ORAL HISTORY – QUEENSLAND COMMUNIST PARTY

TRANSCRIBED RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH George Britten

Date: 11th May, 2013 Interviewer: Ross Gwyther

I: I came from an industrial area of South-East London, I suppose you'd call it. A place called Ilford. It was a, mainly chemical industries and a few other heavy type of industries around there too. And born in 1926, there was three boys and Mum and Dad. The old man worked at the local chemical factory, it was from here to where your car is away from home. You didn't have to spend much on travelling. And the eldest brother worked there, the second eldest brother worked there, I worked there, Uncle Joe worked there and Grandfather worked there. So, and me Mum used to do a bit of cleaning at the Manager's office which was next to the chemical factory, on a Friday, she worked I think it was five hours for two and six, which I suppose was the standard rate for exploitin' workers you know. So anyway that's where we were very close to the industry. There was no question, when I started work there, just when the war had just started, I started work in early 1940, but even before that, there was no question of working anywhere else. All of the workers, it was like in a mining area, they all congregated at the chemical factory because if you got a job there, they didn't sack 'em. They hadn't been sackin' 'em through the 30's or anything.

Wages for a man, my Dad, he got two pound ten a week. Two pound 10 shillings a week, that was for feed and keep and house for five of us. It was very difficult at times, we went through some hard times. It wasn't unusual for us to sit around the table, especially in the winter time when we had a fire going because that was the only way of making toast in those days. There was no other means of making toast, there was no power points in the house. There was electricity, but no power points. So in the winter time we'd take advantage of having a fire there, we could make toast. We used to sit around at nine o'clock at night, bread and dripping and that might be the main meal for the day and that's how crook things were in those days. It wasn't only our family; most people were in the same boat so it was pretty bloody crook. Capitalism wasn't very good; it didn't have a very good side to it in those days.

We battled through there, my brothers used to go down to the bakers at early morning, five o'clock or five thirty in the morning, queue up there and buy yesterday's bread, stale bread. We never got fresh bread. That was quite normal for most people at any rate. Stale bread, margarine, plum jam, those sort of things. Porridge, dripping at night time, but it wasn't always like that, every now and then you got quite a good feed. You know Mum cooked a good feed, Mum was Irish so she knew how, she was quite a good cook. Across the road, well we were buyin' a house, the old Man was buyin' the house. I think it was 500 quid it cost in those days. He bought that in 1925. Went into it in 1925, 500 quid and 10 shillings a week. So 10 shillings a week out of his two pound 10 wages, left two pound for everything else to feed five of us. And we were lucky because he had a job, so many people round where we lived, never had a job.

You never saw a motor car around those areas, the only time you seen a vehicle would probably be a Council vehicle come up to pick rubbish or something like that. No one had motor cars in those days. Lucky ones had push bikes, so we wasn't too well off. Across the road from where

I lived, there was a family called the Lewis'. Remember them well. I'm going back to about 1937, '38, they had about eight kids, seven of them were boys and one girl. And the unusual thing, I still think it was unusual, seven of the boys had red hair and the one girl had black hair. Now, I'm not suggesting anything about the milkman or anything like that, but it was most unusual. Any rate their father was out of work, they were kids, ones, two, three, four like that, like stepping stones. The father had been out of work and got behind in the rent, they got notice to pay the rent or get out. Well they couldn't do either, couldn't pay the rent and they wasn't going to get out with all those kids. I remember, I was, yeah about 1937 it must have been, they got the bailiffs in there to come and see 'em to toss 'em out and they refused to go. So the bailiffs got the police. The police come down there and they dragged them out on the footpath. When they got 'em out, they took what furniture they had and put that out on the footpath. And even in those days, I was only probably about 11 or 12 years of age, I thought, well Jesus, bloody Christ, the rights of the landlord are more important than the bloke with eight kids. Eight kids had nothing to do with it, their father never had the money, he was out of work. But they had to keep up those rights of the landlord, but he always has the right to pursue his destiny there, you know his property. He's a property owner. So he must come first regardless of the eight kids. Now that happened about 1937, and I still think of that, I lay in bed at times and I'm thinkin' about the old days, and I often think about those bloody, and I don't know what happened to 'em. They got tossed out on the footpath, they had a 100 people around there, and they were callin' out to the bloody coppers and the bailiffs all of sorts of profanities of what they were doing. But any rate they went on with it and once they got them out, they changed the locks on the door. That wasn't uncommon in those days, to throw people out on the streets. Wouldn't worry about whether you were sick or you were old or anything. If you owed the landlord rent, the landlord's interest came first. Out you go. So they were some early things that obviously set my mind on what's right in life, what's wrong in life. And that was one of the real wrong things.

Came 1939, the war started, I think England and Germany started there and of course that changed the whole thing too. But what happened then, the rationing came in. And that was the first time we had good food, when rationing came in and it happened for most people. Although you only got, I think we got, each person got four ounces of meat a week, and then they, as time went on, they reduced that right down. So things were pretty tough, but they were much better than what they were through the 20's and 30's because it was bloody terrible. Those sort of things, there you think, well now, why did people, why did we have a society like this? Why are people treated like this? Why would people go hungry, why do people get thrown out of their house 'cause the old man's out of work? You know he couldn't help it. So anyway they were the early impressions I got and stayed with me ever since.

I come to 1939, 1940 I started work, early 1940. April 1940 I started work at the chemical factory, there was no other option. Everyone went to the chemical factory. And one of the first things I got, they put me with the plumbers and I did know about this. Actually what happened was, I left school and I thought, well I've got three or four weeks holiday and wasn't even thinkin' about gettin' a job at 14. And the old Man said to me, he said, in the morning, he said, you're startin' work. I said, where? He said, at the chemical factory. I said, what am I doin'? He said, don't know yet, we'll find that when we get there. Any rate he got the okay to give me a start there, and put me with the plumbers at 14 years of age. I was a little offsider there. Forty-seven hour week, I got 12 shillings a week, five and a half days. We started at 7:00 in the morning, you start at 5:00 in the morning, worked for an hour to 8:00, then your half an hour

breakfast and then, from then you go on I think to 5:00 at night, something like that. So that was pretty hard. But at least I got out of my 12 shillings, Mum used to give me two shillings a week pocket money.

So that was a, after I'd been there a couple of weeks, I decided I wanted to join the Plumber's Union. I said well if I'm going to be a plumber, I want to join the union. So one of the plumbers there, he was quite a good bloke I used to work with, he was a union bloke. He said I'll get you an application, he got me an application card, I filled it in, sent it into the union. And come back and said, you're too young, you can't join. We can't have 14 year old kids in the union, come back in a couple of years. So when I was 16 I got another application, I filled it in again, I got accepted. That was the year 1942, war was on, bombs were falling, yet we still went to the union meetin's once a month on a Friday night it was. And many a time at the union meetin's there, I think I might have mentioned this before, halfway through a meetin' there and all of a sudden it'd get very dangerous. They used to have a signal or a hooter used to blow when things got close, you know bombs comin' down and Christ knows what. And when this was happenin', the Chairman'd say, righto, hold the meetin' up, everyone down and we'd all lay down on the floor. And you'd get sort of an all clear, right and he's back again, and oh that's right we were talkin' about so and so. And then, it'd go again, so this might happen two, or three times at a meetin'. It didn't happen every time, every now and then it would happen. When I was a regular attender at these meetin's once a month 'cause a mate of mine, and many a time there when the bombs had been fallin', it was all trams then, the power had been cut and no trams running, we'd walk, oh at least from here to Woolloongabba. You know it was three or four, five kilometres away and walk home at night to get home about midnight from the meetin's 'cause they finished at 10:00. So that was my early impressions there.

I: Just talking about your sort of involvement in the union and so on, what about the politics of your family? How did that influence you, 'cause you've said that you were influenced by the things you saw, what about the sort of politics of your family?

P: Very little influence at all. The only influence would be from my father and Labour Party. They were all Labour Party probably round there and as good as they were, they were about as good as what they are here really.

I: Were they union people?

P: Oh Christ, oh yeah, all workers were in the union. And even the young 14, 15 year old girls, all went in the union. And it was quite normal, I didn't do anything extraordinary by joining the union at 16 years of age, everyone, if you didn't join, well Jesus, you know they'd be talkin' about 'ya. But that was quite so, yeah, it was all workers, all the process workers and people in the office and everything like that, they were all members of the relevant unions. So, it wasn't a political family, though Dad was the, Dad would be Labour Party. I know voting wasn't compulsory then, they used to send these big luxury cars around the streets at night time there, blowing their horn for people to come out, get a ride to the place where you voted, at the school it was, the local school, and cast your vote. And of course people went to cast their vote so they could ride in the car, 'cause I never rode in a car till I was about 16 years of age. That was the first car I ever rode in. And I think that was to me mother's funeral unfortunately. So that was the setup there, they weren't over involved in politics, in our house. But once the war started, once the Soviet Union came into the war, it generated a great understanding of what was going

on on that front with Germany. That Germany and the Soviet Union were in a great battle for survival for all of us and it was amazing there that, even what anti-Soviet or anti-Russian or anti-Communist propaganda or literature was going around, it suddenly changed, and a different atmosphere and of course it grew from there.

But I missed out a bit, prior to that, about 1937, 1938, on a Friday night, we were either in the town square, the Fascists used to hold thier, I think it was a monthly meeting, or fortnightly meeting, one of the two. And I remember, I was about, probably about 12 or 13 then, it used to get a huge crowd there on a Friday night for the Fascists. Not supportin' 'em, mainly oppose'n 'em. They weren't supportin' 'em, well they had their own group, but I remember Sir Oswald Mosely, he was the leadin' light of the Fascists, of the BUF, British Union Fascists and I can remember him well. I remember standing next to him and I was only a little kid and he was about, big bloke, oh about six foot three, six foot four tall, black outfit, big leather boots right up to his knee caps and he had a big insignia on his arm. Because I was standin' next to him and the insignia was there like that and, like a big flash of lighting. Around where they had this stand in the middle of the road, they had a ring of coppers to protect him and he had a few of his hierarchy there as well. He'd be on the high stand spruiking, his hierarchy'd be around him, ring of coppers around there and big numbers of people on the outside. Now the opposition to that to these meetings was, I found out shortly afterwards, was the Communist Party. They had blokes going around with big sandwich boards on them and they're heavy big wooden bloody things. And what they were shouting out and what they had written up was, "Oswald Mosley, son of a gun, public enemy number one". This was in 1938 and of course there was a great kindness shown in most of the papers there towards the Fascist movement because they said they were an anti-Communist organisation. So, that was my first, perhaps introduction into anything political, although I didn't fully grasp what it was, what it really meant.

I: So when you said the meetings were big, do you meant that most of the people who would have gone to those meetings were actually opposing the fascists?

P: Just people in the area, yeah. 'Cause what happened, even before that there, the Fascist movement in Italy used to send out propaganda to various areas of the country there, different organisations there. They'd have ads in the local papers about the Fascist movement, become a Fascist and prevent Communism and so on and so forth like that. So you chose between Communism or you chose between Fascism. But, that was the situation there, but of course once the war started, the Fascists suddenly disappeared out the way because they would have had their necks bloody wrung wouldn't they?

I: Was there a lot more interest in talking about what was happening in Russia?

P: Not at that stage no. No, because this was 1938 see, 1938, '39, just before the war began. But once the war started with, 1941 wasn't it? In June 1941 when the Germans invaded Russia, things started gradually, gradually changing. And when it was seen there that the Russians were opposing the Germans and puttin' up a good fight even at that early stages there, the whole newspapers, sometimes the headlines would come out about, Russian General Zhukov, or whatever his name was. Zhukov strikes [0:15:44.0] different parts of Russia where the Germans had penetrated and where the fight was goin' and of course thousands of poor buggers were gettin' slaughtered all along the line. And, so everything changed.

And the Communist Party then suddenly become very popular, very popular indeed because they associated the Communist Party because, with what was happening on the Russian front. And the Communist Party took advantage of it too and I recall there, I might have mentioned before, I think it was 1943 when I went to the local picture show, the Capital picture show. There was a film on there about designing part of a ship in Scotland or somewhere. And the bloke they got to do it was a Russian engineer played by Laurence Olivier you know, good film. And then you had a half time, during the interval there, a bloke come onto the stage and he said, well outside he said, when the film is completed, he said there'll be people out there and those that would like to join the Communist Party, please do so. And when the film did complete I went out there and there was a queue from here to the bloody letterbox away, people queuing up to join the party. And when you queued up, when you joined the party you got a medallion there. There was a hammer and sickle, and think underneath it had the CPGB, Communist Party of Great Britain. CPGB, that's right. And people used to proudly wear them, you got on a bloody tram or be walkin' up the road somewhere and you'd see people with 'em. I remember at work, the young girls that used to work in the warehouse department wearing these badges with the Communist Party and that was about 1941, '42. So that was the flavour of the month, the Communist Party was in because they were seen as the direct allies of those blokes doin' all that fightin' over there in Russia.

I: Was there, did you talk about that at work amongst your work mates?

P: Oh yeah. I can remember there, there was a few popular songs going around in those days, Russian songs that they translate into English. And I remember the very catchy tunes and I can remember the girls all singin' these songs. They were actually Russian songs with English you know, translated into English. That's how popular they were and oh yes, it was very popular. What else was there? Well there was the talk amongst blokes there, 'cause I was only a young apprentice then, but the talk amongst the mature blokes there, the different blokes I worked with and there was quite a big factory. I suppose there 600 or 700 workers at the factory there, but in the maintenance area where I worked there, it was often the talk you know about how good the Russians are and you know about the Communist Party doing a bloody good job, which they were too.

I: Was there talk about what was happening in Russia, like Socialism?

P: Oh not a great amount, not a great amount. But I mean I wouldn't say it wasn't, it was discussed, but not in a great amount. The glory of the Russian soldiers fightin' on the front, beatin' the Germans. It was them beatin' the Germans, and the Germans were beatin' the bloody, the English. So that's about the thing of it. But as time went on a bit, it became more popular then, that what we'd witnessed in the 20's and 30's about the bloody unemployment, about the bloody rotten second class food we were all bloody eatin', rotten housing and so on and so forth, this come up there about, well Socialism is the answer. Socialism's goin' to cure these ills, you know, why should we be unemployed? We should all have bloody jobs, we should all have houses. And the only way we're goin' to do is Socialism. We've had hundreds of years of bloody Capitalism, I used to hear that in my own workshop amongst the plumbers there. That sort of thing, that sort of talk. Yeah so it was quite good. So that was about in the early 40's or so.

So during the war even, everything was so restricted you know, everything, food, transport, electricity, everything was restricted. I remember a couple of the leadin' lights of the Communist Party speakin' at our local big picture show there. Harry Pollitt, he was the General Secretary of the CP in England, also Willie Gallacher, he was from Scotland, he was a Member of Parliament. He was a speaker and another bloke there by the name of Stan Rush, who maybe people would never have heard of, 'cause he was a leading light, he was an intellectual in the Party. And he used to speak there, there was many others too. And many a time there I remember on the stage there, they would have the whole central committee of it, I think it was called the Central Committee. They'd have 30 blokes sittin' up there, men and women sittin' up there you know, but a full house.

I: Was this at a special meeting or was it actually at the pictures?

P: No, this was a special meetin' called by the Communist Party. They used to speak from, this is during the course of the war, from town to town, or not every town, but various areas where they would speak.

I: And they'd attract quite a big crowd would they? They'd attract a big crowd?

P: Yeah, oh yeah. 'Cause everyone was so interested. What was going on there with that bloody war you know, and we were gettin' bombed all the bloody time and Christ knows what you know, it was a very dangerous bloody situation, very dangerous indeed. We had bombs round our way, my aunty got killed in the next street with a bomb. She was cleanin' her house one morning, just like in the next street, like over there, and pfffff, that was the end of her. Good woman too, Lil. Yeah and that wasn't uncommon, there was houses every here and there around the place, you'd go two roads there, after the next mornin' there'd be three or four houses flattened down, people killed and Christ knows what. So, it was understandable how the attitude towards Russia became so intimate type of thing. Because of what was happening. The Russians were the only ones that was doin' anything then because we were gettin' belted like bloody hell and what was happenin' over here in Asia, after the Japanese come in the war, didn't have a great amount of bearing on anything. It was too far away, but it did eventually of course, but in the early days there, it wasn't of great significance.

I: So maybe if we talk a bit about then after you came out to Australia?

P: I left just on, late '49 yeah. Yes well when I came out, I was broke when I come out here. I had a brother out here and he'd been a seaman through the war 'cause the attraction I think, in the main, although it was an adventure comin' anywhere if you were going onto a ship for, I think he was paid 10 pound and that covered ya' costs from when you left England till you got to what part of Australia you were going to. The brother had been out here a couple of years, he was working in, oh Jesus Christ. He worked in Sydney there and he come up to Proserpine. He worked for, he worked at a place called the Dittmer Goldmines. I don't know if you remember Felix Dittmer, he was a Senator, Labour Party Senator. He was the owner of a goldmine just outside of Proserpine. They had a strike there and after the strike they went back to work and my brother got sacked, which is understandable. He would do a thing like that wouldn't he? So he went from there to Mt Isa and he worked at Mt Isa. In 1950, he was workin' in Mt Isa, that was the attraction why I came out to Australia. Plus the adventure and it only cost me 10 quid for all this lovely adventure and on a ship for what, six weeks or somethin'. Beautiful food, oh

God, never ate such food in me life. Even before I got to Mt Isa, I come to Adelaide there and I just had enough money to get from Adelaide to Alice Springs on the old, what do they call it? The old train there, I forget what they call it now but, terrible bloody train ride. No food or anything on the bloody train you know. They used to have a water bag hanging down at the end of each carriage and every time they stopped to get the water for the train, the loco, they filled the water bags up and of course the water bags would only be bloody available there for a very short distance because they were all emptied. And people lucky enough to have a bottle with them, empty beer bottle or something, they'd fill their bottle up and of course then you might have to go for an hour or two and it was a bloody heat wave was on. Heat wave was on and you'd be terribly thirsty.

Any rate I got to Alice Springs and the arrangement I had with me brother was, he was going to come from Mt Isa. He owned a motor bike and a sidecar, and he was goin' to come from Mt Isa, come down to Alice Springs and pick me up with me tools and Christ knows what and few, bit of gear. Any rate I got to Alice Springs, everyone got off the ruddy train, couldn't see him anywhere, any rate everyone disappeared. I was the only one on the station at Alice Springs. I thought Christ Almighty, what's happened? Something's happened. So, I was walkin' up and down and he wasn't around, so I lay down on the seat, I was nearly just about asleep I think, and a bloke come and woke me up, he was from the post office. He said, are you George Britten? I said yeah. Oh he said, we got a call from your brother. I said, yes he's goin' to pick me up. He said, he won't be pickin' you up mate, he said he's had an accident at Camooweal on his motorbike. Oh shit, I said. He said, but I tell you what he's done, he's sent 20 pound along for you. And that was a lot of money in 1950, 20 pound. Oh God, I was completely broke. I was completely broke. So I booked into the pub for a day or so and then I got a lift in one of the big semitrailers up to Tennant Creek. From Tennant Creek, I got a bus ride from there to Camooweal, I went to the hospital, found me brother and he was just ready to go and so things started comin' into shape by then. So then we made our way back to Mt Isa, he'd already arranged for a job for me 'cause they were after labour in those days and I think after I'd been there about one day, I went down and got a start straight away and I was there. I was right then.

And then of course what happened then was the, the lead bonus came in. And the lead bonus was quite a large sum of money based on the price of base metals I think, copper and lead, of what was being charged in England. the Britannia Smelting Company. That used to vary and every month there'd be a variation in the lead bonus. It got that way in the end in 1951, got that way there the lead bonus was much more than what your wages were for all workers. I think when we were gettin' about 11 pound a week as a tradesman, the lead bonus was 17 pound 50 and the mines wasn't goin' to cop that. They're not goin' to give all that money away, which they didn't, and I'll tell you about that later. But I joined the union as soon as I got to Mt Isa, within a week or two. And after about three or four weeks, we called a bit of a meetin' for some issue, I wouldn't know what it was, and they made me their delegate, their local delegate for Mt Isa. Which I had until I got sacked two years later.

But from there I got, there's only two organisations doing anything for workers in Mt Isa. One was the AW spew, as they used to call it, the AW spew. And the other one was the Communist Party. I joined the Communist Party, see a bloke named Eddie Harbrom which was the father of that was there the other night, Snow Harbrom. Wonderful bloke, got a photo of him there. And we worked there for two years, we were involved in everything, in the anti-Communist campaign, all sorts of leaflets would come round. We had good cooperation with the Brisbane

or Queensland Trades and Labour Council, Alex Macdonald was Secretary then. He came in after he got ousted from the Iron Workers Union in 1949 and we were in the throws, or trying to organise a provincial Trades and Labour Council in Mt Isa. And we got the full support from Brisbane, go ahead yeah, no worries there. And we were doing pretty good there, we were gettin' some good roll ups there and it looked like that within a matter of months we were settin' up the Provincial Council. Well it didn't work out that way, it ended up there that during the battle for the, this is the company, containing the rise of the lead bonus. They went to the Industrial Court in Brisbane, and they asked them to peg it. They said, we don't want to pay anymore. I think it was 17 pound 50 or something like that. And they refused to do that at that stage. So the company said, well, Mt Isa company, which is owned by the American Smelting Company, said well if you don't, they said we'll have to curtail some of our workers. We can't afford to keep payin' 'cause they were makin' billions of dollars. So, they picked out 200 workers, this is in the year 1952, picked out 200 workers and anyone that was involved in any of that settin' up of the Provincial Council of Unions got the sack. I remember there was four good boilermakers, four blokes come from Sydney, the four of them worked together in the shipyards up in Sydney. The four of them, and they were good boilermakers, the four of them got the sack. I got the sack and my co-delegate in Mt Isa, he got the sack too and two other blokes got the sack. So that curtailed just about the end of my activities in Mt Isa. Then I moved from there up to, into Townsville. In Townsville there I didn't stay ...

I: Can we just talk a bit more about Mt Isa? So you had also joined the Communist Party there?

P: I joined the Communist Party yeah.

I: How did that influence what you were doing at work?

P: Oh yes, quite a lot because Eddie Heilbron, I used to run these classes on political matter, you know political strategy and Christ knows what. About every four weeks we'd hold a class there, they used to get about 15 or 20 people along to these classes.

I: These'd be classes for your fellow workers?

P: Oh well blokes that were close to the Communist Party, oh yeah. None of these blokes there that were inclined to join the Provincial Labour Council, they were involved too. And Eddie Harbron, he was the spruiker there and he was a very clever bloke, well read bloke too. Very good on music and history, two of his good subjects, yeah music and history. And he worked his butt off you know. He was always doing something. He had a big family of his own, they were only young in those days. He had six, seven, six kids, six kids he had. I don't know how he ever found time to produce kids 'cause he was always workin' for the Communist Party.

I: So you'd have these meetings once a month I suppose?

P: Oh about once a month yes, but sometimes it might be a bit longer for some reason or another. But oh yeah, those early campaigns there of the anti-Communist bills coming through there, I mean we were gettin' bundles of leaflets comin' through all the time from Brisbane. You know sendin' them up from the Trades and Labour Council and everyday there'd be a big bundle of leaflets. 'Cause you had to get 'em out, which we did. What we didn't put round the mine site

or in the change rooms, we'd have to take 'em out at night time and do some of the houses. But we put thousands and thousands of bloody leaflets out at that stage of the game.

I: Did the company try and stop you from handing those leaflets out?

P: No, no, no. They worked differently, they worked secretly, they worked mainly through the, they worked through the AWU. They were their allies of course and all sorts of things were happening all the bloody time there with the AWU. I say there was only two organisations, the AWU or the Communist Party, there was no real activity by anyone, occasionally a union official would come down. The only two officials I ever seen there outside of the AWU was Kev Locklands of the BWIU, he was an organiser and Freddie Thompson. He was the Northern Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and Fred would come out there every so often. But in those days, people had to come, they came by train and if an organiser or something was comin' from Brisbane, he'd probably spend about three days bloody gettin' to Mt Isa you know. And that's why, one of the reasons why it restricted things.

I: So your attempt to sort of set up a regional Trades and Labour Council was actually to try and build the strength of the other unions ...

P: Yes exactly.

I: Relative to the AWU.

P: Exactly yeah. Well the AWU they done some crook bloody things there, you know they certainly had the strength, they had the numbers. I suppose 90% of the workers in Mt Isa are members of the AWU that worked at the mine. And the other 10% were from various, all sorts, you had Carpenter's Union, Painters Union, the bloody Metal Workers and some Boilermakers and all that sort of thing, Plumbers. We had about 32 plumbers there I think at that time, that was quite a large number.

I: Would there have been Communist Party members in those other unions too?

P: Yeah there was and also there was a couple from the Railway Unions 'cause they used to run a train up there twice a week. There was two, there was a couple of blokes there from the Railway Union and they had a few women that was in the Party too up there. A lot of these people come from Melbourne, they'd been active down there in unions and in the Communist Party and so on and so forth, and they come to Mt Isa and of course attracted by the big bonuses that was being paid to the workers there. So naturally enough they attracted all sorts of workers and they were in the Party there and it was quite good too. It had quite a bit of strength there at one stage.

One of the incidents there which I'll never forget was, two incidents. After I'd been there a short period of time, a matter of weeks, I went to a picture show that used to run at the Star Theatre, it was two nights a week, Friday and Saturday and they used to get a full house. You know the old theatres there with the canvas chairs and the big sloping floor and I remember the kids up the back there, they'd get these empty bloody soft drink bottles and they'd put them in the aisle and roll them down the bloody aisles you know. They did everything to try and cut it out, but that was one of the humorous things that used to happen. But one of the things that

wasn't humorous was that in front of all these canvas chairs there was four rows going from that lot and that lot, four rows of wooden stalls I think you'd call them. Wooden stalls, they were reserved for Aborigines and the Aborigines weren't allowed to sit in the canvas chairs. But I remember I was there one Friday night and I was sittin' there and all of a sudden a couple of kids got up and looked around, and they saw it was clear, and there was a woman there that used to act as the, one in charge of puttin' people, tellin' people where to sit on that side or that side and so and so. These couple of kids got up and they sneaked up the side there, up about 20 or 30 seats I suppose, and they got into a canvas chair, which was a white man's chair. And all of a sudden she got to know this, someone must have pointed it out. She come up there and she was standin' in front of 'em, come on, back there, back there and hunted them back onto the wooden seats. And that was my first taste of racism I'd ever had in my life when that happened. And the owner of the theatre was a member of parliament, Norman Smith, Labour Party bloke and he owned the theatre. See?

A little while later I remember a delegation came back from Warsaw, a Peace Delegation. It was to be held in London but they cancelled it out and they shifted it quickly to, I think it was 1951, shifted to Warsaw. Two delegates from Queensland who I remember, there was a bloke named Des Eaden, he was the Secretary of the Ex-Servicemen's Association and also a bloke named Gordon Horn. Right, well Des Eaden, when you got to Darwin in the plane, he decided to come to Mt Isa, they arranged for him to hold a meetin' there at the Star Theatre. We booked the Star Theatre for one night outside of when the movies was showin', that was going okay. And on that night it was to be held, he cancelled, they shut the doors of the theatre and wouldn't let us in. They cancelled the bloody meetin' 'cause it was a peace meetin' see. So what they done, this was Eddie Harborn, the Party Secretary, he hurried and got a big flat top truck and across the road from the Star Theatre runs the Leichhardt River and on this side of the Leichhardt River was a sort of a picnic, big picnic area. And up on the big pole, telegraph pole there, there's a power switch that was used for the amenities there on these picnics. So what we were able to do was to, well this was our idea, to plug the speaker apparatus into this power thing and hold this meeting which was cancelled at the Star Theatre and hold it on the flat top truck. Now what happened? Our local member of parliament, who is the owner of the Star Theatre, who controls the electricity once it's produced by Mt Isa Mines, all the electricity goes over the Leichhardt River, he controlled it, our Labour Member of Parliament. He cut the switch, he cut the power off in the main street so we couldn't hold it. But we did hold it, with lights and candles and bloody torches and Christ knows what. It made it very difficult, but that's what he done. And this was the local member of parliament, Norman Smith, 1951, Mt Isa and what a nice character. He was a very, he was a bosom pal of a bloke named Vince Gair. They were bosom pals. They share the same political ideology, I know that. Oh Jesus Christ. Yeah that was some of the excitement that was there, because where there's action there's always reaction. And all this generated a reaction because we'd got leaflets out about it and let everyone know who the owner of the picture show is, who turfed us out, what about the Aboriginal kids that were thrown back onto the wooden seats? We printed all that stuff and of course after that, time was gettin' on and so that's when the sackings come on.

I: So when you say you printed it, did you put out leaflets?

P: Oh yeah. We included it within our leaflet. The Party used to put out a leaflet called The Plot. Good name for it. And on this leaflet it had in big red letters, Plot. Eddie Harborn used to do all this work, poor bugger. And we used to put that out and God, they were sort after, you know

we didn't put out enough for everyone, we put them out in the change rooms in the mine sites 'cause I was workin' underground. They put them out in the change room in the smelter and other places there, but everyone was after 'em, after these Plots. They were very interesting, very good, told you all about who owned their mines and about what's going on, all the corruption that was bloody goin' on and so on and so forth. So yeah everyone got to know all about what was goin' on.

I: How did you work out what you put in that Plot?

P: Well I wasn't responsible, Eddie Heilbronn run, he was the technician, he done all that, about what was goin' on politically through and out places.

I: Would you have a discussion to talk about, you know well let's have an article on this?

P: Oh yeah. When we held a meetin' Eddie would say, well look what I've got lined up for the next Plot to come out next Thursday or some bloody thing, I'm going to write up about so and so and so and so and we're goin' to put in about this and we've got a couple of good articles from so and so and some from the railway. One of the railway workers has given us this article about the railway. And Eddie had one of those old flatbeds what they used to print with and he used to do all this on his own, poor bugger. But any rate we'd get 'em out there and we'd pick 'em up about 6:00 in the mornin', 7:00 before the shift started and go and put 'em out in the change rooms around the mine site. There was a lot of activity going on even in a place like Mt Isa in those days you know because the issues were there and of course ...

I: Did you have, as well as these sort of study classes, did you have actual Party meetings where you ...

P: Oh God yeah.

I: Can you tell me a bit about them?

P: Oh well they were more or less along the lines there of discussing what the political issues were, how glorious the Soviet Union was and so on and so forth. Which it was in those days of course because it was doing what it was, you know about the war. Well it was after the war rather and that was just when the anti-Communist campaign was being waged you see, I think it was about 1950, '51 wasn't it? The anti-Communist ...

I: So a lot of your concentration in the Party meetings would have been on that campaign?

P: Oh yeah. There was another campaign going I remember now around that same time. I don't remember all the dates, about 1950, '51, '52 was the Ban the Bomb Campaign, it came from Sweden. I think it was ban the atom bomb. And on Sunday morning, Christ Almighty we were busy. We'd be going round selling bloody Guardians and Tribunes one week, and the next week we'd go round getting signatures on a bloody petition for something and then there'd be something about Ban the Bomb petitions. That went on for quite a few weeks, or few months I suppose, about banning the bomb for the, I think the original idea came from Sweden didn't it? Any rate I don't know how successful that was, but there was always plenty to do and very seldom would you say, well I've got nothing to do today, because there'd be a thousand bloody

things to do. You know there was so much to do in a place like that and so few people to do it. Any rate in 1952 I was really going well there too and I got notice up, they reckoned they could mine bloody copper and lead without me, so they sacked me. Yeah and I came to ...

I: That was basically a deliberate policy of getting rid of all the people who were trying to organise ...

P: Oh well that's what they done yeah. When they rejected the Industrial Court, when they put an application in to curtail the bonus, that 17 pound 50 or whatever it was, they said that if this is not agreed to, we must have curtail our work people. They said, because we can't afford it, and they were making billions. So within a couple of weeks, 200 were sacked, Eddie Heilbronn, quite a few other people, quite a few other people. The other people, the ones they didn't sack, I had a brother workin' there in the mines, he wasn't an electrician but he was an electrician's offsider or something like that, he wasn't in the Party, but he was quite good. But they didn't sack him, not till later. Yeah so that was the situation and from there, I came to Townsville and the first bloke I met in Townsville was a bloke by the name of Dick Anear. He was working for the Communist Party then and then he became a, he went back into the Meatworks after that. Yeah so I didn't spend a long time in Townsville, I came to Brisbane then and then in Brisbane there I went out to, I lived out at Chermside. Met a bloke there by the name of, I don't know if you ever met him, you might not have met him, Merv Young.

I: Merv Young. Yeah I actually knew him because he was in the campaign against Nuclear Power in the 1970's.

P: Yeah, yeah, good bloke and his wife too, Pam and Merv. They were the first people I met here sort of thing, of any description. Yeah then I became involved in the, she was the sister of the girl Henderson, Jimmy Henderson's wife. Yeah they're very great people, Merv and Pam, I really love those people. Wonderful people, I stayed with them a few days and they were so wonderful. And then I become absorbed in the Eureka Youth League.

I: So when did you get involved in that?

P: Oh probably just 19 months after I probably, or weeks after I arrived in Brisbane. And that was very good, of course as a young person there, you're mixing with young blokes and young girls and that sort of thing, so plus the politics of it all. And a lot of it was socialising and that sort of thing and meetin's we held and so and so. We didn't do much actual political canvassing. A couple of times there we got involved in the elections there, we'd speak in the Communist Party elections and that sort of thing. That was good. A woman by the name of Betty Thomas was the, or Betty Kerr as she was, she was the Secretary of the Eureka Youth League there in 1950, '51, '52.

So whatever was going, I sort of tried to become involved in. 'Cause that was my interest. I got involved with the union of course soon after I got here and that was a big letdown. Oh gees the plumbers here now. Yeah it wasn't very interesting at all but I kept it up for 50 odd years. Well I started to go to the meetin's here in early 1950 and I stopped when I retired from work, I made that me last meeting then. But I was involved all the time with the union and the Trades and Labour Council, I was a delegate for about 20 odd years in the Trades and Labour Council. No, 25 years I think in the Labour Council and for a while on the Building Trade Group and

Building Trade Group Picnic Committees and Christ knows what and Education Committees and Christ knows. Yeah so those days the building industry used to have a picnic, an annual picnic down at the beach down near Sandgate there, every year. And that was quite involved, I used to be collecting money for that and got caught up with, you know doing it on the job and they wanted to sack me and Christ knows what and all sorts of things happened there. But I was kept busy all the time involved with the party, plus going to Party meetings and anything else that was on of any interest.

I: So being, can you talk a bit about being in the Party, what sort of commitment did that involve for you? Almost complete commitment of your life, that's the sense that I get.

P: Yes, that'd be the strength of it. That's all there was. And my wife, Imelda, she was a member of the Party too, which made it a lot easy and we only got together, we got together about 1954 I think it was, 1954 we come together. I met her and we got together and 'cause she was an Englart, that was the Communist Party family and so everything was sweet there.

I: So being in the Party really meant committing your life to politics.

P: You never had much time to do things other than that, not that I wanted to do other things than doing that. Saturday mornin' was, Imelda and I, we used to sell newspapers down at the Gabba or Stones Corner, not every week by any stretch of the imagination. Put out leaflets around these houses and around where we used to live in Coorparoo, around there. All sorts of things like that yeah, petitions and Christ knows what you'd carry it out. Then we'd get involved with the bloody, over the Peace Committees and Christ knows what, so between the Eureka Youth League, the Communist Party, the Trade Unions, we were kept pretty busy but we didn't have much time to scratch ourself even. But that was normal. But it was good, it was good, we loved it. We wouldn't have had it any other way, wouldn't have had it any other way.

I: What sort of philosophy did you get from the Party about your, you know working in your workplace or in the community and so on?

P: Oh well the first thing was there, I suppose we had the primary education of growing up in the Depression and that's a good basis there, that whatever you get it's going to better than this. We're going to eat decent bloody food 'cause everyone eats decent food in Australia, or the majority of people do. I wouldn't say everyone. And that was the big thing that we accomplished, having proper food, living in a proper home, you know with all the amenities and so on and so forth. And we always thought we believed Socialism was inevitable, the Soviet Union was, you know was up there with the Gods and what the Soviet Union said must be right. And of course we used to take everything as being right in those days and if you read early literature of the Communist Party, you'll find that is so. This is how they thought and how they spoke. You justified everything that was crook. I remember them justifying, you know what happened in, where was it? In Hungary, yeah. The Party just justified that and I remember one big meeting we went to in the Trades Hall, 'cause they had some big meetin's then, 500 people, you know members of the Party there in those days, in the early '50s there. And they justified, and there was a campaign on about the military trials they had for officers in 1937 in the Soviet Union. And they put a lot of them to death as traitors or something of Socialism sort of thing. And the Party was able to, through its leadership, blokes like Claude Jones, who's Imelda's cousin, family, and who was the other great leader there? Ted Baker, they were good,

terrific blokes but they were carrying out this Soviet line and you know they were quite justified in doing what they had to do to these people there because they were enemies of the state. And you know they were opposed to Socialism, well they probably was, I got married, but we believed all that sort of stuff. You look back on it now and you think, oh Christ Almighty, we didn't criticise it too bloody much, 'cause we didn't know much. We just took that everything they said was okay.

Those days there, they often had delegates to the Soviet Union there from the union movement, from different unions there. And they came back there, with usually glorious tales. The only person I have first heard that had criticism of the Soviet Union that spent time there, was Hughie Hamilton. He come back and he was really critical about what he'd seen and what he'd experienced. And he thought, he said a lot of changes, this is long before they got overthrown, a lot of changes have to be made because he said there won't be Socialism. He said the way going on, you know the bureaucracy and everything like that. Other people come back with glorious reports, you know all roses and cream and Christ knows what. Everyone was happy, well that was all bullshit you know. But, oh great experiences. I suppose if I had me time over again I would have done the same thing 'cause it was most enjoyable and of course the quality of the people that I worked with and associated with. They were all dedicated people you know, people that thought that Capitalism wasn't the system that we should be living under. We should be living under a system where there's no exploitation, and no unemployment, everyone's got housing, people have got jobs, people are looked after, good health and so and so. That was what we were aiming for. We thought we were going to achieve all that, but we didn't achieve it at all.

I: What about working, like political work, you know how the Party had a, that sort of phrase of political work. How did you see that as being, can you expand a bit on what that meant to you?

P: Whatever they said I agreed with. I was fully trained. No, I don't think I ever disagree with anything, what the Party said. It's going out to, taking leaflets out to some people, talking to people on the street, selling papers, getting petitions signing, speaking up at union meetings about you know the policy we should be on and so on and so forth.

I: So you were encouraged to do that sort of thing?

P: Oh Christ yeah. We were all encouraged. Not everyone took it up, but I certainly did and blokes like Hughie Hamilton, oh Jesus Christ he was, Hughie was in everything that opened and shut. And we had a great, the Communist leadership of the BWIU was the leadership of the Trades and Labour Council. It was the BWIU that done everything. They come up with all the ideas in the bloody world and in the building industry, there wouldn't have been a building industry union without the BWIU. They done all the leadership, the other unions only flowed and followed behind them. Well the other, I should qualify that a bit. At one stage, the early stages there, the Painters Union was quite good with Jack Hanson, he was a member of the Communist Party and Cyril Boland, they were quite good. And then Jack died and I think, I forget, Jack Bagus [0:53:51.2] became Secretary of the Painters Union. But it never had the same punch as what it had when Jack Hanson was there. But these blokes were very good. Hanson, Dawson and them, on the Trades and Labour Council, were the political stuff that came out. Everything that they brought up there, they used to do a lot of work to get all this stuff ready for the Trades and Labour Council meetings 'cause Trades and Labour Council was

one of the biggest propaganda allies that we had. And on a Wednesday night we had these meetin's once a fortnight, there'd be the press outside, there'd be a bloke from the Telegraph, there'd be a bloke from the Courier and they'd want to get statements from Alex Macdonald about what resolutions were passed about this and that. And in many cases, if not all, they'd be printed in the Courier Mail and the Telegraph the next day about the policy of the Labour Council, what they were after, what they were doing, and what they'd achieved and so on and so forth. So they were busy all the time.

I: So those Labour Council meetings were, it sounds like they were a very grass roots Democratic sort of organisation.

P: Oh yeah.

I: So you'd go along as a representative from your union and people would be arguing the case back and forward about what should be done.

P: There wasn't great arguments, there was differences of opinion, but generally speaking everyone was in line with the militant policy that was going on all the time 'cause they were carrying out a very militant policy all the time for many years. And I wouldn't say that everyone agreed with what came up, but there was a lot of excellent discussion, healthy discussion. But amendments were being made and Christ knows what about this and which way to approach it to involve her and so on and so forth. But usually there when the Labour Council came up and they called for a stop work meetin' next Wednesday about certain issues, you know annual leave, long service leave or something else, it was always unanimously agreed with by the unions that were there. And some of those unions were of the right too, they weren't all left wing unions, but the majority of 'em were left wing unions in those days, in the 50's and 60's. Yeah that was quite good.

I: When you look at the, all those Communist Party activists, like Eddie Heilbronn and you've named quite a few of them, including yourself and your other comrades, what was it about the Communist Party that led people to be carrying out such a sort of committed, concerted sort of activity.

P: Well it was the commitment to Socialism. And the leader of Socialism was the Soviet Union and then of course China came into it didn't they in 1949, 1950. But mainly it was the commitment to Socialism. They were sending blokes, blokes were going from here quite frequently to the Soviet Union. They'd send say half a dozen blokes from different unions or different parts of the state, would go to the Soviet Union there. These were the blokes that were gonna be brainwashed, that's my words, not theirs, brainwashed to when they come back, they were gonna fight for Socialism too. Because they were gonna also be the ones that's going to lead the Socialist revolution in Australia, the blokes that were going to the Soviet Union. Sometimes people went to the Soviet Union for six months or nine months at a time. I know quite a few that went there for long periods of time. These were the blokes that come back as leaders.

I: But even the people who didn't go to the Soviet Union, like yourself ...

P: I never went, no.

I: You were still committed to Socialism.

P: Oh Christ yeah.

I: So there was something deep in people's commitment that made them work day in, day out every day right through their lives.

P: Of course for the glories of Socialism and plus what we'd experienced through the 20's and 30's through the Depression. We don't want Capitalism because this is what it brings, because we were at the bloody tail end of all the crap that people copped. All over, not only in England, but Australia too, unemployment, Christ knows what. In England thousands and thousands of people are unemployed and haven't been employed for bloody years, living on bloody bread and bloody dripping and Christ knows what. And people never even had a bloody home. And so, they made up their mind there that Socialism was the answer. The leader of Socialism is the Soviet Union, that's why we support the Soviet Union. That's what it was all about, yeah. And people, even people today still die hard about, you know the Socialist society which I don't think they may see it, I hope they do see it one day friend, but it'll be a lot different to what we had forecast because there'll be too much bloody bureaucracy. But any rate that was it, the experience of the 20's and 30's I'd say was one of the main factors, plus the glorious bloody campaign put on by the Soviet Union after they'd been attacked by bloody Germany and they were the incentives you know to get people going. And today people are still talking about Socialism, yeah.

I: What are your thoughts today about Socialism?

P: Well unfortunately I don't think in its old form it can't work. But there's certainly a lot can work, a lot of things can be state owned. A lot of the things can be greatly improved, more Democracy and even our parliaments and so and so, more representation of ordinary people in parliament. And you know it's bureaucratically controlled now, we know what's going on state wide and what's going on federal wide, we're aware of all that, what's going on, but there's room for great changes. You know there's, I mean there's groups still fighting to do all this, to change society from its present being, you know. Oh no, quite good.

I: Some other things you wanted to say?

P: Yeah might not. In the early days before I left England there, where I lived in the eastern part of London, one area called Mile End is an area with a big population of Jewish people. And it's mainly where all the sewing machines were and the clothing was made and Christs knows what. And they told me, it became a big Jewish area and an area for clothes manufacturing, because they couldn't get out and get jobs in industry because of their background and being Jews, this is going back a few bloody years. It's very difficult to get established anywhere else outside of the clothing industry where they could work from home. But it became a big Jewish area, Mile End, and of course with the glorious work of the Soviet Union, and what they done beatin' the Germans and it was the Soviet Union there, Soviet soldiers that liquidated the Germans from the concentration camps and released all the prisoners, the Soviet Union was way up there. Couldn't do a thing wrong. Well in 1930, I think about 1949, elections were being held in England and Scotland and the local Council had 13 Councillors and when they returned, when

the ballot was over, this is for Council elections, 11 of the 13 were members of the Communist Party. One bloke became the Member of Parliament, Phil Piratin. He become the Member of Parliament and the other Communist Party bloke was, who everyone knew of, Willie Gallacher, he was miner you know from western Scotland, from the 30's onward. But the two of them were both Communists and they were in Parliament but there was 11 of 13 Councillors were members of the Communist Party.

I: What year would that have been?

P: 1949 I think.

I: Just after you left.

P: Oh before I left I think. At Mile End, that was in, they had a terrific influence there the Jewish people, and of course that all changed as time went on as we know. But that was the situation then in 1949, I think about 1948 or '49. I might be wrong there, I'm only guessing, but that's about the date. Yeah, before I left in 1950 any rate. Yeah so the Party then had a great influence over, on what was going on politically. And of course they had some great bloody speakers too and so many union leaders were joined from the, given the Labour Party away and joined the Communist Party through the years. Through the war years and in all sorts of things, especially in the metal industries and the mining industry, they were all members of the Communist Party.

I: Just one last thing. Just in terms of how you worked amongst your fellow workers, is there any more things you want to say about how that was actually informed or influenced by your membership of the Party?

P: How the workers were influenced by it?

I: How you worked with them, or what is being in the Party, how did that lead you to interact with your fellow workers?

P: No problems at all, no problems at all. The thing was there that it was mainly party people that was doing anything on bloody jobs any rate. Of all the jobs I had, and I did calculate them, I think there was about 45 jobs or 45 employers I've worked for. I've probably got sacked from about 40 of 'em and left about five on me own. The last job I had workin' for the State Government, I lasted 20 years. They couldn't sack you there because you know we were well organised and so on and so forth and they didn't want the eruption to take place if you sacked a union delegate. But oh no, it was, there was no competition. Usually on most jobs I went, or you go to, I would probably be, in my situation, the only one that's doing anything. I'd go onto a job and get a start and straight away you've got to consolidate your position, that you can do the work that you're supposed to be doing, the plumbing work, okay. But in between time, I'm checking out the rotten conditions on the job and they're all rotten conditions and anything else about members of the union. See if everyone's in the union which I always done and I'd check all this out for a week, couple of weeks, and then I'd get meself elected as delegate. I'd call a meeting, even get a union organiser down here which was difficult at times. If not I'd bloody get 'em to elect me and then I'd notify the union I'd been elected. That saved them coming down there 'cause they didn't like coming down doing jobs like that.

And so then, next thing I'd do would be check with the other unions, the Carpenter's union, the Painter's Union, the Plasterer's Union, the Bricklayers Union and so on and so forth, see if we can get someone to represent 'em as a delegate on the job. If you were able to get say four or five of the seven trades, there'd be enough there to call a meetin' and elect a Job Committee and if you got the Job Committee, it was good. It was good. This wasn't always successful, sometimes it was. And then you'd work from there. Had no trouble at all. I never used to broadcast the fact that I was a member of the Communist Party, but everyone knew. I mean people, they knew what I was, well I put out Communist leaflets, I'd collect your money on petitions for strikers and so on and so forth.

And I remember on one job there years ago, working out at Chermside. They were building a bit shopping centre at Chermside, it's still there today I think. That was in 1955 and I had a petition, I was collecting money for strikers at, what's that mine up there, just this side of Townsville? Oh what's the name of it? Can't think of it, not Scotsfield. Collinsville, Collinsville. The miners were on strike there, they'd been out for weeks, the Labour Council put out petitions, I went round with the petitions, wasn't doing too good. And just not far from where we were working, there was a contractor there, a painting contractors. They were all Italians, well they appeared to be, they all spoke Italian at any rate. There was about 15 of 'em and I thought well I'm going down there to see if I can get their name on a petition, so you know I thought I might get the arse. But I went down there and as I walked in there, this was at lunchtime and a big bloke said, what you want mate? I said, I've got a petition. Petition, what about? I said I'm collecting money for strikers in Collinsville. Oh leave it here, I'll fix it up. Come back later. I thought that's the bloody end of that isn't it? So any rate I went back later, I think it was smoko, yeah later in the afternoon, this bloke he had the list with everyone's name on it. And they all donated money, they all donated to the Collinsville strikers and you could have knocked me down with a bloody feather. And I thought, Jesus Christ, he's going to tear it up and throw it at me or something like that.

I: That's a great story. So all that sort of organising that you did, that was because you got that ability because you were in the Communist Party?

P: Yeah, oh yeah. They learned me how to talk, I couldn't talk before. When I first went to union meetin's here I was that nervous I couldn't say a bloody word. But I tell you one humorous incident. When we were in Townsville and I worked there for two years, I worked at the copper refinery there and they sacked me of course. And Eddie Harborn and I decided one week, it was about 1959, they had a pile in the office, Party Office in Townsville, they had a pile of Italian newspaper, what do they call that, the newspaper? L'Unita Comunista, the newspaper. And the Secretary of North Queensland, Frank Bishop was away overseas. I think he went to the Soviet Union and he had all these bloody newspapers, that were piling up. I don't know if they come every week or every fortnight or what, but Eddie Heilbronn seen them piled like that and he said, we can't let them go to waste. What we'll do, we'll take them up to Ingham, where the Italians are, or the bulk of the Italians are and we'll distribute them. So I drove him up there, he never had a car, Eddie, I drove him up there and he gave me a big pile and he took a big pile like that and he says, well look, what we want to do, you go to that hotel there and I'll go to the hotel at the top and you distribute these. I said what do you mean distribute, how can I? I can't speak Italian. He said, you don't have to, he said, all you do, he said, you just call out, L'Unita Comunista and he said, you'll sell 'em. And I said, what bullshit that is. Any rate I went into

the pub there and they appeared to be all Italians, it was about midday I think on a Saturday. And I went in there, brave as I was, L'Unita Comunista. And they all look, L'Unita yeah, yeah. Got rid of the lot of 'em. I went right through the hotel and got rid of all of them, no trouble. And before I could get out of the hotel, a big group started standin' around me. I thought, what the hell's this, what's goin' on? Hey, and they're going, tellin' me something in Italian and they didn't seem very polite about it. And a bloke came next day, he said, hey you know what mate, they criticising you? I said, no, why are they doing? He said, you sell some of these papers, they're three months old. We never looked at the bloody dates of 'em. I don't know what we charged 'em, must have been a very small amount you know, but had no trouble sellin' the Communist Party newspaper to the Italians. He said, shit they don't agree with it. Yeah three months old some of them. Yeah that was one of the humorous things that happened up there. They wasn't physical in anyway like that, they were never ready to hit me or anything like that. Run through me, what I've written down. Street sellin', Imelda and I used to sell Communist Party newspapers at Stones Corner and sometimes at the Gabba, we'd sell them there. We had Communist Party classes down the Gold Coast in the early days. I'd have a few days off from work, sickies, and we'd go down there and have classes down there. Townsville I worked at the copper refinery, I was the President of the bloody Job Committee there and I was there for two years till I got sold. But one of the things that happened there was, we were fightin' to get try and get a bonus for the workers in the copper refinery, because the copper refinery was part of Mt Isa mines. They got a bonus in Mt Isa for producing copper, we didn't get a bonus for bloody refinin' it at the refinery. So we had the help of blokes like Freddie Thompson and Kev Lochlan, they were on the side with us. So any rate what happens there that we were campaigning and the AWU were opposin' us. They were opposin' us. But they what they done, they had a secret agreement with the employers, to accept, not the bonus which was about nine or $10 a week or pounds or whatever it was in those days, 1959. They agreed to tradesmen gettin' two pound a week, process workers 30 shillings and labourers a pound. And when we found out they'd bloody agreed with it, like we would have cut their bloody throat. So when we went to get the wages the next week when they introduced this, they had the wages, you got your wages in a little sealed package, like an envelope. They also had the copper bonus in another little tiny package, a little envelope. When we found out, we used to line up at the office and get them, and when we come out the office there, see a big queue would line up to get their wages 2:00 in the afternoon. When we come out of there, we see what's happened, we didn't know anything about this, this is your copper refinery bonus. We decided there that we wouldn't, what we'd do, we'd take it back to 'em, give it back to 'em. So, when everyone got their wages, either that day or the next day, we held a meetin' and we said, we won't accept this, we wanted the full bonus, what they're gettin' at the Isa. 'Cause what the copper refinery was tellin' us, this doesn't belong to the Isa. We're independent of Mt Isa. Like bloody hell they were, they're part of Mt Isa Mines. So any rate, what we done is, we decided to go back, so we decided, must have been two days afterwards. We all lined up again at the office at 2:00 in the afternoon and we all took our envelope of money in and we got a signed receipt and a couple of women there and the bloke, they were flat out writin' these receipts out for the return of the money. Halfway through, the boss of the copper refinery came and said to us, what's going on, what's all this queue for? He says, he told 'em, oh they can't do that, they can't do that. They said we've agreed to it. This is an agreement we have with 'em, with the unions. Not with the unions, with the AWU they had an agreement with. So what they done, they destroyed the campaign, the AWU's destroyed the campaign that we were in a very fortunate position at the time of grabbin' this bonus same as Mt Isa. It was destroyed by the AWU.

The AWU put out a crook leaflet and I mention blokes like Kev Lochland and Freddie Thompson and what's his name? Jimmy Fay, he was the Secretary of the Meat Workers Union. And a few other, I think it mentioned me too in this bloody thing, the pamphlet, and I'm sorry, it wasn't. It was a production put out by the local newspaper, but it was written by the AWU because we, the AW delegate that worked at the refinery, he wasn't a bad bloke. He worked with us and he told me, he said, you know that crook leaflet they've been puttin' out, he told me, he said, the AWU put that out. He said because they gave me a draft copy and they asked me if I wanted to add anything to it because he was the AWU delegate on the job. And he said, no I've got nothing to add. And they gave it to the Townsville newspaper, what is it, the Townsville Gazette or what it was. And they produced it, not of any mention of where it originated from and so they used the AWU, or the AWU was part and parcel of the establishment of course, and that was why.

They had a bloke up there, he was the organiser for the AWU, he was a shocker. He was a shocker. Oh gosh almighty he was a shocker. Everything that we done, he wouldn't allow the AWU to come into any of our meetings, he wouldn't even talk to us, he'd just say, no I don't want to talk to you blokes. I don't want to talk to you blokes, he used to say and oh it's terrible. But any rate even without him, we got on and we done quite well there and then of course, things were really going well, then of course they come out there and they decided to sack myself and my co-delegate, sack the pair of us. So both of us got sacked because I had the family up there in Townsville too, so we ended up, we had to, they had to come back on a plane and I drove the car back eventually and come back to Brisbane. We had nowhere to go, we had to live with the in-laws for a while. Yeah so a lot of things were going on all the bloody time but Jesus Christ, can't really follow. Yeah Oswald Mosley, yeah we done with that rotten bastard. Petition signin'. Yeah the paint-ups, we done a lot of paint-ups everywhere, paintin' and that sort of thing. So we were at it all the time. At it all the time and doin' this, doin' that, whatever came along, we looked at puttin' bloody, especially puttin' leaflets out. God Christ that was a hard job. Walkin' the bloody streets, putting bloody leaflets out. Like standin' in the shoppin' centre puttin' leaflets, gettin' names on petitions and Christ knows what.

I: You mentioned one of the guys who was in the party who was in the Return Services Leagues, RSL.

P: He was in the Legion of Ex-Servicemen. I don't know the actual origin of it, but the Legion of Ex-Servicemen was one where Communists belonged to. Vince Englart, 'cause he's not with us anymore, I know he was a keen member, but the Secretary was Des Eaton, a bloke by the name of Des Eaton. And he had a brother named Lenny Eaton who was a very active member of the Builders Labourers Union.

P: The only thing was the Communists within the RSL would have had a hard time. They wouldn't have had the slightest influence on their policy, wouldn't have been able to get onto any committees or anything like that that's making policy. They would have made sure there that that didn't happen. Or they would have expelled 'em. If they found out they were actually a member of the Party, they would have expelled 'em, oh yes. A bloke that I'd been seeing, he was a bloke that fought in New Guinea, got dysentery and bloody malaria, yeah. And they went through a bad time up there and any rate he come back and he was pretty crook there and he eventually got himself up and got over it alright. But he was only one of many, but the other thing about Vince Englart, as a Communist there, he had the right, him and his brother Kevin,

had the right to sit for the Public Service examination and go to university. Oh they went to university and they both qualified, both qualified, no trouble, they were brilliant. Brilliant scholars the pair of 'em, and they sat for the Public Service examination, they passed with flying colours, they put in to become teachers. Vince's was on Science and his brother Kevin, in Mathematics. And they eventually got notification back that they, some **B**oard, whatever the Board was that was responsible for this, they said, because of your background, we could not employ you teachin' in our schools. And Vince had been through everything in bloody hell and he was a brilliant bloody scholar, he was a sort of a working class intellectual. And so was his brother Kevin, Kevin had mastered in Maths and Vince in Science and they wouldn't, Vince ended up, he couldn't get a job anywhere.

I: That's why he ended up as a builder's labourer?

P: Builder's labourer, it's the only thing he could get. They wouldn't employ him anywhere, oh he was persecuted alright. Oh Jesus Christ he was, he went for some jobs there and they, it might last two or three days. They'd say, out. We can't have you, you're on the black list, you know which he was too. But not only him on the black list, but I'll tell you what, his son was on the black list. When his son was a 12 year old boy, Vince knew everything, he read every bloody thing. He taught him about the conjuring tricks. How they do 'em you know because he knew, Vince knew all that sort of thing. He had one trick there, he used to make the boy disappear and that was only one of many. But any rate, the organisation at that time was the Australian Soviet Society I think it was called.

I: Soviet Friendship Society.

P: Friendship Society. They had a big social one night they organised, and Vince got his boy to come along and do some conjuring tricks, magic. I seen it, he was pretty good this kid. And years later, when Vince got a dossier from the Secret Police here, the 12 year old boy's name was on there. This is the son of Vincent Englart and it gave his full name, Rodney so and so Englart, goes to so and so school, lives at 11 Cook Street, Red Hill, so and so, so and so. He was 12 year old when he appeared on the bloody, on the crook list. Yeah, they were good. They're still there. Wear hard hats, yeah we won that one. Probably lost more than we won. No, it was a great life's experience. I suppose if I had me time over again, I'd go through the whole thing again.

I: Well that struggle over hard hats, I mean that's a pretty key struggle.

P: Yeah but I tell you what? And that was about the hard hats, and it was the Plumbers Union that was in the forefront of this, with the help of blokes like Vince Englart who done all that digging down there, down below. I wrote out a copy of this and I gave it to our Union Secretary, 'cause it was a very significant thing. Very significant when we won those hats. When the bastards said, no we refuse. Well they wouldn't have anything, see there was no conditions on the job, most jobs in 1960. You know washing up conditions, you'd wash under a hose tap or a hose, there was no change room. And sometimes the toilet might a bloody, one of the old outback type of thing with a pan dug out the back. Terrible. I was workin' on a job out there at, near Goodna, out near there and it was a Government, building for the Government. It was for some juvenile children and the builder was a European and he wasn't too conversant with English and

everything. They had a toilet there, one of the old outboxes, what do they call those old outboxes?

I: Thunder boxes.

P: Thunder boxes, I knew it was rotten and it was the middle of summer and it was rotten. And you know what he had for paper? What he used to do, he used to pull the insides out of cement bags, the clean brown sheet, take 'em home and his wife used to cut 'em in strips, about a foot long and six inches wide. He'd bring them back there and he'd put 'em on the nail in this little toilet. I found that, I wasn't workin' for him, I was workin' for a subcontractor. I thought Jesus bloody Christ, oh no, so I got one of the organisers to come there. I think it was, it might have been Kev Lochland, come down there, have a look at it, and take some camera shots of this bloody toilet and an old bit of corrugated iron on the top. It was hot as hell if you had to go in there. And that was the only place to relieve yourself at all. Cement bags. Anything goes in those days. This is about 1965 or something like that you know when I worked for this bloke. Oh Jesus Christ.

But most of the jobs there, there was no such things as washing up facilities, no proper toilet, there might be one toilet for about 150 bloody men. You know what state that would get in. Sometimes there on jobs, also, I remember workin' in the early days in, when they were buildin' the first nurses quarters on the South Brisbane Hospital, PA Hospital there. There'd be about four plugs, power plugs and there'd be about 20 bloody blokes'd want to use it and they'd have double adaptors in there, double adaptors in there. And what would happen, someone would come along and pull someone's bloody double adaptors out, put theirs in. I've seen fights there, fightin' over to get power. Oh Jesus, oh dear and some terrible things used to happen in those days there. They're a lot better now, there's a lotta laws come in and you know about Health and Safety and Safety Committees and so and so. They wouldn't allow such a thing as a Safety, most of them only had a, might be a big building going up, they'd have a box about that size about 18 inches by a foot with a few bandaids and a bit of a, just some a bit of that in. And that was it. And you know if you really got hurt, which a lot of people did get hurt, this is what you had to try and find something there to bloody bandage something up or put a bit of this on it before they rush them off to the hospital.

I: 'Course those struggles keep going on don't they?

P: Oh yeah there's no relaxin'. You've got to be at it all the time. Whether it's a dining room, you know first aid, ambulance, safety, whatever it is, you know. And cleanliness on the job, tidiness and so and so. And everything else yeah. Oh yeah 'cause once you let up, it starts drifting backwards, but at least now they do have, I think Safety Inspectors on the job. Wouldn't have been allowed in the old days, wouldn't have allowed that sort of thing.

I: Can you just tell me the anecdote about Vince Englart and the sun dial that was going to be built at Toowong Planetarium?

P: Yeah well Vince was working for the Brisbane City Council and he was sent out on this job there as he was as a builders labourer and what was happenin' there, they were planning to put a sun dial there and Vince's job was to do this, pour this slab with this couple of mates there ready for the positioning of this sun dial. They had a couple of experts come up from, I think it

was from Sydney and they worked it all out theoretically, and came over there and they worked out exactly where the degrees would be for the sun dial to operate correctly in that part of Brisbane. Well Vince must, I don't remember if Vince had it on paper or what, but after they'd left, these blokes, Vince got it and he straight away looked at it and he said, no, that's not right. That's wrong. The sun dial won't work there, the sun dial, he worked out, he said that would be the same, who worked it out? This is what you'd do if it was in Newcastle, not Brisbane. And this is had already spent thousands of dollars preparing this site. So he didn't know whether he'd get in touch with the bloke that was in charge because he said, he didn't like him to think he was crawling or anything like that. But then they had a discussion with his mate and he said, well, if you don't the bloke's going to get into real strife if it doesn't work. So Vince got in touch with him that night. And the bloke come round to Vince's house and Vince showed him, Vince worked out the drawings. Showed him the drawings and this bloke had to agree, that's right, yes, yes, I'm wrong. And he said to Vince, look, how can I thank you? What can I do? Vince said, no I don't want anything. He said, look can I help you in any way? He said, well I've got a son that's unemployed, he was about 18 or 19 years of age then, Rodney. He said come to Council in the morning. So Vince went with the boy in the morning and after five minutes talking, right, start, straightaway. He got the job straight away. So that was all that Vince got out, but Vince got the great satisfaction that the sun dial out there is right.

And one other one of his great things he done, you know in sheet metal work, to really work out the patterns for various types of obtuse bends and squared around cones and all that sort of thing. They work 'em out geometrically with a sheet of metal. Vince drew up a scheme where you could work it out with a computer and save all that. Anytime you wanted a particular bend, you just looked through your takings off the computer there, and it'd all be there, all the measurements and everything. He couldn't get anyone interested here at the time. They weren't up to that yet, they hadn't got to computers. So he got in touch, he was in touch with someone in England and he sent the, 'cause he couldn't do any good with him here, he sent the patents and everything over to England where they started using them straight away. And he got a very little amount of reward for that, a few, probably a few hundred dollars, I don't know. But, he had it all worked out, he showed me, I remember him showing me some of these big squares of rounds, which I know a little bit about, and cones and Christ knows what and different angles and that. He had it all worked out. Builder's bloody labourer, hey.

I: And you said he used to teach kids after school?

P: Yeah that's right. He'd come home from work, I'd say he'd worked bloody hard, he was a great worker, Vince very great as a young man. Done a lot of concretin' under my house and I never paid him anyway. But, he'd come home and there'd be two of these, they were lovely kids, you know 15, 16 year olds, they'd be waitin', sittin' at the table in the lounge room waitin' for Vince to come home you know. And Vince'd drop his bags down and bloody straight into it. Righto so and so, doing his Maths, Maths and Science he used to do, mainly. Yeah wonderful bloke and the way he was treated, it was terrible, but any rate, he was a, they tell me, I don't know, they told me there, or his family tells me, when he was about 14, no 13 or 14 'cause he left school at 14, when he was about 12 and 13, he was that clever at school, they used to call him the professor. When he was a school kid. And of course he never had money to go to high school or anything like that, so he just got a job, I think in a sheet metal shop or something at the Gabba. Yeah poor old Vince. Wonderful bloke and he'd do anything for anyone.

I: What were you saying about class struggle there?

P: Yeah I said, well that was the basis of the energy that was, abound, more so in the days gone by. I don't say it's completely gone these days, it probably hasn't. But, people understood what the class struggle was all about. It was the working class or the ruling class, proletariat or the bourgeoisie isn't it? And what side are you on? I knew Stan Heilbronn, I remember when I first went, he was a bit younger than me, Stan. And I remember we were all coming out of the picture show I think one Friday or Saturday night and there was group of the young people there, I was one of the young people then. We were going across, going over the creek into the area where we were livin'. This is in Mt Isa. I remember Stan lecturing everyone about Socialism. I think he was about 18 you know. I think I just about, had or just about to join the Communist Party and he was, all the young boys and girls you know, in our own age, we were teenagers, and on about the glories of Socialism.

I: And what sort of reception was he getting?

P: Oh I can't remember now, but I'd say it would be alright, it wouldn't be hostile. It wouldn't be hostile, no. Yeah I remember, I was about 15, I started work at 14. I was about 16 years of age and I got this bloody rash on me neck and up me arms. It was the quinine, what they called the quinine. People that worked in the quinine manufacture which this company I worked for were flat to the boards producing it 'cause it was all going to the Army.

I: For the malaria.

P: You know for malaria, yeah. And I got this rash come out. And I went to the hospital a couple of times and they told me, their bloke there told me, I told him where I'd been working so and so and righto he said, well now, I don't want you working in the quinine area again. Don't dare because it's going to bring this rash out again. And when I got back to work I told the local leadin' hand or whatever it was, I'm not workin' there. And they said, fair enough and then the Chief Engineer, he called me up in the office. I think I was only about 16 years of age and me Dad was there, 'cause me Dad worked at the same factory as meself. And he said, now what's this? He said, this is your apprenticeship papers, he said, now you refuse to do this work that you've been told to do. I said, yes they told me at the hospital not to do it. I'm telling you you're going to do it. I said, I'm not going to do it. He said, see these papers, I'll rip them in half. I said, I'll rip you in half.

I: And what happened?

P: He didn't rip 'em in half and I didn't do it, but I had a rebellious spirit about me. He wasn't going to stand over me in any way whatsoever. [end of recording]