTORY – QUEENSLAND COMMUNIST PARTY

## TRANSCRIBED RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH DAVE & DOREEN LOFTHOUSE

**Date: 20th April, 2014**

**Interviewer: Ross Gwyther**

*[This transcript has been slightly modified by the interviewee to add explanatory notes when necessary. These notes or words are in "italics"]*

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DAVE: I came up through the Depression, you know, which they did it hard, and I can remember asking a bloke at work, 'Do you think we'll win three weeks annual leave?' He said, 'If we get off our arse, son, we'll bloody will it.' That was the attitude then.

DOREEN: And I can tell you, David used to keep me informed because he was active in getting improved wages and so on, and I'm nursing at the Women's Hospital in Brisbane, and David said, 'You should get an increase in your pay because we've been to the Commissioner and asked for an increase in the basic wage,' so then they got the flow-on, you see. I said to the girls, 'Do you know how much you're getting?' 'No.' 'Do you know how much you're going to get? You're going to get an increase.' 'Oh, isn't that lovely?'

I said, 'Do you know where it came from?' and they hadn't a clue. They were just taking it, accepting it, and they'd never done a day's work as far as struggling. They were just on the backs of the people who'd fought and struggled for it – hadn't a clue. One of them said, 'What's the Union done for me? I don't want to belong to the Union.' It was compulsory.

DAVE: We campaigned and that. That was right up until about the '80s, but after that she went bad, because they started to send a lot of our manufacturing overseas. Their interpretation of globalisation is, of course, to use the cheapest possible labour, and it's pretty important to explain that to people.

DOREEN: And, Dave, tell Ross about in the Railway, when you were there, that the blokes, the Railway was out-sourcing the jobs and that, coming back, and the blokes had to fix it. Remember that?

DAVE: Yes. Well, under Bjelke-Petersen, well, I was working in the Railway for a couple of years after NACO closed down because they sent everything off-shore, and we were working at Geebung. There was a plant maintenance there, and it was poorly run and nothing organised, and I ran out a list of improvements that could be made, you now.

But they contracted work out on the Western line to people, and they not even put the bearings in properly.

DOREEN: It was all shoddy work.

DAVE: This was the problem with contract workers. When McElligott was the Minister for Health, he made a statement in the paper that he was going to do away with all the day workers in the hospitals, and next thing all the delegates were over after me, so they said, 'Listen, 90% of our work is repairing work that contractors come in and do, and don't do it properly.'

This is still the same at the present time, so I wrote a letter through Austin Vaughan, the Secretary. I included him because I knew there'd be hell to pay, and so I wrote a letter to McElligott, and I said, 'Listen, unless you retract what you say in the paper, we're going to really tell people what exactly is

going on.’ I said, ‘What is actually going on is the fact that the contract workers don’t know what they’re doing, and 90% of our work in the hospitals is repairing the muck-ups that the contractors do.’ I said, ‘They’ve got to be shown by the permanent workforce where the work is supposed to be doing.’

And I said, ‘You know, I’ll give you to the end of the week to retract it.’ Well, he phoned up Aussie, and Aussie said, ‘Look, you’d better take this serious because he won’t back off,’ and he know what he’s talking about, because I consulted Aussie and I included him in the meeting with the delegates.

DOREEN: And all the workers showed him and pointed out where the work had been done, you know.

DAVE: So next, Mr McElligott (the Heath Minister) sent his underling over and said, ‘He wants to see you.’ I said, ‘If McElligott wants to see me, let him come over here,’ and I said, ‘Tell me when he’s coming and I’ll have the delegates here.’ Well, he ranted and raved. Any rate, I really went for him, and I said, ‘At least you’re in the Labor Party, you can at least come and talk with us before you make such a ridiculous bloody statement and make a fool of yourself.’ So I said, ‘Don’t think we’re going to back off.’ I said, ‘You retract what you’re saying, because what we’re telling you is objective.’

DOREEN: And, Dave, tell Ross about the other time that bloke, the employer - you said he wasn’t a bad bloke actually, the Industrial Officer or something – wasn’t it something about all the work he blokes, they wanted a rise in their wages? I can’t tell you – ten percent?

DAVE: This was the four percent, the four percent increase, and it had a fair bit to do with to keep the blokes on side, that we were able to win these conditions, and it was through the Arbitration Commission. So it was the four percent we were going for, the increase. We weren’t prepared to give anything away for it, except we would improve the efficiency of the workplace.

It was at Evans Deakin, Rocklea, and the engineer, he was one of the only engineers that really owned up and said, ‘Well, what you’re saying is absolutely right,’ because a lot of the blokes were quite meticulous, but one bloke, he was working a horizontal lathe or boring machine, a big machine where you put on discs for roundabouts and things like that, and they’re milled and turned, and he’d been complaining every time that he moved the console he lost the read-out, which meant that he had to read, zero in the job again, which took quite a time. He’d documented that.

The welders had been onto them about the old choke welders, and how they were badly corroded and so forth, and they were having trouble with them all the time, and one case we gave, we gave five instances where the blokes were making the cranes frames, which were made in two halves, and big, long 40ft lengths.

The two different halves were made separately, down that end of the shop, to the other, and no-one knew, you know, what the other bloke was doing – and the blueprints were shocking – whereas if they made them together, they could compare notes and see that their blueprints covered them, so they would mate up effectively.

There was another two or three issues that we raised with them. I said, ‘Well, give it to the end of the week.’ He said, ‘Look, Dave,’ he said, ‘all you’re going to do is screw us again.’ I said, ‘No, we’re fair dinkum. If you can’t make any savings out of that, you want to have another look at yourself.’

So that was the Friday, and I said I'd give him until the following Friday. On the Tuesday he phoned me up and he said, 'You're absolutely right.' He said, 'I'm astounded that these problems, that the blokes had kept on raising with the foreman and everything, that nothing had been done about it.'

DOREEN: And they increased the efficiency – I can't remember what you told me, but it was quite considerable.

DAVE: He had no trouble. He was the only engineer that I know from out Queensland, that really came to the party. A couple of the blokes in the sugar mills did, but most of the old blokes in the sugar mills, the managers had actually worked on the shop floor, and that made a big difference. Old Braddocks was one, at Maryborough Sugar Mill. Now, young Braddocks never had a clue.

We went round also on asbestos, because all these mills – like, I worked amongst a lot of asbestos, and touch wood, it hasn't come up against me yet – but in all the ships, all the installations were asbestos, and in the mills, likewise, all the boilers and everything like that, you know. We went round and explained to the blokes because there was a very good New York Jewish hospital that put out this film on the effects of asbestos and what it would do to you, so I took it around to everyone and I said, you know, the position is that you need good showers and everything like that, and have a good bath before you go home, and go home in clean clothes. Don't take it home with you.

DOREEN: We knew blokes who used to come home from Hardie's, where he worked, and sit down on the carpeted floor and play with the kids, in his overalls.

DAVE: At the mill, knock-off time, even after I give them this lecture and showed the films, they'd knock you down going home in their dirty overalls.

DOREEN: In the car. David could tell you other stories about getting fresh showers and all this stuff for them, and they were---

DAVE: Well, that was at Braddocks, yes.

DOREEN: And the old fellow said, 'You know, Dave, they'll never use them' – and he was right.

DAVE: He was dead right, and I told him so, too, because he was a good bloke. During the Depression years I was very young, and so I never had a hard day in my life, but I know the parents did do it very tough, but they were very good providers.

DOREEN: The youngest of eight, Dave was.

DAVE: I was the youngest, and my brother, who was born in 1917, he at 14 went out on a station as a ringer, and then he joined up the AIF in 1940 and he went to the Middle East. He was loaded onto the *Fairsky* in the middle of the night and unloaded in Java a few days before the main Japanese invasion, then he was caught in that. He went through the tender mercies of the Japanese.

DOREEN: In Changi.

ROSS: So you were younger than him?

DOREEN: Seventeen years younger.

DAVE: Yes, I was born in '33.

DOREEN: Tell them about your mother, where she came from and how---

DAVE: Well, Mum came from Paisley, and the grandfather, he was a fitter on the Clyde. Now, I didn't know him. He died in 1936. I was born in '33. As I say, I think his parents must have paid for his apprenticeship, because he was apprenticed and he was sponsored by the Ipswich Railway Workshop and they went to Ipswich in 1910.

DOREEN: Your mother was the more progressive one of the family, though, David said.

DAVE: She was, but the old man was later, when he went to work at Murarrie. He was affected by the blokes---

DOREEN: The meatworkers?

DAVE: Yes, the blokes there, you know.

DOREEN: He was pretty charming, see. You'd read him like the British Army, too.

DAVE: Well, you can imagine how he was brought up, you know, never shown any affection because he just didn't know how to, I don't think.

DOREEN: And they were old, David's people were old. How old was your mother? Forty-four when he was born.

DAVE: Dad was 54.

DOREEN: I thought he was 56. He was 12 years older than your mother.

DAVE: Could have been, yes. I'm not sure. So they had an – they never had any facilities like we've got today.

ROSS: Would they have been Labor supporting people?

DAVE: Yes, they were. They were Labor supporters.

DOREEN: Your father got the Communist Party *Tribune* and Kath Watson used to bring it round to him. You know, did you ever hear of Kath Watson? Geoff Wills – she was down there with them.

DAVE: No, she lived at Hemmant.

ROSS: Because you grew up at Wynnum?

DAVE: Wynnum Central, yes.

ROSS: So do you think that would have meant that your father was in the Communist Party, or---

DAVE: No, he was never in the Communist Party, but he was receiving the *Trib* from Kath Walker at the time.

DOREEN: Watson.

DAVE: Watson, was it? I thought it was Walker.

DOREEN: Kath Walker was the girl, the Aboriginal girl, the poet.

DAVE: Yes, you're right, yes.

DOREEN: So it was Kath Watson.

DAVE: I never read the *Trib*. I had a look at it. It was where I went to work, and I joined the Amalgamated Engineering Union.

ROSS: So after you'd finished school, you were apprenticed?

DAVE: Yes.

ROSS: Tell us a bit about what happened there, like, what sort of an industry did you get into?

DAVE: Well, the first job was as a motor-cycle mechanic apprentice, and I stayed there for three years.

DOREEN: One bloke, only a single bloke, wasn't it, who was running the business, wasn't he?

DAVE: Yes. I could see a better future as a motor mechanic, so I changed, I went through to the Southern Electric Authority and I got a job there, but as I was going to go in there I went into National Service as well.

DOREEN: What year did you start work?

DAVE: 1949, I think.

DOREEN: Yes, I think you told me that recently.

DAVE: And as I said, they were the conditions then, and a lot of the blokes were either returned soldiers or Englishmen or Irishmen, and there were some Germans and there were some Italians.

DOREEN: Were they very union-conscious, at Southern Electric?

DAVE: Some of them were.

ROSS: When did you join the union?

DOREEN: Straightaway, didn't you, as an apprentice?

DAVE: No, I did about a year after, and we were attached to the English Union in those days. We didn't have autonomy until 1960-odd, and---

DOREEN: They were very progressive, the English Union, weren't they?

DAVE: Yes, and the meetings that you went to, they were fairly progressive meetings. They explained things to people, and I didn't know them well in those days, but they'd always give you an answer,

you know, if you asked questions, which I used to ask a lot of questions, they'd always try to explain things to you.

ROSS: So you would have got your initial political sort of outlook from the Union people?

DAVE: Yes, I did, yes – and Doreen.

ROSS: Yes, I thought we might just maybe now get you tell us a bit about your family background and history, too? If you could tell us again about your grandparents and so on?

DOREEN: Yes. Well, I'll just say that I met David when I was 16, and he was 20, and I'd been a member of the Eureka Youth League, you see, and Mum was a Communist. When I first said I'd met David, they said, 'What sort of work does he do, and does he belong to a union?' That was the first thing. Well, as I said about my grandparents, they and my mother and grandfather were in Monto. They formed the first Labor Party up there, and there were only the three of them and I don't think they ever got any more members. I can remember, it was during the War, my grandparents must have been getting ready to go to Sydney, and my father and mother lived out on a farm further out that belonged to my grandparents, and I think the Communist Party was going to be banned or – anyway, I think Menzies (wasn't it Menzies?) thought he had it in the bag, and the *Trib* had come that day and there was a policeman in the town. He wasn't a bad sort of a bloke, but to come 15 miles in those days,... but anyway, my grandparents were camping in the tent beside the house and my family, such as the house was, we were inside, and the *Trib* had come that day from town and the policeman must have got the information that my family had got this subversive literature, and it had come home and had been read, but it happened to be out in the tent with my grandfather, and he put it under his mattress.

Anyway, the policeman came to the house proper and said – my father was a big man, 6 ft two and a half, a lovely, gentle man, and there was a sort of step up where the kids slept in this other part of the house, if you could call it that. I think they had a dirt floor in the house, actually, and the policeman said he was going to search the house to find the paper, and my father stood in front of the doorway there and said, 'You can look in here, but you're not going up there where the kids are. They're sound asleep.' But there was no paper up there, anyway. My grandfather was lying, you know.

Anyway, when they came to Brisbane – I don't know when they joined the Communist Party, but when we came to Brisbane my mother, she either joined the Communist Party then, but I know just incidentally she'd backed Russia in the Melbourne Cup and won ten pounds. We didn't have any money, but the ten pounds was wonderful. She backed that.

ROSS: So when did you come to Brisbane?

DOREEN: 1948, and stayed there – I was only 10, but Mum was very worker conscious, very progressive, very Left Wing, and so were my grandparents, I think, but Mum was there when Freddy Patterson was bashed. He went to the May Day March, I think, wasn't it, when he was bashed?

DAVE: No, it was the Railway Strike March.

DOREEN: Yes could have been, but I know she went to it, anyway. It was up behind the Trades Hall where he was bashed, yes.

Anyway, she'd go out, she'd work late. She was working in the bag factory sewing bags in Recomb. She'd worked in a lolly factory, because my father was working the meatworks and we had no money. The wages were pretty poor, you know. She'd go out to the meetings, and then we moved

after two years to the Housing Commission house and my mother would work two shifts a day. She'd go to the Communist Party meetings, she'd go to the P & C, she'd go to the Peace Movement, and still wash by hand and, you know, really struggled hard, but she felt that we had to – oh, and when they wanted to ban the Communist Party, which was in .. 1951. We were in this house in this Housing Commission area, all new houses, no drainage, so street lights, nothing. They put all the people there after the Second World War, and anyway, the Communist Party put out all these papers about what will happen if the Communist Party is banned, and so when you put out leaflets in those days, they delivered a big stack to the house and you had to fold them all, thousands of them. We were only kids and my mother said, 'Yes, you'll have to get out there' – and she'd do it, too – 'get out there in the dark' – because we didn't want anyone to see it was us putting the leaflets in the letterboxes. All the roads were unmade, soggy ditches, and the dogs were barking, but she said, 'If we don't put out these things, we'll all be behind bloody bars.'

So I didn't want to be behind bars, so I was out there putting them in. She said that's why the Labor Party is in on opposing it, too, because they thought they'd be behind bars, too. Anyway, my mother, we went with her to the political meetings and, you know, I'd say to my son and so on that if ever there's a doubt about where the blame lies, it's not with the under-privileged and the poor, I said it's with the rich, and I said I'd come down on the side of the poor and the under-privileged every time, you know.

So we then went to the Eureka Youth League and, you know, it was good, really. We had a good time, but they educated you.

ROSS: So you would have joined that when you were about----

DOREEN: 12 or 13, and they used to educate you, and you were talking about the loan, the colony, we had the history of the Australian Labor Party, and we studied that from beginning to end. We studied Marxism, and also we'd have lecturers come and during the school holidays we'd go down to O'Reilly's. There was Max Julius – what was Fanny - all the Juliuses – there was Sol and Max, and Eva Julius. That family, they were all Communists and Marxists, and Sol was the Superintendent of the Brisbane General Hospital. Fanny, she became a – Eva became a high school teacher. I don't know about Fanny. I feel she was there somewhere, but I don't know what about her, and Max became a solicitor and so on, so what they did, they were poor Jewish people, poor Jewish Communists, and they made a pact that they'd each work to get the other one a good education. Yes, we used to go to lectures from some of those people but, oh, I can't remember the train of my thought now. Anyway, they were very influential in making you understand that it was the struggle of the poor against the oppressors, you know.

ROSS: So that was a big part for you growing up, that was a big part of your political education, through the Eureka Youth League?

DOREEN: Yes, and Mum's, and Grandma and Pop. In our family that was working class, and you were working class. You had no doubt about where your allegiances lay, to the working class, to the people, you know. Anyway, when I went nursing in Ipswich, there was a branch of the League in Ipswich, but it was hard work being in the Eureka Youth League. You had to get out and leaflet, you had to go to meetings, you had to do all sorts. So when I went nursing, I thought, 'Ah, I can have time off,' you know. So what happened was, I then met David, so those four years were full of our time together, and then we moved to Melbourne.

ROSS: So that would have been what year, when you went to Melbourne?

DOREEN: 1958 we went to Melbourne, and here we are, David being that industrious person who was tied up in the AEU, he went to the union meetings and there's Communists there, Doug Williams, and here they are, they're much more sophisticated. See, the Queensland mob, the wharfies and so on, they all drank like fish, you know.

I have to tell you that my mother didn't drink. None of my family drank, but they were absolute drunkards, a lot of them. Some were good people. Some didn't drink, but anyway, we went to Melbourne, so here's David tied up with these AEU, and these Communists – well, they're much more sophisticated; in their subtle way they get around people. So this cottage lecture was going on. David said he wanted to go to this cottage lecture by Bernie Taft on Marxism.

I said, 'Well, I'm not going. I've had enough of all this.' He said, 'One in, all in.'

DAVE: A real Democrat!

DOREEN: So we end up going to the cottage lecture, and then we end of joining the Beaumaris Branch of the Communist Party. There were all sort of intellectuals – we had a QC who was in our Branch. We had another bloke who was a very prominent Statistician in something or other, and there were all sorts of sophisticated people, some with middle class money, some of them.

DAVE: But Bernie Taft, he also told me in those days, he said – and I didn't understand what Zionism all about, I didn't understand, you know, the Jewish position or anything like that – he said, 'Look, Zionism is a fundamental religion,' and he said 'It's a recipe for disaster.' That was what Bernie Taft said.

DOREEN: We put in very good years, though. We leafleted, we worked, we did the booze, and what we turned up at Nundah when we came back to Brisbane – I had to tell you this – they had the ideas of the hippies, the lefties, the long dresses and the smoking pot and so on, and here's David and I, we turned up at Nundah to hand out the leaflets for the Communist Party candidate. I had my big picture hat on, I had my nice suit on, and I had stockings and high heel shoes, and David had his Stetson on, a nice tie and shirt and so on, and we could see people, they'd take our leaflet and then they'd look back, and they couldn't work out how come we were associated with these awful Communists!

We enjoyed that, didn't we?

DAVE: We did, didn't we?

DOREEN: Yes, but we turned up. Dave and I turned up everywhere. We turned up to many, many things.

ROSS: So when did you come back to Brisbane, then, from Melbourne?

DAVE: In the '60s.

ROSS: And then you started work in---

DOREEN: No, I stayed home for about four years. Then I went back and worked for about 12 years. I was a Theatre Sister most of the time - nurse, that's a nurse.

ROSS: And you worked in - where were you working?



DAVE: I worked everywhere. I worked in a shipyard, I worked in ship repair, I then went down to NACO and worked in the tool room there. Again, it was the person who was prepared to take on the Delegate's job.

DOREEN: Tell him about that dreadful place at the 'Gabba where you were doing the doors to the Radium Institute.

DAVE: Well, you know, I just forget the name of it – Cox, right there at the 'Gabba. He turned out motor-mowers, and he had a foundry across the road, and that's where I first came in touch with the Moulders Union, Frank Wyvill.

DOREEN: Yes, wasn't he lovely? And tell him about setting up, what he said to you when he hired you. Remember he said, 'Can you do this? Can you do that, read a drawing and so on?'

DAVE: Yes.

DOREEN: And then he said, 'Well, come with me,' and tell him about the set-up and everything.

DAVE: Well, what happened was, he got these big, brass frames that was come together, which would hold glass, and in between there'd be a solution which stopped radioactivity coming through, to my knowledge. They're still in the Block 7. So what happened was, first I said, 'Well, I want a bit of quarter by four inch or five inch pine to make a template,' because what you do is, you make a template and then you can get all your frames all exactly the same. You know, you can mark it out, drill the holes, and then go along and mark all the others together.

So he wanted to know what I wanted to – he said, 'Are you going to start a fire?' I said, 'Look, you've got to make a template.' I just explained to him, you know. He had no idea.

DOREEN: He'd got the contract to make these doors.

DAVE: He got the contract to do it, but he had no idea.

DOREEN: No-one ever inspected it or anything.

DAVE: So eventually he went out, I convinced him to go and get the timber, and I then made the template up out of the timber, these big stores which would be about twice as long as these tables, and I milled them level on one side to take the glass, and they had a fitting section where the glass fitted in, and you could seal it, and then I got this table, and it's a pretty precarious table, but I then had to level it to get it absolutely level so as I could square up with markings.

So I'd just got it level, and I packed it up with all sorts of material to get it level, and it would have been all right for me and the assistant to move the frames around so as I could mark it out, but it's got a drill on one end, and a bloke comes along and he's knocking out the levels, you know. So I go to the foreman and I said, 'Listen, mate,' I said, 'for Christ's sake, I've just gone to the trouble of levelling this table up. You've got this bloke on the other end of the table knocking it all around, and it's out of kilter again.' He said, 'He's got to do his work.' I said, 'Well, if you want it that way, mate, I can put the bloody holes in, but I'm not responsible for how bloody straight they're going to be.' I said, 'If you let me do it properly, it'll be okay.'

So I just put them through any way because he wasn't prepared to even listen to me, you know.

DOREEN: David said he struck a bloke trying to install them or something, and he said, 'You wouldn't believe,' he said ----

DAVE: '----the trouble I've had with these doors!' This was at Block 7, and I said, 'Well, I know all about it, mate.'

DOREEN: That would be contracting out, wouldn't it?

DAVE: That was a contract, you know. Anyway, how I come to, because I was working for that conveyor mob at the time – see, you could go from one job to the other, you'd get a lot of cheek and go from one job to another. If you got shunted from one job you'd go to another, you know.

DOREEN: Mind you, he had trouble when we came from Melbourne. They black-listed him and he had trouble getting a job.

DAVE: Oh, I was always on a black list.

ROSS: So tell me about that? How did they come to black list you?

DAVE: Well and I turned up at NACO to get a job, because anyone who would take on the Delegateship had a black mark with the employers' association. They'd put your name around, and that's why I didn't want to be the Delegate immediately, you know, because once blokes got to know you, you were all right and you had some support, but if they come along and shunted you before that, well, you had no support.

But no-one was prepared to take the Delegate's job on. That was the problem, you know. When I went to NACO to get a job there, the bloke, a fellow by the name of Noyes – was it Noyes? – I just forget now, but he signed the indentures. He was the personnel officer. He said, 'I hear you've been a bad boy, Dave. Try to keep your nose clean for a few days, will you?'

DOREEN: But, David, when you couldn't get a job, you ended up on the Water Board right out on one of the dams.

DAVE: We went to the Lesley Dam at one stage before Christmas, you know.

ROSS: So would this have been because they knew that you were an active unionist?

DAVE: Yes.

DOREEN: They knew he was a Communist, never mind about the union.

ROSS: So it was because you were in the Communist Party?

DAVE: Not only that, but even an act of union, you'd have the same trouble.

DOREEN: Yes, but that, you know, that branch, that Security Branch, they spread your name everywhere/

DAVE: They did, yes.

DOREEN: It would have come up from down there that he – and that's why when we hit Brisbane, Dave couldn't get a job. But he got one out on the dam.

DAVE See, what we suffer from here in this country, and I think it's all over, is lack of training. I can point to several major accidents, like the explosion in the gas fields in Victoria that time years ago, the Naval ship in Western Australia that caught fire and people lost their lives there, it was all through contractors not knowing what they were doing, and a lot of the engineers – and this is a funny thing that happened – a lot of the blokes come from the Clyde and Birmingham. They wouldn't take any rubbish off engineers or anything like that, you know.

There was an engineer at NACO. They put out this die, and he gave it to me first to look at the die and to fix it, or to make it, make the die. These were press-tool dies, you know, the old iron presses. I looked at it and I measured it, you know, what the measurements were, and it was going to clash. It was not possible to do it in the design that they had it, so I put red ink all over it, and this engineer, Stan Dyne, a little engineer, he came up to me and he said, 'What's all the red ink?' I said, 'The die's going to clash and it'll smash. It just won't work that way.' I said, 'I can give you some advice to change it.' He said, 'That's the die we want. That's the way it's going to be.' I said, 'Well, I'm not going to make it, because you'll blame me for smashing the die. Now,' I said, 'you go to the best tool-maker in the place---he's had far more experience than me. Don't tell him, I won't tell him anything. You see what he says.' So he goes and gets another blueprint and takes it down to this bloke--He was an Englishman and he used to sweat, so he wore this, so we called him Johnnie Indian. He was a little character, and I just watched this finally. This is how he used to speak. He said, 'It won't work. This'll clash. It'll smash the first die,' and this Stan Dyne stands over him and says, 'Well, you make it. I'm telling you to make it.' He said, 'Are you stupid or something?' All the language too, you know. He said, 'Are you stupid or something?' He said, 'I'm telling you now it'll smash.'

Stan Dyne insisted. He said, 'I'll make it, okay.' So right to the end, even when it's been put into the press, this Johnnie Indian said, 'You're the biggest f-wit I've ever met.' He said, 'This is going to smash to bits. Now, cover your face,' you know. Stan Dyne presses the button - SMASH!

DOREEN: And where did it end up, did you reckon? David reckons it ended up at the bottom of this creek or something.

DAVE: And I'm down there with the manager talking one day, and he throws this up at me, and I said, 'Hold on, Don, come up to the tool room and I'll get the blokes to explain to you exactly what happened, and I'll explain my position. I was the first bloke that got the job, and wouldn't do it.' But this went on everywhere.

DOREEN: It's those inefficient, ignorant workers, you know.

DAVE: And they blame the workers.

DOREEN: I've never found where they don't blame the workers, have you?

DAVE: I worked for the Gas and Fuel in Victoria while we were at Sandringham. I'd done a lot of work with oxy-acetylene cutting and everything like that. I welded, everything like that, but I never had any experience with ordinary household gas, but I knew governors and I could adjust them, and I could repair them and all that, you know. I could set up all the pipework and everything like that, but I'm working on a little kiosk outside. They called them kiosks because all the governors were there out in the districts around, and these governors were there.

Now, no-one came to me when I first started and explained to me that, you know, it was dangerous stuff. What it does, it lays low, the gas lays low and you can't smell it or anything like that because you'll get used to it, anyway, but you can't smell it, and then next thing you just keel over.

Any rate, I pulled the top off this kiosk and it's open, it's quite open and I'm working. I fixed the governor on it, and then I stood up, and I keeled over. Now, they never trained me, told about the dangers or anything like that, and I just didn't realise that if I had been in a very isolated spot, well, I'd be history, but I just fell back onto the lawn and a bloke gave me CPI and tried to revive me, and I came good.

But all over, this was the case – no training, nothing. They got a person in and you ask a lot of questions. See, when I left the Gas Company I left a detailed list of what the blokes should be trained at-----

DOREEN: That's all Party stuff, see, you know, safety of workers, it's all---

DAVE: It was the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union that educated us on these things. They woke up long before that people just didn't know what they were doing. I used to do a lot of work in the ship repair as an Organiser for the workers, and I had a lot to do with the Painters and Dockers. Now, our Union had a policy we wouldn't drink during the day. Now, some of us broke that, but I always stuck to it. I had no trouble sticking to it, because we just didn't believe in drinking and working on the job, you know. Ray Winning----

DOREEN: He was lovely. He was the Secretary of the Painters and Dockers. He was lovely.

DAVE: He was always chasing up Doreen of nights, looking for me.

DOREEN: Early in the morning this gravelly voice would say, 'Mrs Lofthouse, is Dave there?' He had the most gravelly voice. He was a diabetic, he drank like a fish, and he was a good bloke. Communist, he was, he was a Party bloke.

DAVE: So I'm at the pub drinking with them and I'm having a lemonade, see? He said, 'Dave, you'll have to put a bit of colour in that. You've got our name to think of.'

DOREEN: But they were good blokes. They were good blokes. Even then I said to you, you know, when I went with my mother to the socials – they used to have these Peace Socials or Communist Party Socials, and they'd all go to other people's houses and they'd make cakes and sandwiches, and they'd have someone there to speak on the Peace Movement or some important political subject, and you've no idea – all these people, all the Communists used to come and they'd sit down and they'd get kegs, and they'd have 10 gallons----

DAVE: And Doreen used to jack up on them.

DOREEN: This is when I'm older.

DAVE: Because she went to the meeting to discuss----

DOREEN: This is when I'm married.

DAVE: ----to the do that was going to be on, and she said----

DOREEN: I said, 'You can only have a 5 gallon keg. You can't have 10 gallons. And no more.'

DAVE: No more, and that's it. And the 5 gallon keg ran out, and they're trying to get onto Doreen to break it. 'You agreed----'

DOREEN: They were drunks. They were all drunks. You'd go to the meetings, this meeting when we were kids with my mother, and all these nice people, and they'd just drink and drink the amber liquid the whole time, drink, drink, and they'd sing Irish songs, rebel songs and so on, and by the time the evening finished these really nice people were, 'Aaarrgh,' you know, and that's why we took to Melbourne. I thought, 'I can't take much more of this,' even though they were good people, but they weren't like that in Melbourne.

DAVE: But Edgerton – I'll tell you a story about this. We had a Trades and Labour Council meeting on this night- and Edgerton was in the Chair, and he waddled in absolutely full as a boot. And Ray Winning, the Secretary of the Painters and Dockers, any rate, this was this Ray, he come in and he's pretty full as well. The debate got going, any rate, and something come up, and Ray Winning has his say, you know. Any rate, Edgerton finished up turning round and saying to Ray, 'Listen, Ray, sit down, you're pissed.' And I got up and said, 'Point of Order, Mr Chairman. You're talking about Ray being pissed. You're the Chairman. You're a bloody disgrace to be the Chairman, because you're absolutely bottled.'

Neil Caine, the Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union, he turned around, and he said, 'Sit down, Dave, you Presbyterian wowsler,' because he knew that I went to the Presbyterian Church in Wynnum, because a bloke that was 12 years older than me, Dearlove, he knew that I'd gone to the Presbyterian Church, you know.

DOREEN: When he was a kid. No, but one of the things, you know, you talk about education and the party, what it made us, but remember I took my boyfriend – the Eureka Youth League in Brisbane was putting on this play, this musical, and it was Reedy River, and there were all the senior League people, and probably some of them were Party people, but they were all the young people, and they put on this Reedy River.

I somehow found, even when I was nursing, that this play was on, and would I come, you know. It was in All Saints hall there, off The Terrace – you know, whatever Terrace, Gregory Terrace, whatever, anyway – and I thought, 'My God,' it was about the shearers and so on, and I thought I had to make a decision whether I'd take my boyfriend, whether it would be too Left to take my current boyfriend to see this – and so I took him. So this was him, and I couldn't work out whether he'd think it was too radical, you know. And it was the best show, and David loved it. It was the best show, all about the shearers and--

DAVE: World class.

DOREEN: Anyway, after we were married, we saw a show in Sydney and we saw a show in Melbourne, and Brisbane out-classed them in every way. It was the best, all about the shearers' strike, and they were good, and that was the talent from the League. You know, they played, they acted, they---

DAVE: They sort of tried to bring a bit of culture into people's lives, you know.

DOREEN: Yes, and we used to go with the League girls. Before I went nursing, we went up to Ipswich Workshops which was teaming with blokes, and I can tell you it wasn't very comfortable, and here's one of the senior League girls who must have been a dancer, and she's trying to teach us a bit of

some sort of dancing and singing Australian songs like “Wattle,” and they booked us to go to the Railway Workshops in the lunch-hour. Can you imagine? About 15, and here we are, ‘Oh, whacko, oh’ – I don’t think they were interested in our cultural contribution. It was quite difficult, and we were trying to prance around and do this show.

DAVE: But they tried, you know.

DOREEN: This is the culture to the workers were trying to introduce, you know. One of the girls sang beautifully, and she sang a lot of Australian ballads, you know. They tried to introduce a bit of culture.

ROSS: So that would have been Party members up at Ipswich who would have organised it through the Eureka Youth League?

DOREEN: Well, there were blokes that would have worked in the Railway Workshops, you know. See, there would have been Pat Keily. He was one. He would have worked there.

DAVE: He was a boiler-maker, yes.

DOREEN: They would have set it up, but some of the people came from Brisbane, too, because there weren’t that many League people, you know. A couple of us were in Ipswich, but they came up but they came up and I think twice they put on a bit of culture for the blokes.

DAVE: See, the first time I came in as a full-time Organiser, I wasn’t elected at the time----

ROSS: This is for the AEU?

DAVE: Yes. It was in the Vietnam War, they got me to go around and got me to explain what was happening, that it was a war of independence and the Vietnamese were fighting for their independence, and explained this issue. I went round all the places.

ROSS: So the Union put you on as a full-time Organiser to do that, those talks?

DAVE: Yes, and so we tried to go round, not that I was a great speaker or anything like that.

DOREEN: And schools, you went to some schools, too, David.

DAVE: Yes, we went to schools.

DOREEN: But that was to explain about the Union to the private boys’ schools.

DAVE: Yes, the Catholic Schools.

DOREEN: Yes. They allowed them to come and speak.

DAVE: Not only that, the right of entry for an Organiser in those days under the Arbitration Commission was far superior to what they have today.

DOREEN: Can’t get in, can you, unless the employer says you can come?

DAVE: So they’ve taken that all away.

DOREEN: The whole thing made us what we were, didn't it, David?

ROSS: Can we get back to just after you joined the Communist Party? How did that change how you operated, like, in the Union or at work? Can you tell me a bit about what advantage to you in your work politically was it to have been a member of the Party? What did it do for you?

DAVE: Well, because we got the *Tribune*, we got the explanations of what was going on in the world, and---

DOREEN: But we were Marxists, and we applied Marxist philosophy to your struggles, you know, by educating people you changed the situation. Marx said if you struggle with a situation you will change it, or if you always use a Collective. Like, you don't just go in and make a decision on your own – and, David, you were very good at it. He used the Collective. They used to use the Collective in the Party, in the Branches, even amongst the workers.

That's what you were trying to do when you were going round to the works at lunch time and saying, 'We are doing this. What do you think of that?' and they said, 'We'll give you money, David, we'll support you.' 'Yes, well, f--off, I want to play cards.' But David was trying to use the Collective to see what the workers want and what they thought of it – and that was Marxist philosophy.

DAVE: Even to explain the financial position of the Union and what was it doing with the money that we were collecting from them, and a lot them, they supported us, we had no trouble getting the money, but they didn't care a stuff what you did. That's the problem with the corruption that takes place but, like, we always insisted, our Union always insisted because we had people that came and checked our books and everything like that, that they also insisted any money we got, we always gave a receipt.

Now, as an Organiser, you'd be surprised the number of blokes that wanted to come up and give you money without taking the receipt. We always had to insist, because you had your name to think of. So I just simply, I always carried the receipt book any rate, but that's one of the problems, that people have lack of understanding how important it is to receive a receipt for what you pay, even check their wages.

They must have had some basic understanding of maths, but they wouldn't even check their wages.

DOREEN: They could put a bet on the races, David said at NACO, complicated bets that he wouldn't understand, yet they couldn't check their wages. They couldn't tell what was what.

DAVE: You know? And Doreen was the same, like, people picked up people that were getting underpaid at her work.

DOREEN: Well, only by chance, because this girl and I had worked the same hours.

ROSS: So were you in the Nurses Union?

DOREEN: I was.

ROSS: And were you act as a Delegate there?

DOREEN: No, I wasn't very political, really. I supported David all the way, but----

DAVE: But you were very political.

DOREEN: But I wasn't really, not on the workplace. I attended demos that the nurses had. Once I tried to help them when we were being, all the responsibility in the theatre was being put onto us to take the blame if anything was left in the patient, and sometimes we told the surgeon the account was wrong, and he said, 'I know it's not in here,' and continued to sew them up. He was all very confident, but when we said we can't find a sponge – I remember this doctor – he said, 'Well, it's not in here,' so we insisted on an X-ray.

Once, you know, I went to the Nurses, and the Nurses Union were very reactionary, like, they were. I think they've improved since then, but I had a dispute with the Matron about this incident, and she was also in the Nurses Union and one of her friends was one of the Executive Officers of the Nurses Union, so I took David with me when I went to interview them. But I wasn't very politically active in the Union, but I was generally, but not like David. He was brave; I wasn't.

ROSS: But being in the Communist Party and having that philosophy of Marxism, that would have influenced just even how you worked with you fellow workers?

DOREEN: Yes, with my colleagues, yes, it did.

ROSS: Can you tell me a bit more about that?

DOREEN: Well, I always found, and David and I both found this, that when you, always to consider your fellow worker and try to always keep a good standard for people to work in, you know, and I went to various places and there was discord there, but by trying to include everyone and find out what they thought and apply a Marxist philosophy to the whole philosophy in the area, you know, that it changed the situation to where we were all very warm and helpful to each other. That's what my really main contribution was.

DAVE: Well, that's what we did in the tool room and other places. We all worked together. You know, if you didn't---

DOREEN: You bonded them.

DAVE: If you weren't really competent at one section of the trade, you'd go and ask another bloke and say, you know, 'What do you think of this? I'm not too sure of this.'

DOREEN: We did the same.

DAVE: And he'd put you right. Now, we'd all help each other.

DOREEN: We did, too. If we didn't know we'd use the Collective, you know.

DAVE: If you struck an engineer that knew everything and was, you know, well, we wouldn't give any cooperation, but engineers that did cooperate with us, we'd help them and explain things to them and put them right, and it made the job easier for them as well. Because even though a university-educated engineer has some experience in, say, the design and so forth, their general workshop down to a basics training is very poor.

ROSS: So what you're saying is that that philosophy that you got from being a Communist was that you built some sort of Collective experience?



DOREEN: In our work areas, yes, we did. With everyone we tried – or I tried.

DAVE: Mind you, Doreen always had it at any rate, and I think I had it, that we'd always try to help people. Even if we didn't know exactly what we were doing, it was sort of natural that we tried to get on with people and to help them, you know.

DOREEN: Well, that's what my people did. They helped people.

DAVE: And that's what my people did, too.

DOREEN: None of this, you know, tough if you'd made an error and you're in trouble. They always helped people. I tell you, the Communist Party, I can remember when I was growing up, from about 14 or so, it would be in the '50s, around '51/'52, that in the Housing Commission area where we were, where our houses were, there were a lot of kids running round just like today, you know, kids running round, no-one knew where they were, getting into trouble and all sorts, and the branch of the Communist Party my mother belonged to (Seville Road, Holland Park), the men put time into training the kids in football and organising them to go on events to other suburbs and so on to play football, to coach kids in boxing, in running, racing. They put the time in. I think they formed----

DAVE: Wally Stubbings did a fair bit of it.

DOREEN: Yes, he could tell you about those sorts of things.

ROSS: And Stan Irvine was probably---

DOREEN: Stan was, yes. Stan was up on the hill across Holland Road, they were, but he married Betty Leary, Stan, and they had a new little baby when I first met them. But they were a bit further over. I think they might have belonged to the Holland Park Branch. I think they might have, but the Seville Road were our mob, and there was a lot of them worked a Repat Hospital, whether they were cleaners, wardsmen, whatever, quite cultured people, but they were the ones who put the time in on the kids, tried to – I don't know, but I know they put a lot of time in on them.

ROSS: Yes, because I was going to talk to you about involvement in other community activities other than at work, and that's one of the things you were talking about.

DOREEN: Well, Mum was on the P & C, I told you, at the Cavendish Road High School, you know, and the woman had no time to herself. She walked everywhere. We didn't have a car or anything. She'd walk miles from the tram, all the way up there and come back home, you know, and get home at all sorts of ungodly hours to find a bit of potato drying up in the pot. She'd be up again, she'd catch the first tram at 5.00 o'clock in the morning to go in to clean the Post Office in town, and she'd walk miles to get over to catch the tram at Nursery Road. First tram, and then she'd come home about 9.00 and I'd meet her as I was coming home from High School when she'd be walking over to the tram again to go in to clean in town again.

She had to light the wood fire before she went. She'd get up, I don't know, about half past 3.00, get up and light the wood fire and go back to bed so she would have a cup of tea before she went. But then all of a sudden they could afford to buy a kettle or a jug, one of those china jugs.

Any rate, all this made us what we are, really – isn't it, David?

DAVE: Yes.

DOREEN: But I think Marxist philosophy was the big thing for you and I.

DAVE: Of course it was.

DOREEN: It was the big thing for us two. I don't know, they tried to teach Mum something about Marxism and so on, but she said, 'Oh, I think I'm too dumb.'

DAVE: She wasn't. She didn't have the time.

DOREEN: She didn't have the time to do any study or anything, you know.

ROSS: Can you tell me a bit about your actual involvement in the party, like, meetings of the party and so on? You would have had the Party branches?

DAVE: Well, they were very well run.

ROSS: Would you have been in a Party branch in the Engineering Union?

DAVE: Yes, that's right.

DOREEN: That's when Ted Crisp wanted to drop you because you said Edgerton had ratted.

DAVE: Yes. Well, he was a boilermaker. He was a good bloke, Ted.

ROSS: Was he in the Party too?

DAVE: Yes.

DOREEN: Ted Crisp was his name.

DAVE: Yes, longstanding Party member.

DOREEN: Probably been in since he was a kid.

DAVE: But didn't suffer fools too well, and I was a bit of a fool.

DOREEN: Young and green.

DAVE: But I was right in what I was saying this time, and I stood -

DOREEN: This was the Industrial Branch, they called it. This was all the tradesmen in the Branch, and they met up on the Terrace.

DAVE: But we tried to conduct everything in a business-like way, you know, to give you an example, the first meeting I went to in Sydney, which was the Union's---

DOREEN: Party Fraction, Communist Party Fraction. They'd meet the day before the conference or something.

DAVE: We had a vote from South Australia---

ROSS: How many people would have been in that?

DAVE: There would have been about 20.

ROSS: From all round Australia?

DAVE: Yes.

DOREEN: And they had to get permission from me to allow you to go, because we wouldn't go anywhere without each other. Remember they came round and persuaded me to let him go? It was quite funny, really.

DAVE: But we always worked as a unit.

DOREEN: We were so close, you know, we went everywhere together. But anyway, tell Ross about Sydney.

DAVE: This chap, McPhillips, he needed a course on Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder. He was hopeless.. and a fellow by the name of Wally----

ROSS: When you say he was hopeless, in what way was he?

DAVE: Well, he wouldn't listen to any argument----

DOREEN: Dogmatic.

DAVE: So dogmatic and hopeless, put it that way, you know. Wally Buckley, he was an Organiser in Sydney.

DOREEN: He was a Communist.

DAVE: Yes.

DOREEN: What was his trade, David?

DAVE: He was a fitter, but I'm there at this meeting, and the meeting gets under way and someone gets the call from the Chairman – which you've got to do that to get business done – and he gets up and has his say, and Jack McPhillips is yap-yap-yap, having a go at him while he's, you know. So Wally stuck this for a couple of time, or about three times, and the third bloke that he'd interjecting, Wally Buckley turned around and said, 'Listen, Jack,' he said, 'you had your say and everyone listened in silence with due courtesy.' He said, 'Now, if you don't apply that to everyone else from now on, I'll bodily throw you out of the meeting.' McPhillips closed up, but he was like that.

DOREEN: But it was very serious, the meetings. There weren't there to waste your time.

DAVE: They were really down to business of what we were trying to achieve, and we were setting down rules that, we tried to develop ethics in everything we did.

DOREEN: And one of them was that the Organisers don't have their wages any higher than the tradesmen, and that was from the Party in the----

DAVE: Well, we settled on one-third or one-quarter more than the tradesmen, because of our irregular hours.

DOREEN: And the travelling and all.

ROSS: And once you'd decided that in your Party Fraction meeting, you'd put that to the whole conference?

DAVE: To the conference and we prevailed.

DOREEN: That's how they kept corruption out of the thing.

ROSS: Sorry, can you tell me, like, how did you have so much influence in the whole Union, because 20 members is not a lot in terms of the membership of a Union?

DAVE: No. How you did it was because you didn't go off half-cocked. You carried out your homework on what you were going to talk about, and very rarely, and when you sounded off to your colleagues to see what they thought-----

DOREEN: That's the Collective.

DAVE: It very rarely was found wanting, because of the objectivity of what you were putting forward, and so people then became, even a lot of the Right Wingers had to rely on you and---

DOREEN: Because they didnt' have any policies.

DAVE: And they didn't put any time into thinking what you were doing, you know.

DOREEN: Half the time they were thinking of themselves firstly, too.

DAVE: And so we promoted that. In actual fact, we were there to assist, not ourselves, but the bloody working class. That was our principle. That's what we were in the Party for. That's what we were in the Union for, and it was very important. We were very class-conscious that we had an allegiance to the working class. That was our responsibility.

ROSS: To wrap up, it would be good for you both just to summarise what philosophy you got out of the Communist Party and how you think you would give advice to young activists in the future, that's come out of your own experience.

DOREEN: David's been giving a lot of thought to that, as a matter of fact.

DAVE: Well, my advice to young people is that their future lies with the collective effort to safeguard social conditions within our community, and that means unemployment; that means demanding proper work hours where people are fully employed for a reasonable day's work, and the Government can do this – not big Government, but ordinary Government can carry out this work – and create infrastructure work. We need ---

DOREEN: Like the new deal.

DAVE: There's a host of work, and this is where I see the future for young people then, but it's by sticking together and working for each others' welfare that we're going to get somewhere. No-one else is going to do it. It's going to have to be us, and even the old people, we've still got a part to play and you've got to try and assist people to understand the political moves so that when a ballot does take place, when the vote does come up, that they make the best choice that's available at the time. That's not always what you'd actually want, but it's the best choice that's available at the time, and then you can progress from there.

There's no future in neo-liberal free market economics. That's for the World. There's no future in it, and it's leading us to a disaster. It'll probably lead to more wars, because what they're after in these countries, in Africa, all over Asia, what the argument is with Russia is that they want the raw resources. They want to exploit, and they wish to exploit at will.

DOREEN: What Dave and I both say about the youth, his training in his trade, my training in my trade, made us the people we are. Now, that's what the youth need, is training.

DAVE: If you don't get trained----

DOREEN: ----and if you're not the best, the highest, the brightest, you don't even get into Uni. Everyone's got to try to get into Uni. There's no trade for, like, in the Railway Workshop, in the PMG, all those places where they've trained, there's no training there anymore. Now, the youth need training. The management stuff, hospitality shit----

DAVE: That's Mickey Mouse training. We're talking about people to be trained skills, manual and mental skills that are going to serve them in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

DOREEN: That's where I think it is, training.

ROSS: And what do you think about, from your Marxism, what's the philosophy that you've taken out of Marxism that you'd like to pass on to the next generation of young activists?

DOREEN: Don't give up hope.

DAVE: Not only that, but we've always worked as partners, and you know, I'm the most reasonable man in the partnership, of course (!! ) but we've always got on very good.

DOREEN: Because I think that we're Marxists. That was so important, that women in society generally didn't take an inferior position. In lots of ways – it's subtle in some ways – but because we both believed in a Marxist philosophy and an equality, I think it was wonderful for our relationship together. I mean, we have fought like mongrel dogs sometimes, but because we, you know, you can't have----

DAVE: But we had a general purpose in life and we both thought the world of each other.

DOREEN: But we helped people. We still help them.

*(End of Recording)*