ORAL HISTORY – QUEENSLAND COMMUNIST PARTY

TRANSCRIBED RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH JACK HUTTON

Date: 16 April, 2013 Interviewer: Ross Gwyther

Notes: *Jack had a number of hens in his back yard, and we can hear them calling out during the interview! Other slight corrections to the transcript have been made by Jack (see text in italics) although the original audio has been left as recorded where appropriate)*

JACK: I was born in the Burdekin in Ayr in the Depression Days in '29. My father, who came from Scotland, came from Ayr (Ayr in Scotland)to Ayr and the background to him was that he put his age up so he could go to the First World War [*he was 16*], which he thought was going to be a – he thought he was going to enjoy himself by travelling and seeing and so forth, but he soon found out that wars are not – and consequently after the War was over, he came to Australia and settled in Ayr.

Now, during the Depression days, of course, after I was born, he worked cutting cane for the three months of the year, and then the rest of the time he was on relief work or wherever he could pick up work. It was pretty tough in those days, and most of the time he was on the dole.

So when my two other brothers were born in the '30s, and consequently when the War broke out again, he joined the Army again and he was here in Townsville, *[they]* were guarding the wharves and things like that – the "garrison," I think they called them. Then after that, he decided that he'd go overseas and so he joined and he was sent to Syria.

Now, my Mother had two brothers. One was in the AIF in Tobruk. He finished up getting killed by a Japanese sniper after he came back from El Alamein and so forth. They sent him to New Guinea and a Japanese sniper killed him. The other Uncle, [*my mother's*] other brother, he was with my father in Syria, and my father had a brother, and he was in the Army too, in Singapore, the fall of Singapore.

So, you know, the background to it was that my Father was always fairly militant, but belonged to a weak Union, the AWU, cane-cutting, but he was always arguing to try and improve the lot of cane-cutters, because I never seen him much when I was a kid when he was cutting cane, because he'd leave at 4.00 o'clock in the morning and it would be dark when he came home, and we would be in bed a lot of times, because he had to ride his bike about five or six miles on a push-bike, and then Mum would get us washed and put into bed and he'd have his tea when he got there. Sometimes it would be dark when he got [*home*]. It would be more than 6.00 o'clock – 7.00 o'clock at night.

I always thought to myself, 'Well, this is bloody terrible, you know. If I ever get a chance when I grow up, I'm going to change some of these things if I can.'

When he went to the War the second time, because of the Depression days, Mum was left with the grocer, the butcher and the baker [*bills*], and she had to pay them off with the allotment *from* the Army that she got, so she paid all them off – I don't how much, but I think it was about 70 or 80 pounds to the butcher, and a similar 90 pounds or something, in those days.

In those days, of course, they stuck by you, the businesses. They allowed you to tick up, and that's how we survived; otherwise, we wouldn't have, you know, if you went in the present days to Woolworths or Coles and you didn't have any money, well, you would starve to death.

So that's why we became, or I became involved firstly with [*chooks*], because when I was only a little fellow, my job was to feed them every day and collect the eggs and things like that. So we were survivors because the old chook was so bloody reliable.

Anyway, while *Dad* as in the Middle East, I went to High School in Ayr and I had to stay with an old lady because I had nowhere else to go. I rode to school each day, and after school, at weekends I'd come home, which was about 10 miles away. While I was at school I saw this job called in the Railways for apprentices, so I thought, 'Well, I'm going to have to try to get a job,' because the old man was still away.

Anyway, I did the exam and got the job, and I came here to Townsville in 1944. We were here before that, but I got the job and employment in 1944, and the old man came home on leave and he came up here to Townsville with me. I got a room in Stanley Street, which was [*one*] dollar a week. I had to share a room with another young apprentice – we'd eat mainly at the pie-stall on the corner, which was a shilling for a pie and gravy, or a rissole and gravy, and a cup of tea and a piece of bread. You know, it was pretty tough.

ROSS: What sort of job were you apprenticed to?

JACK: Apprentice boiler-maker. Later on, of course, after the War was finished, my father came back and they got a house built in Ayr, and I used to go down on the weekends occasionally to see them, but you know, I never had much of a chance to be with the family, because it was just the way that things were, and the old man was away overseas and Mum was struggling, and she was trying to do a bit of work to try and feed us, you know.

Consequently, afterwards, while I was in doing the apprenticeship, I could see then that the apprentices, we were getting a real raw deal. They were working hell out of us, you know, and the wages were terrible, absolutely terrible. My wages were $1.75 a week, so I said, 'Well, that's no good.' So I got onto the Railway and they said, 'We'll give you an extra pound because you're away from home to help.' It helped but, as I said, you lived on pies and stuff like that. That was the cheapest you could live.

So it was during my apprenticeship that we formed a committee of apprentices to try and do something, but we had all the troubles in the World with the hierarchy, you know. I said to the blokes, well, 'When I finish my time I'll be getting on this Apprenticeship Board, and I'll make sure things are changed.' It took me a few years after I finished my time, but I did get onto the Apprenticeship Board, which was there for almost 20 years – 19 or so years – and we did make a lot of changes.

I argued strongly about the wage conditions and under-payments. The worst era for apprentices was probably when Bjelke-Petersen was in power, because he in particular, if you were caught smoking marijuana or [*had a plastic bong*], instant dismissal. You know, I argued and argued. I finished up going to Court for one kid and they didn't convict him, so he kept his apprenticeship. So there were a number of them in that same sort of category.

There was another young kid – but that was later on – but he married a young girl of 15 or 16, I think she was, and he couldn't live on his wages. I knew his mother, so I got him an apprenticeship. The money wasn't good enough for him, either, so he decided he'd do a bit of breaking and entering, with the result, of course, that he got caught and finished up out in jail. So I knew it was going to be hard for him. He had a wife and she was just about to have a baby – she was only 16 – so as soon as he came out of jail I got him and took him back to his old employer and got him back into his apprenticeship.

He finished up a real top tradesman, too. Everybody was chasing him years later, but he was a real good lad. He's still with his wife and his family's grown up. I think one son's a professor and the other – I forget what the other son – he's a train-driver so, you know, they grew up. If somebody wouldn't have come to his assistance, well, they wouldn't have [*a hope*], you know, there was a life ruined for young blokes like that.

Once I became interested in the Union when I was an apprentice, well, I became a member of the Union as a second-year apprentice, and I didn't have to, but I did.

ROSS: So this was the AEU?

JACK: No, this was the Boilermakers and Blacksmiths. It was the Boilermakers and later on became the Boilermakers and Blacksmiths [*during the 1960s I was organiser and branch secretary for the Boilermakers*]. Consequently, in 1972 we amalgamated and we joined in, I became the Secretary of the Metalworkers Union, which is an amalgamation of three Unions. I remained [*as branch secretary*] on the State Council of the Metalworkers for 20 years before I retired, and I was, during that time I also acted as an Organiser for the Metalworkers Union.

I got leave of work once I was in the job for about three months, but when the job became vacant there was a full-time position. I didn't want it because you were away too much, you know. That's what I said to Freddy Thompson, you know, I said, 'I don't know how Loma can put with you being away for weeks and weeks at a time,' and he said, 'It's hard on the women.' I said, 'I couldn't put that on my wife, with three young kids,' so I said, 'I don't really want the job.'

He said, 'Well, think about it'. Tommy Barton was a fitter and he was [*wanting the]* job, and he joined the Communist Party because he thought, well, if he joined the Communist Party he could get the Organiser's job, and the Communist Party sent Fred to talk to me and he said, 'Look, you're not in the Party but Tommy Barton is, we're going to support Tommy Barton for the job.' I said, 'Look, I don't want the job, I can tell you now, but I can beat Tommy Barton by three to one if I want the job – but I don't want it. I'm happy to stay where I am.'

I said to Fred, 'Look, Tommy Barton will leave the Communist Party as quickly as he joined, because I know him, I know of his background,' and I said, 'I can tell you now, he's all for himself.' Exactly, as soon as he got into Parliament, he left the Communist Party and joined the Labor Party, and of course he became a Minister. I'm never doubting he didn't have a fair bit of ability, but his attitude, you know.

One of the things I can always remember is he was working at [Mt. Kalamia sugar] mill in Ayr as a fitter – I'm trying to think of the type of fitter he was, not mechanical, but a special type of fitter, he was – and when he got the job with the Union as full-time Organiser, he

naturally had to [*leave*] it and he came up here. He cut all the fruit trees down and everything in his [*yard*]. He had a mill house. I said to him, 'What are you doing, killing all the plants and cutting the trees down for?' He said, 'I'm not letting any bugger have the benefit of my work.' I said to him, 'By Jesus, you've got a strange outlook.'

So him and me didn't get on really extra good but, you know, I'm not saying that to belittle him in any way, but he got into Parliament and became a Minister he became a sort of a king-maker amongst a few of them, and quite a number of people used him, were friendly with him. He'd push them into the positions where he could use them, you know.

So that's one of the things that I remember vividly, but during the time with the Union, you know, I was a Shop Steward for about 30 years, and I was on the Apprenticeship Board. I was the last President of the Combined Railway Unions, and there were a whole number of different organisations that I belonged to over that period of time.

ROSS: So all that time you worked at the workshops?

JACK: I worked at the Railway until 1950, when I came out of my time. Then I left to get outside, well, I wanted to get more experience and to travel around a bit, but when I got outside I was the Boilermakers' Delegate on the Trades and Labour Council from 1951, and in 1952 Jim Newman was nominated to attend the function in Red Square, the Labour Day or May Day, it was called over there, and in those days the problem was that because Jim Newman and his wife had split, she had to sign the form to say that he could go – and she refused to sign it.

So he wasn't allowed to *get* a passport, so in '52, in August, they were to go away in September, and in late August they came to me and said to me, 'Alec McDonald from the Trades and Labour Council in Brisbane and those fellows, Gerry Dawson and blokes, recommended that you take his place. Do you think you could do it, get ready inside of a week?' I said, 'Yeah, all right, I'll get myself ready.' He said, 'There's no payment, no wages or nothing, but you'll be looked after by the Trade Unions in the Soviet Union and in China.'

So that's how I became a Delegate, and I went to Vienna to the Peace Conference.

ROSS: So that was in 1952?

JACK: '52. I had a good look around the Soviet Union and in China. I came back because we couldn't get [*visas*], you see. The Menzies Government wouldn't allow us to get out, and you couldn't go unless you had somewhere, so we had to go through China. So I had a passport to get to China and I went up through China, Mongolia, and of course Siberia, Moscow, that way, then down to Vienna. Then coming back I had to do the same thing again so I could get home, because you couldn't get a [*visa from Australia*].

I left the Soviet Union and then I went to China, I was in China for quite a few weeks, and had a good look around there, and I was very impressed. They had nothing, you know. It struck me – I went out to a place and there would have been a thousand blokes working on this mountain with little hammers, chipping away, cutting in, you know, and I thought to myself, 'My God, how backward are these,' you know. A plug of dynamite or something – but I was impressed with them because they all had a job, you know, making this rock into this little small stuff.

So I went to a number of factories and things and looked around and I thought to myself, if ever a country's going to go somewhere, it's China, because I thought the attitude of the people, you know – and although at that time the Unions were pretty strong, [*Ernie*] Thornton who used to be in Australia at the head of the [*Ironworkers'*] Union, and he went over there to train the Unions in China, and of course later on, I don't know whether they called themselves the Red Guard or the Young Guard or something, but they got rid of all the Unions in China, and so it changed.

That's one of the things that I regret that [*did*] happen there but, you know, the attitude of the people I thought was wonderful because they didn't' have anything, but they all could see that there was something in the future for them if they could only stick together and put up with you, you know; whereas the Soviet Union, they had everything, you know, the best of everything [*except for some food shortages*].

They expected that, you know, that they should have [*every*]thing. That's where I first tasted caviar, was in the Soviet Union. They had it on the tables every day, you know, breakfast, lunch and night time. It was the red caviar and the black caviar, and neither of it – I reckon it was bloody awful, like shotgun pellets with a fishy taste, awful stuff, I reckon. Anyhow, that's my opinion of what caviar is.

So when we came back to Australia, I couldn't get a job and consequently I went to the City Council that advertised for a boilermaker, and it was in the paper. I read the paper early in the morning and I thought, 'Well, I'll slip out now at 6.00 o'clock.' So I slipped out on my pushbike up to the City Council, and when I got there I asked them did they want a boilermaker, and they said, 'Yes, but you'll have to see the foreman.' So when the foreman came he asked me my name and everything, and then he said, 'I'm sorry, but we've filled the position.' I said, 'What, did somebody get here before me?' He said, 'Oh, no, we filled it yesterday afternoon. We had the ad in the paper [*today*], I know, but we filled it.' I said, 'Well, if that's how it is, that's how it is,' but I went back the next day to see if somebody had started but, no, nobody had started. I didn't get the job.

So I thought to myself, 'I'll get a job somewhere else,' and everywhere I went I had that problem, and I was just married, and I said to the wife, 'We'll have to leave town,' so we went to the Burdekin Bridge for the next three years and she said to me, 'You'd better not have anything to do with the Union here,' and I said, 'No, if there's anything wrong here I'm going to get stuck in to see that things are righted.'

Well, as soon as I got there, there were lots of things that were wrong and as I said the other day, the blokes were being underpaid and all the rest of it. So I got that sorted out, and of course I had lots of problems with Vince Gair because at that stage the Burdekin Bridge was a hot potato, because every year it got covered with water, the old bridge, and consequently lots of time it got washed out. It was months before it was – so it was a hot potato, and of course in '57 when it was finished, I came back to Townsville and I did a couple of jobs for Evans Deakin here building some tanks down the wharf, big tanks and things like that, specialist welding.

Then when they finished there was not much work about, so I decided then I'd go back to the Railway. I went back to the Railway in '57, and consequently I remained there until I retired in '92 – or December '91, actually, I retired.

While I was in the Railway, the first day I arrived there I found the Boilermakers and Blacksmiths never had a Shop Steward, they had no Union [*delegate*], no bloke would take it on, so I had to take it. First day back after a few years I became the Shop Steward for the both Blacksmiths and Boilermakers, and I remained as that for a long period of time.

I found that, you know, the Railway had a position where they had the right to not only hire and fire you, but they had the right, even when I was an apprentice, they had this right that they could deal with you and I can remember as an apprentice the fellows were arguing for time to wash hands, and they wanted lunch time and knock-off time, and the Department wouldn't do it, so we had a campaign. We got apprentices that were pinched for going out to wash their hands at three minutes to 12.00 every day, and they finished up fining you [*one*] pounds for washing your hands early, and the same in the afternoon.

It's the only place I ever heard of where an employer could fine you, you know, if you came late or were caught in the bathroom. I know a fellow that went one Saturday, when they had to work Saturdays during the War, and he had to go up to town, and when he came back he was a bit late so he went in and back to work. One of the engineer saw him up the town, and he had to "please explain" and he told them he went up on business. They wouldn't believe him. They fined him two pounds for not being back on his job on time.

So that's the sort of – so I thought, 'Well, I'm going to get onto the Railway Appeal Board. That's the next thing I'm going to do,' and when I went back in [*1957*] I finished up on the Railway Appeal Board. First of all I became a [*union representative, and I*] did the appeals. The Railway Appeal Board, you see, they even had solicitors for the appeal that had to appear there, but you didn't have to be a solicitor. I done a number of cases for appellants there, you know.

I can remember one fellow, he fell off over the side of a bridge onto the sand, and the Inspector came along and saw him laying in the sand and said he was drunk, and towed him behind his motorised vehicle into Julia Creek and sacked him on the spot. So he came down to the Coast and came to see me, and I said, 'Well, I'll do your appeal.'

I did his appeal for him and finished up winning the case. The Magistrate said, 'Well, we'll give you another chance. You can start back on Wednesday. You go out on the Inlander on Tuesday and start back in the Railway on Wednesday.' Well, this bloke – he was a little Irishman, but he liked a drink or two all right, he was a single bloke, but anyhow, he got to the pub and he missed the train. Of course, the General Manager of the Railway came across the road and spotted him in the pub, so he walked up into the pub and said to him, 'You're sacked. This time you're sacked. You might have got out it in the Appeal [*Court*], but you won't get out of it this time.'

So he came down to the workshop the next day, little Paddy the Irishman, and he said to me – I still remember him, a little fellow – and he said, 'I missed the train.' I said, 'You weren't on the booze, were you, Paddy?' 'Yes, matey,' he said, 'I missed the train and the General Manager came across and sacked me again.' I said, 'Well, you just wait here,' so I hopped on my pushbike and I went up to the General Manager's Office and asked could I see him, and he said, 'Yeah, well?' I came in, and he said, 'What are you after?' and I said, 'You sacked little Paddy Boyd yesterday,' and he said, 'Don't tell me what I can do or I can't do.'

I said, 'Well, he's not even an employee of the Railway until tomorrow. Today – which is Wednesday – that was the decision of the Magistrate. He was to go out on Tuesday and start on Wednesday, so he's missed the train, so you can't sack a bloke that wasn't an employee of yours.' Of course, he done the block. He threw [*things*], he knocked all his phone and books and everything flying. I just sat there and laughed at him, you know, and that made him worse.

So I got little Paddy his job back and sent him back. I said, 'Now, don't miss it today. Get on the platform and stay there.' So he caught the next train up there. He died later on – it was a terrible bloody job, out in the boiling sun welding the points crossings for QR, you know.

I had another bloke out there at a similar time later on, and he got sun cancers all over him, you know, and I had a hell of a job to get him back into the workshop, a bloke by the name of Alan Halliday. They didn't want to shift you, you know. You got out there in those jobs, and they kept you there.

Yeah, I had lots of fun, not only fun, but lots of experiences with the Railway, because they were pretty hard to move. You know, the wages were low, and all the campaigns we had, we had heaps and heaps of campaigns for shorter hours, increased wages [*and so on*].

ROSS: When you were still doing your apprenticeship would have been when the big Railway strike was on---

JACK: In '48.

ROSS: What was your sort of involvement in that?

JACK: Well, because I was a fourth year apprentice, they expected me – I had to work with these scabs, you see, to build the big water tank. The job was marking out the plates, the big plates, and then punching the holes for them, and putting them together sort of thing on the ground, to be later taken away. Anyhow, when we started I said to the blokes, 'Look, we've got to do something about this,' and of course there were a few blokes there that were scabs and they belonged to the AWU. Some of them didn't claim to belong to anything, but I think they were in the AWU too.

Anyhow, they said their Union wasn't involved so they would come to work, so we had to do it, so I had to stop the machinery. There were a number of other younger blokes, boilermaker apprentices, with me. They were using engines also, steam engines, to pull loads and things with scab drivers, well, not so much scab drivers, but one of the foremen scabbed, and this bloke said to me, 'We've got to do something,' he said. So I got a bucket of water and threw it into the switchboard to try and stop the shears and punch, which I stopped them, but I nearly electrocuted myself.

[*One apprentice*] got a big packet of Rinso and went down and poured it into the packs of tenders in the engines, and of course when the boilers got going they couldn't do anything with them. There were soap bubbles and everything coming everywhere, so you know, we had to play that role of trying to put a stop to it, anyhow.

After the strike was over and they came back to work, all them scab blokes, they made it too hot for them. They all had to leave. Every one of them left, got out, and I can remember

these blokes. They thought they could get away with it, you know, and they'd all be forgotten when it was over, but the blokes made it really hard for them and they got out.

So consequently in the workshops and in the running section they were always pretty militant people and there were stacks and stacks of them, you know. As I often said to blokes, they said that they got called Commos and all the rest of it, but they were never in the Communist Party like me, never were in the Communist Party, but they had strong Union beliefs and I think most of all believed in Socialism.

ROSS: Was there a reason why you didn't want to join the Communist Party?

JACK: Well, Eddie Heilbronn came to me on several occasions and he said to me, 'We want you,' and he said, 'You're a young bloke and we want you,' and I said, 'Eddie, the only thing I don't like about Parties –' the Labor Party wanted me to join, too, and I said, 'Once you get into a party you've got to accept the decision of the Party, whether you like it or not,' and I said, 'I'm not like that. If I think that anything is wrong, I want to have my own opinion.' He said, 'You can express an opinion.' I said, 'I'll express an opinion all right. That's what I'm doing now, but I'm not going to be told by three or four other people that, you know, you're wrong,' so I said, you know, 'That's the reason I didn't want to join.'

He said, 'Oh, well, that's up to you, but we'd like you to.' They never stopped, you know. They kept at me because I was on the Labour Council for a long, long time, probably 40 years. I couldn't get in 40 years because I had to leave town, but they made me an honorary member while I was at the bridge doing the work there, and I had to give them a report weekly to the Labour Council on how the bridge was, how progress was done, because as I said, it was a real hot potato.

So when I came back, I went back under the Labour Council and---

ROSS: So you worked alongside the Communist Party members pretty well?

JACK: Pretty well. I knew every one of them. I knew that most of the Communist Party, I knew – see, the Trades and Labour Council at that time, I think the President was a Communist Party member, I think the Secretary was a Communist Party member, but they finished up with an agreement somehow that the Labour Party, that there'd be alternative positions for some of the Labour Party blokes. Not a lot of them had much ability, either, but they got, nearly all the Communist Party blokes had all the ability, you see, and consequently I had – Bill Irving was the Secretary of it in my latter years, and of course the Labour Council have always run the Labour Day procession [*on the first Monday in May*].

The groupers, with the AWU in cahoots with them, they applied for the permit to march and took it off the Labour Council, and they ran it for the next few years. We didn't stop marching or taking part in it, but I remember one year we had big banners about old Bjelke, thought we'd better get rid of this, and they came and confiscated all the banners off us. You know, the groupers then in '71, they found out that they couldn't run it any longer. They couldn't get enough money, so they said to me, 'If we get it and hand it back [*to the TLC*], would you be prepared to do something to try and get it going again?'

So I asked the Union would they give me a week off work, pay me for a week, and I would organise it. So I organised a program and I got the girls in the Union Office to make up this program, and I sold the ads to all the business houses for five bucks and things like that,

and that's how we got enough money to start the thing up again. Of course, for the next few years, well, I ran it for over 12 and a half years sort of thing under the Labour Council banner.

We had big crowds, you know, Aboriginal and Island people, all their kids and things. We used to have sports and free drinks and ice-cream, and free food to all the kids, the subnormals and all the crippled children. They were all our guests, and we had a big following, you see. It went on and it wore me down to such an extent that I said to them, 'I've got to give it away; otherwise I'm going to get [*burnt out*] –' even though it was only once a year, but it was too much work.

So I did get some help with it with some of the others, and anyhow, to make a long story short, I gave it away after 12 and a half years, and consequently now there's none of that goes on. The Council support put the money in. In those days we had to raise our own money. The Councils were mainly Liberals and things like that, but I remember the Mayor, Max Hooper – he later became a Member of Parliament – and I went and said to him, 'Max, I'm collecting for the Labour Day procession. I'm looking for a donation so that we can get ice-creams and drinks and food to the kids,' you see. He said, 'You know that I'm a Liberal [*National*], don't you?' and I said, 'Yeah, that's right. I also know that when you were a kid you lined up and got your free ice-cream and drink out at the Showgrounds.' 'Jesus, he said, you've got a bloody good memory.'

I didn't remember him at all, but I knew it because of that period in time. Even though his old man was a property salesman, I knew that they were all finding it hard to live as well. So he said to me, 'Yeah, yeah, I did, but I can't remember thinking about you, how you knew that I was in the queue getting my ice-cream and soft drink.' I said, 'Oh, yeah, you were,' and he didn't deny it, so I shamed him into giving me five bucks.

So the Labour Council still – well, it's not the Labour Council now they call themselves---

ROSS: Queensland Council of Unions, yes.

JACK: Yes, and they've got it now. They run it now, but the Council pay for it, you know. In those days we had to raise our own money, and we had to give prizes for the floats and we had to give prizes for different things, and it was all Trade Union, you know, it was all workers. Not too many business people were involved in it.

ROSS: Going back to that period when you'd finished your apprenticeship, like, in 1951 and so on, that's when the Menzies Government brought in all the anti-Communist law and the Referendum and so on?

JACK: Yes.

ROSS: Were you involved in all that sort of stuff?

JACK: Not to any extent. I recall it pretty well, but I remember with a couple of blokes we went out and put our slogans and signs and things, painted the road and things like that, but had to keep an eye out – otherwise if you would have got caught, you were a goner.

ROSS: This was when the Referendum was on?

JACK: Yes. Yes, it was pretty rugged, and of course the Blacksmiths and Boilermakers, I was – this is before I was Secretary; I was an Executive Member then. The groupers decided that they were going to chuck the lot [*of us*] out, and so they stacked the meeting this night and a bloke whispered to me coming in the door, he said, 'All the groupers are here,' he said, 'Watch what's going on.' I woke in a flash that they're here to – so there was Garth Gifford and Bert Stabler, Ronnie Heilbronn – that's Stan's younger brother – and they were all on the Executive, all Communist Party members – and me. They were going to get rid of the four of us in one go.

When it came to nominations for the positions, I was just an Executive Member and I said to Bill Keys, sitting next to me, 'Bill, when it calls for the President, nominate me, would you?' He said, 'You sincere?' and I said, 'Yes, I am,' because Billy Wilson was the President and he was in the Labor Party, but he was in cahoots with these DLP-ers. So when they called for the position of President, the groupers nominated Bill Wilson straight off, and then Bill Keys nominated me, and of course it upset all their planning. That was the last thing they thought was going to happen. Consequently, they had to re-think where they were going, but they got rid of Garth and Ronnie Heilbronn and Bert Stabler, but because I'd beat Billy Wilson in the ballot for the Presidency, that upset them completely. That's the sort of thing that went on.

That's the sort of thing that the groupers not only tried to get over, but later on they were worse in the AEU. They tried to get, they had lots of problems in the AEU, more than we had, the Boilermakers, but we had a couple of them that were real strong DLP-ers, or QLP-ers as they called themselves later on.

When Menzies was in, of course, when they tried to, when they were going to bring in the law that outlawed the Communist Party, there was a lot of blokes that weren't even in the Communist Party, but were prepared to help where they could. As I often tell a lot of the blokes that were in the Communist Party, it wasn't only Communist Party members that were militant. I'll admit that the majority of the leaders of the Communist Party were the most militant, not only the most militant, but the smartest amongst them all, blokes like Alec McDonald, Gerry Dawson and them fellows.

Consequently, you know, it was not only the groupers but there were people in the Labour Party that got sucked in to get rid of the Communist Party. You know, they were the cause of all of the trouble. It didn't go over with a lot of, you know, in the Railways at that time there was a very militant group and they kept fighting for conditions, and they knew full well that things weren't going to improve with Menzies. If he got rid of the Communist Party it would be worse, so there was quite a bit of work done.

ROSS: So people saw the Communist Party, and they would have seen people like you as well as the ones who were actually fighting for better conditions?

JACK: Yes, well, they saw us as people that were not worrying politically too much, they were more concerned with trying to improve the workers and the lower paid people, trying to do something for them. I always admired, you know, in the Railways, even the labourers there, which were the lowest paid. It took them sometimes 25 to 30 years to get out off the lengths [*ie fettling*] into the workshop, out of the boiling sun. It took them that long to get there because they had so bad a conditions, you know. Some of them had absolutely woeful conditions, and when you look back in time and think, you know, they were out in no-man's-land, and when it came to their provisions, their meat and things, the guard would kick it out

of the door, sort of thing, at the stop, and they had to go up and get it straight away so it was brought out of the sun. All those sort of things, you know, no refrigerators and things like that.

In the workshops when we had the bloke come round with the wheelbarrow and the ice, and they put the ice in the water every day – no cold, no refrigerated water or anything like that. That came years later. But all the conditions, you know, there was one penny for working in this – dirt money, you know. Working in a confined space was threepence an hour and things like that, and the Railway would come along and they said, 'You've booked five hours confined space today. Now, you were only in that boiler four hours all told, because you came out for lunch, you came out and had a drink of water, and you went to the toilet, so in actual fact you only was in that boiler for four hours.' So they'd chop you off for threepence, all that sort of stuff – really tough.

It took a lot of struggle, but I always admired them from the point of view that they would stick with you, you know. If they backed you, they would stick with you. They wouldn't – I'm not saying you wouldn't have arguments, because people had differences of opinions, but consequently that became the position.

ROSS: Why do you think it was that the Communists were the ones who were the sort of leading people?

JACK: Well, I think it was the media mainly, and of course a lot of the politicians made out that all the stuff was coming through the Communist Party and they got the blame for everything that was going. Like, when we worked a 44-hour week, they decided that we wanted to get that to a 40, you see, and we said, 'Well, we've got to do something seriously about it,' so consequently they said, 'Oh, you know, this is no good. You can't get a 44 hour week, can't get a 40 hour week,' and we said, 'Oh, yes, we can.'

'How would you work it?' and we said, well, we didn't want to work Saturdays and Sundays, so we decided to work eight and three-quarter hours a day so we didn't have to work Saturdays or Sundays, and of course that upset them. They said, 'You fellows are supposed to believe in an eight hour day,' and tried to use all those sorts of things against – and we said, 'We still believe in an eight hour day and that's what our next aim will be.'

But we did work eight and three-quarter hours a day for a few years. Then we got it down from 44 down to 40, and then when the 38 hour week, it took us five years before we got that. As I said on Sunday, a lot of the engine drivers in them days, things had changed over a period of time and they weren't too keen for a 38 hour week. They were looking for more overtime, and of course the 38 hour long nine-day fortnight, what we were about was – and I did the agreement here. I said if you can't, it's not to be any overtime, it doesn't stop you from working overtime, but it can't be on the day off. The day off will be every second Monday, and if you are required to work you'll have to work, but you've got to take the day off. It won't be overtime.

Of course, that upset a few of them greedy people. They said, 'Oh, no, we want the overtime.' 'Well, you're not getting it.' So that was part of the agreement. There's lots and lots of cases, you know, people getting sacked and dealt with.

One of the things I can always remember as an apprentice, they had this idea, they put you on the staff, to grease every apprentice that went into the workshop, they manhandled you

after you'd been there a few days or a week or so, took all your clothes off you and then put grease and stuff all over you, you know.

ROSS: Who would do this?

JACK: The other apprentices, but they were egged on by a lot of the tradesmen, and I said, 'Well, I'm going to stop this eventually,' so when I got onto the Apprenticeship Board I finally stopped it. It took a few years before I finally stopped it, but I had to threaten the Railway Department of action against them on what it was doing, and I said, 'You are responsible,' so they issued instructions immediately that it had to cease forthwith. But as far as I was concerned, there were a lot of good young fellows, and if you put up a fight, you know, they liked it. They might come back the next day and do you again, and all this sort of thing. They'd put six or seven apprentices onto the one bloke. He had no chance.

Of course, when I got initiated (they call it) I stood with my back against the wall and I punched a few blokes, and they thought that was good, back the next day for another go. I got done several times but, you know, I thought it's shocking to think that the tradesmen used to laugh, and I'd see the kid walking to the bathroom with all the axle grease and oil dripping off him in the nude, you know. So I finished up, I stopped it, but it took me a good few years and they had to have the support of the engineers who were reluctant to do anything for a long time. They thought it was wrong, but when I told them that I intended to sue them, that sort of frightened them then.

I talked to the Apprenticeship Board and I said, 'We've got to take out legal proceedings against these people because even though it's not them, it's the apprentices that are doing it, they're responsible.' So that's how we stopped it then.

ROSS: What about when you were campaigning, if you saw something that you thought should be changed in the workplace and you wanted to run a campaign, how did you go about that?

JACK: Most times at the Combined Railway Unions meetings I was a Delegate and blokes like Lyle Smith and Johnnie [*Hill*], all them blokes there, there was three or four of them there the other day, they later on all were Delegates to the Combined Railway Unions, and if we wanted to change something we'd talk about it there and then decide on a campaign and how to put it into practice.

ROSS: What would that involve – can you give me an idea of a typical campaign you might have done, or actually did that campaign?

JACK: Well, for instance, we campaigned to try and improve the wages and things like that, and even after the '48 strike, you know, it still was bad. The wages, even though they went on strike for six weeks for fifty cents, the wages were still bad and consequently it took – I remember one of the campaigns we had, we wanted, it mainly was for tradesmen. We believed that the tradesmen outside were leaving us further and further behind, and the only way we were going to do it was to get what they call special class tradesmen, so that we talked to the Department and they said, 'Yeah, we're interested in special class, but they have to be special,' you see.

I said, 'Well, what do you call that?' 'Oh, they all have to do a welding test and all those sorts of things, and prove that they are – so I said to them, 'Well, one of the campaigns that we had, we were concerned that they were only going to give it to certain people,' so I said

to the Department, you know, 'Well, that's not on,' and they said the same in the South, Brisbane and Ipswich and those places. Everybody's got to get it, not just certain select people.

He said, the argument was, 'Well, you're trying to rort the system. You're trying to say that you're a special class, and yet they're not a special class.' We said, 'Well, we see it as a way of giving tradesmen a bit more money than some where it's nowhere near what they're getting outside the Railway.'

So we fought on that issue for a fair while, and when we finally got it, I got the Department to agree that nobody would fail the test, and so what I did, the real good top class welders, I got them to do all the welding tests. If you wanted to do your own you could, but if you didn't, I got them to weld them. They'd just stamp the names of those blokes on them. You know, they'd put them in and try to break them and all the rest of it, but everybody passed, you know. Even the worst tradesmen, they all got special class. But that was all talked about beforehand, and organised.

ROSS: And those tradesmen all took part in that?

JACK: They all got special, got an increase in wages, became a special class tradesman. Of course, the off-siders then complained that they weren't getting anything out of it, so they put on a turn and they wanted some money, too. The Railway had some engineers and things like that who [*said that*] you couldn't wash your hands before [*lunch or knock-off time*].. – I remember in one case, old Jock Letuce [*Chief Engineer*], he'd caught the Delegate from the ARU in the Blacksmith Shop, washing his hands, and he said to him, 'You're washing your hands and it's only 11.00 o'clock in the morning. Are you getting ready for lunch?' and he said, 'No, I'm about to go to the toilet.' He said, 'My mother always taught me to be hygienic,' he said, 'and I've got dirty, greasy hands so I wash them when I want to go to the toilet.'

He said, 'Well, that's a good excuse,' the engineer said, and this bloke said, as quick as a flash, 'Well, you can come in and take my penis out for me if you want to.' He said, 'Clear off! Clear off!' So that was the sort of thing that went on, you know. They'd chase people up terribly, and I had so much support with them, you see. Any new foreman that came there, got the job, they would take him into the office and say – and they came back and told me – 'Now that you've got this job, we want you to keep your eye on this bloke Hutton. If he comes into your shop, chase him out, don't let him talk to any of the men, anything like that.'

So all the foremen said, 'Look,' you know, ' we've just come here. Why haven't you done something about it? Why ask us?'. A bloke by the name of Tommy Fallon, he came from Cairns, he said, 'Look, I want to get on with this bloke. I don't want to fall out with him. I've just been appointed to the job of Leading Hand and I don't want him to make my life miserable, and he's got the support of the blokes. Well, that's fair enough, but I'm not going to do nothing about it.' So that's the sort of thing that went on, you know.

ROSS: So you had a lot of support from the workers?

JACK: I had all the support in the World, you know.

ROSS: And can you summarise why they supported you, basically?

JACK: Well, they supported me, I think, mainly because they could see that I wanted to do something. I was trying to help them. I was sincere, you know. A lot of the other blokes – I remember another two Pakistani blokes, they were labourers and they both had a day off together, and the yard ganger said to them, 'You two weren't sick yesterday. You went and had a day off. What did you do?' and they said, 'We were sick.' He said, 'No, you don't get sick together like that.' So he made a recommendation that they don't get paid sick leave.

So they came to me and I said, 'Look, you're in the ARU. You go and talk to them,' so they went to the ARU and the ARU Rep said, 'Look, we can't do much for you over that,' he said, 'They're saying you weren't sick. We can't say that you were,' so they came and said to me, 'Can we join your Union?' and I said, 'We don't body-snatch off other Unions,' you know, that's the rule, but I'll help you. He said, 'No, we want to get out.'

So when they came to see me I said, 'Okay, we'll do it this way. I'll go and put the argument up that you were sick and it's up to them to prove you weren't,' and I did. Of course, when they couldn't prove they weren't sick, because you had to be off three days before you had to have a [*doctors*] certificate, so consequently they came back and said, 'Now we want to join,' and I said, 'Well, I don't like taking people off the ARU,' and they went to the ARU and resigned. The Delegate said to them, 'Why are you leaving us?' He said, 'Well, it's like this. We came to you. You said you couldn't do anything for us. We went over to the other Union and they put up a fight for us and got us paid the sick pay, and pulled this foreman into gear.' He said, 'It's like going to the doctor. You go to the GP or you go to the specialist. We went to the GP and he done no good. We went to the specialist.' I can remember these little Paki blokes.

Anyhow, I remember another case. Outside of the Railway was a – what was their names – they used to do a lot of pipe work and they all belonged to the – I can't think of the Union now; I don't know if it still exists, but at that time they were the Ironworkers Union. The Ironworkers had got increases for their members in the South, but for the people up here they didn't do anything, so they asked me would I come out and talk to them.

So I went out and I said to them, 'We've got a couple of fitters and things working here, specialists, but you blokes are all ironworkers. I know you are getting the royal root (as they say) but we've got to do something about it.' So they said, 'Well, we'll all join.' I spoke to Fred, and Fred said, 'Well, sign them all up but don't take any money off them, because we don't do that.' I said, 'I know that, but somebody's got to help them.'

So the Ironworkers got in touch with them and said, 'What's the problem?' and they said, 'Well, last year we asked you several times to come up from Brisbane and talk to us and get us an increase, and you won't. This bloke has come out here and he's prepared to take us on.'

So I got stuck into the company and they sent their officials up from the South and we put on a strike and got them all an increase in wages. I said to the Ironworkers, 'Well, all these cards we've signed up now, it's all over. I'll tear them all up and you've still got the members, but look after them.' So even to this day I run into some of those blokes and they all want to know, 'How are you going?' and everything, because they were disgusted, you know, with their own organisation. Harry Peebles was their Organiser and he later became an Industrial Commissioner, yes, Harry. When he became an Industrial Commissioner, we had a dispute up at Greenvale and it was a fair drive to get there, so the blokes were on

strike. I went up there, flew up on a light plane, and I talked to the blokes and I said to them, 'Look, we're going to fix this by agreement between you. I'm suggesting to you that we can get out of it by taking an increase, but not to the extent that you want.' 'No, we're not going to do that. We want the full amount.' I said, 'Well, you're not going to get it. We'll have a big dispute over it and you could lose a lot of time,' but I said, 'You know, I'll talk to the employers.'

So I went and talked to them and they said no, and I said, 'Look, if we take a lesser amount, would you agree?' No, no, nothing. I said, 'Well, you know, we're going to have to put it in the hands of the Industrial Court.' So Harry Peebles – I hadn't struck him for years – he come up and he was a Commissioner. They arranged in Brisbane for me to go up with him in the car, so going up in the car – we took a girl from here from the pool to do the typing, you know – he said to me, 'You've been up there, Jack, and tried to settle this?' and I said yes, and he said, 'What did you do?' I said, 'Well, I put it to them, I said, 'Harry, that they take less than what they wanted, and I went and talked to the company and I argued with them that we would take less, providing there was an increase in wages,' and I said, 'They wouldn't take anything.' 'Oh,' he said, 'They wouldn't be in it, either?' I said, 'No, it's a dead [*duck*] – you're going to have a problem.' So he said to me, 'All right. Now I what you're' [*proposing*] – so when he sat down, he talked to the employers first and then he came and talked to the Union and his recommendation was so much, exactly the words that I'd tried to take, and that's how the thing was settled. They agreed on it.

Now, coming back from up there, we came back by car and he was driving, and the girl was sitting next to him, and as we got out here to Woodstock, coming from Charters Towers, we got a blowout and he said to me, 'Could you change the tyre?' and I said to him, 'No bloody fear, I'm not changing the tyre. That's your job. You're the driver.' He said, 'You wouldn't change the tyre for me?' I said, 'I'd change it for myself, but I'm not changing it for you, Harry. You go and change it.' So he had to get out and change the tyre. He said, 'Jesus, you're a tough bloke,' and I said, 'Harry, whether you're a Commissioner or a Union Official or who you are, you've got to be prepared to do your own things' – so I wouldn't change his tyre.

But they're the sort of – I can remember, you know, some of the things around the town here. I got into trouble once up in Cairns. I went to a place, a Wolfram mining place [*Mt. Carbine*] and we had an agreement with the company that all had to be Union members. I went there and these blokes would come from Cairns to do work for the company and they weren't in the Union, and I said to these blokes, 'You've got to be in the Union. You've got to sign up,' and they wouldn't, you know. I said to them, 'Well, you're not staying on the job.'

So I went to the company and I said, 'These blokes have got to get off the site and you bring Union members on; otherwise, I'll knock the lot off.' There were a good few blokes there, working there. So they still wouldn't join, so the company said, 'Get off the site. We'll chase them all off.' They went back to Cairns, and then I got a ring from Aussie Vaughn in Brisbane (who was the State Secretary) and he said, 'Jack, I got a ring from the Manager of the company, and I've just got to tell you, you've got to be careful. He's over in America and he's rung me from America and he's threatening that he's got means of disposing of you or, if you don't like that, you've got to change your attitude.' So he said to me, 'I suggest to you that, you know, you be a bit careful.' I said, 'Aussie, we had an agreement they had to be Union members and that's it, whether he likes it or whether not, so I'm not frightened of him.'

So he rang me here from America, too, and he said to me, 'I'm sending some blokes back out to the mine,' and I said, 'Well, if they're not Union members, I'll go back and chase them off again.' So he made sure they were Union members that went out there the next time. So Aussie Vaughan said to me, 'I was a bit worried about you.' I said, 'I know them blokes. I've had threats plenty of time in Australia,' and I said, 'When they threaten you, you don't worry too much. It's when they don't threaten you that you've got some worries that they might carry it out.'

Another instance: We had a stoppage in the Railway and the ARU Secretary rang me. He said, 'Jack, when you start marching from the workshops up through the town to the picture theatre, the wharfies will be coming from the wharf, the meatworkers will be marching from up the town, they're all going to meet at the Olympic Theatre.' He said to me, 'Be careful. I've just heard word from the Police that they're going to stop you and get in, get in and stop you. Now, be careful. Get some of the biggest blokes you've got and put them up the front, but don't – just keep marching on the footpath – if they're on the road, just tell them to just push them aside. Don't punch them or anything like that. If they put their hands out, just push straight through them.'

So I lined up all the biggest blokes I had. I had a heap of them. I can still remember this bloke, a blacksmith striker, Bluey, and anyhow, as we were marching off, we were marching towards the theatre, he's singing out, 'Where are these coppers? Where are these coppers?' He was looking for a blue, and I'm up in the front, I'm hoping they don't front at all. Anyway, they didn't front. They didn't stop us. We went to the Olympic Theatre. All the Unions were involved at that time. That's just one of the things, you know.

As I said, some of the Police here were all right, and some of them were very, very bad, you know. They'd pull you up and want to know where you were having the strike and all this sort of thing. They'd follow you.

ROSS: So if you were to sum up, sort of, your philosophy of working in the Union, how would you sum that up?

JACK: Well, I thought not only was it a hard, but a wonderful experience, but to me, you know, we achieved things all along. We had to fight for everything, you know, there was nothing given to us. We had to fight – everything we got, we fought for and we had to lose time for. I think the philosophy of it today is there's so many non-unionists and they think that the 40 hour week or the 38 hour week, or the four weeks leave and all those sorts of things, that the employer give it to us out of the goodness of his heart. Little do they realise how much time and effort was put into it, how much people lost to get these gains for them.

There are some still, you know, I always used to say the best investment you ever make is either insurance, if you own a property, or your Union ticket if you've got to work, because you know, anything goes wrong, you've got to have some help. So it's the best investment, I always say, you could make.

(End of Recording)