

## **TUC INTERVIEWS**

### **Barbara Castle**

**This transcript was proofed with the video on 11 August 2011 and some discrepancies were found. The new suggestions have been highlit in red**

**Right, Barbara, I think we're just about set up. The cameras are running and away we go. I'm going back some way but in your upbringing, in your early working life, did the trade union movement figure prominently then?**

Well, of course I read Politics at Oxford ~ Politics and Economics and so on. And the history of the trade union movement has always thrilled me. You know, the idea of you know the little Davids coming clubbing together to stand up to the all-powerful Goliath. And then when I came down from Oxford it was at the height of the depression years ~ about 1932 ~ and the only job I could get was one working in shops. And I promptly joined the shop assistant's union in Manchester. And it was to me absolutely thrilling. Here I was, in one of those organisations which had drawn working people together to stand up to their powerful masters. So I had an emotional identification with trade unionism from the very start.

**You believed in the solidarity of trade unions.**

Yes, and also the importance - I learned a very interesting lesson at that time. I remember working in the little shop, a very posh little shop. And I was in fact in demonstrating crystallised fruits for a big firm and the only other employee was a young girl. And I found her in tears one afternoon and I said, what's wrong? She said, it's my afternoon off and I'd arranged to go out with my boyfriend and now the orders have come in and for a wreath they want it in a hurry, so he's cancelled it. Well, I said, look, pointing to the display on the wall of something from the shop Assistant's Act or whatever it was called, saying, Miss so and so is entitled to a half day off every Wednesday. You see. I said, that's your legal right. Insist on it. She shrugged. She said, there's plenty more willing to take this job if I don't. And I realised then that trade union power in isolation was powerless because it was up to governments to create a full employment situation, and to tackle the unemployment which was dragging down people's wages and living standards. And I've always, I think that was my first lesson on the importance of the trade union movement, realising it was part of a wider economic battle, an important part, but not the whole part.

**Right. A member of another union later on?**

It was called the Shop Assistant's Union then. Now get it straight else nobody will believe that I really did join it. And it was a Manchester central branch. I remember a trade unionist saying to me once, oh I think you must have joined it because that's what it was called at that time. Anyway -

**But no thoughts about climbing the greasy pole in the trade union.**

Oh, in the trade union movement no because my dream from a small child had been to becoming a Member of Parliament. I couldn't imagine anything more exciting than to be elected by people to represent them and fight their battles. Because as I said, I've always, loyal as I was to the trade union movement, inspired as I was by trade union history, to me the main battle and to be the political one, because governments provided the framework in which trade unions had to operate. And as that young lass said in the shop, there's plenty more will take this job if I turn it down. And, of course, trade unions do maximise their power in a time of high employment. They do maximise their power.

**We'll move towards the direction of Parliament now. '45, you were in Parliament for Blackburn, you were in a party which was in power. What was the feeling at the time?**

It was, it was, you know, like a fulfilment of a fairy dream. And to be in power with the Labour in such a large majority after we'd had all the miserable experience of the 24 and 29 minority Labour governments and how they had been dependent on the whim of the Liberals which turned out to be a rather insecure foundation. But no, here we were with real power to act. Now during the '30s, of course, I had been in all the left wing organisations like Socialist League under .... and.... and Bevan(Stafford Cripps and Aneurin Bevan). On the UNITY campaign, fighting, trying to mobilise people to prepare to resist the menace of Fascism which was Hitler was striding across Europe. And so having been through the war and all the blitzes as I had in London , because I wasn't married then , and to have at last emerged victorious over Hitler with a majority of 100, it was intoxicating. And, you know, bliss was it in that dawn to be alive and to be young was really heaven. There were a lot of young MPs because they'd, many of whom, you know, hadn't expected to get elected or selected because of the war and the war had - there had been an electoral truce, during the war and nobody had been sort of doing the routine you know courting of possible constituencies. But it was so exciting because so many of those young men straight from the fighting forces, still in the fighting forces, waiting to be demobbed, who had been selected and won. And I remember we , of course, Churchill had fought the election on the fact that Labour was unpatriotic, disloyal and all the rest of it, going to introduce the Gestapo , introducing a Gestapo I ask you. And there we were able to show , we'd got more fighting men in on benches than they had on theirs. And the rest of us had been through, most of us had been through the blitz well I certainly had. So we were, we were full of self confidence and conscious that it was the vote of the fighting forces which had turned the scales in Labour's favour , because they had, they'd gone through all the horrors of war and they weren't going to be cheated of the peace. And they just , and Churchill couldn't understand why he was ditched. The great war leader had taken his country to victory. And it was simply because the fighting men and women didn't trust him to build the peace. He was already slipping back into being leader of the Conservative Party and we knew that would be stronger than any patriotic appeal he had been able to make during the war. And so we felt an enormous sense of responsibility towards those people who had put us there to win the peace for them. And we were, oh we were ardent young fighters. I remember we um we were the ones , it was the Labour Party who introduced the concept of the constituency party surgery every week. In fact we initiated it. The Tories had to copy it but they'd been rather complacent (elitist), you

know, of course, the workers will accept us leaders. But we went with great humility back to our constituency and we sat every week and listened to their problems. And I used to, sometimes, to come out of those surgeries worn out, thinking what on earth can we do to help? Because, of course, the country was bankrupt. The war had bankrupt us. But there they all wanted, they wanted a home. They want their lads demobbed. They wanted , they got plenty of jobs but they wanted more fun after all the austerity and the responsibility was enormous.

**Let me take you on to that post war period. The relations between the Labour government and the trade union movement. You were on the Bevanite wing of the party weren't you?**

Yes.

**Many of the union leaders were to the right of that.**

Yes, well it, it amuses me, you know, looking back. There's all this talk and New Labour which seems to imply that the things that they're trying now, some of the things they are now trying to do, have never been done before. For God's sake, it had been our guiding star. For instance, we were bitterly against the trade union block vote. Its power over the party conference. I mean at one stage in the '30s, we were fighting the battle to stop the trade unions not only selecting the women's section but the constituency party section as well. And we were the voice of the rank and file in the constituencies. That brought us into discourse (**battle**) with the big three unions, the Transport and General, the Miners and GM - General Municipal workers, and their bosses ..... used to bellow, oh we will pay the piper and call the tune, you know. And the trade union movement desperately in need of reform but it was supporting the right wing leaders, who hated Bevan of course. So they were respectful. And what again I noticed was that the capitalist press never criticised the block vote as long as it was in the hands of right wing trade union leaders. But when a few left wingers started like Frank Torrance and Hughie Scanlon came to the top in key unions. .... absolutely scandalous block vote, it's just - you're not democratic, you know. And I have always despised a lack of consistency in leadership which sort of says one thing when their enemies are in power and another when they get in. But that's a slight sideline. But what again I learned during that period from ..... himself was that he was no syndicalist. The trade unions, and he was a great trade unionist, he was the youngest ever chairman of his miners' union lodge in Tredega while he was still a miner, a young miner. And he was a great believer in the importance of industrial strength but he was no syndicalist and there was a lot syndicalist about in those days. And he knew perfectly well that trade union power could never use political power and never should try to. That sort of syndicalist gestures like the general strike of 1926 found him standing on the sidelines, keeping his mouth shut out of loyalty, but knowing he couldn't succeed because what the union leaders then were claiming was to be the government, as Ni wrote in his book 'In Place Of Fear'. And Bob Smiley the miner who told him the story about the triple alliance of miners, railway men and transport workers was trying to threaten a standstill to the economy and Lloyd George, then Prime Minister, told them you do realise, don't you, that if you succeed in your strike then we are powerless and you are so strong, then of course you have become the government. And he didn't want

that. They didn't want the general economic responsibility. They wanted sectional interest promoted and that, I think, has been at the heart of some of the confusion in Labour's relations with the trade unions over the years. But Ni Bevan, a left winger, had no doubt. He wanted Parliament. He believed in Parliamentary democracy. **Right. Let me take you right on to 1968, April I think it was. You were made First Secretary, and Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity. You said at the time, I'm in the thick of it now for better or for worse. What did you mean by that?**

Well, I also said I had no doubt that I may probably, this may probably destroy me politically. Well, I'll tell you why I said that. Because successive governments, since the war, had been struggling with this enigma of how to solve the balance between industrial power and political power in the unions. And I had no doubt that the right to strike, as I wrote in my White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, the right of a worker to withdraw his labour is an essential freedom in a democracy because it's one of the weapons of the weak against the strong. But equally, I had no doubt that to abuse trade union power was not only undemocratic but was to call down an enormous trouble on one's head. Because in the end, one wasn't willing to take over the government. The boss always was. He had been pulling the strings anyhow behind the scenes of the Tory government. So I knew I was part of this whirlwind of ideas, you know, the trade union movement pulling in two different directions. And, of course, we'd had a very unpopular Prices and Income's policy. I didn't introduce it, I inherited it when Harold Wilson twisted my arm and persuaded me to take on this job, Secretary of State and Employment and Productivity. I didn't want it. I loved transport to which he'd elevated me. And so I didn't want it but he persuaded me and he threw in First Secretary of State to make it sound - and I thought, well that might give me more influence. But the ,

**Before we go any further, *In Place of Strife*, you've mentioned it. There's a nice story about how you got that title -**

Oh yes, I had the job of dealing with this industrial turmoil, the great increase in unofficial strikes. Harold had set up the Donovan Commission which had produced its report and I had to produce a White Paper saying what are we'd do about it. And I was sitting , I used to rewrite most of my White Papers because civil service, civil servants, excellent though they are as advisors, can't write. They can't communicate in a way a politician is trained to do. And I was a journalist on top, of course. I'd worked for the *Daily Mirror* and did a lot of freelance journalism. And so I'd rewritten in human language at about two in the morning and I was sitting bogged-eyed in our little London flat in the dining room, and Ted comes in out of bed and he said, aren't you coming to bed? Well I said I'm stuck for a title, I've finished it now but I'm stuck for a title. And he said, what about *In Place of Strife*? And I knew he got it spot on. Because I believed in saying what I did say in this , trade unions are essential in a democracy to protect individual interest. And the right to strike is an essential freedom. But if they abused, then the enemy, the political enemy would just take over and destroy the unions. And I knew, I'd absorbed myself in Bevan's book *In Place of Fear* - I knew that that was a message running through it. Left wing as he was, because the conclusion I brought from this argument was that Parliament had better deliver the goods. You need a government that's got guts

and good analysis, know what's needed and win the economic battle for working people. That's what. So this was what I believed and I wanted the trade unions not to abandon this section of interest but to fit them in to a wider economic, national strategy pursued by a democratically elected government, their government, which they had financed and voted for.

### **And the strife you're talking about at the time ,**

Well, it was the absolute rush of unofficial and unconstitutional strikes. We called them unconstitutional because they were not, they were in breach of agreed procedures. They had not given proper notice. I mean workers were just down to - like that. And they were about 1.8m of these unofficial strikes compared with some 600 of the official ones, the great big ones.

### **Car industry, engineering ,**

Well, that I , you see, and employers used to say we don't mind the major strikes as much as this chaos. Because if you know you're going to have a great show down with a big union, you can prepare some defences. But, if suddenly, as happened at Girlington Brakes Works, a dozen key men down tools, without warning, and walk out. They're helpless and so are the rest of the staff. That brake liners, I think they were, strike left some 2,000 workers out of work. And they wrote to me saying what sort of chaos are you going to go on tolerating. It's our livelihood We've had as much right to a livelihood as these chaps have ,

### **What about their union leaders? They can't have been happy about that.**

Well, I had at the Department of Employment some very shrewd, experienced and liberal minded conciliators. Conciliation officers. They knew their trade union movements through and through. And they used to say to me, if there is a strike of this kind and we immediately tried to get hold of say the regional organiser of the union, if it's a localised strike, they'd run to ground. They don't want to know. And we suspect that in some unions, at any rate, they don't altogether mind these unofficial strikes. Because, you see, it means the workers are doing the job for them without any strike claim. So there's no run on the union funds. And all these , and I used to find that , I remember the job I had getting hold of one union organiser - I think , I think it was from Wales. I forget the details. But we had an enormous job tracking him down. I wanted him to come and talk, discuss solutions. He didn't want to know. Now that is - this chaos was doing great harm to industry and Ted Heath, then leader of the opposition, was, you know, having - making a meal of it, you know , an enormous tax on Labour's for it's weaknesses and of course, behind Ted Heath was a little band of Conservative lawyers who had produced a little document , I think it was called **Fair Deal at Work**, in which they proposed a legal framework for the trade unions, tying them hand and foot by law. And the last thing I believed in, or Harold Wilson believed in, was this legal framework , because you can't solve human problems in the court of law. You can't do it. It's got to be done with beer and sandwiches around the table. Of course, it has. Unless you're going to have a sort of legalistic dictatorship. And so Harold Wilson, who could see the Heath line of argument gaining ground, **set up the Donovan Commission** under

Lord Justice Donovan with George Woodcock, General Secretary of the TUC on it and playing a very influential part. And so that landed on my desk when I was moved into the department.

**Carry it forward, he said.**

I had to pick it up to, just as I had to pick up the Prices and Incomes policy which I thought was a very unlevelled playing field because I knew that there was great justice in the union complaint that if they forewent wage increases, through voluntary restraint or statutory restraint, that increased the profitability of the company, in which they had no share. So I got one of the economic advisors - I brought in Derek Robinson, to work out for me a scheme for capital sharing, how that, all these ideas, were our ideas, were innovative. And we had to do the educating work of the treasury, of the rank and file, everybody. And so the smugness New Labour saying we've got to turn our backs on this, cast off this ideological old baggage. I think they were referring to me. They um - you know even though I found it irritating, we had done the pioneer work, we'd done the rough work, and done a very great educational work.

**But in industrial relations, the Donovan Commission, then your White Paper, you did see the need or were pressed into the need for legislation. What did the unions think about that?**

Look, I want to make it quite clear nobody pressed me into my proposals. They all came from me. I wouldn't allow anybody to press me into anything as fundamental as that against my will. No, I had worked out, discussing it with a wide range of people, that what we needed was not just a purely voluntary system which is what Donovan proposed, but Donovan plus, that is to say the important part of Donovan's work. The report was that we needed a better, to avoid strikes we needed a proper conciliation machinery and that meant strengthening unions, not weakening them. So my first proposals were to give unions, working people, for the first time in our history the statutory right to belong to a trade union. It never happened before. And we also, I embodied the concept of right of appeal against unfair dismissal. And laid it down in the proposal legislation that membership with a union could never be a fair reason for dismissing people. And so it was a great breakthrough for trade unionism. And as a quid pro quo, I wanted the TUC to throw its weight behind our attempts to decrease the number of down tool strikes. And they were refusing to do it. And Harold Wilson and I wanted the rule changed to the TUC's constitution to enable them to issue edicts to the unions who were indulging in this chaotic practice, that they were to stop. You know. But the TUC didn't want to know. That was really the big split between us. And so I was determined not to have this rigid legal framework that the Tory lawyers were calling for. I said, this is a political matter. To how you deal with any dispute by a group of human beings is a political matter. So I made it the Secretary of State's responsibility to decide whether new proper conciliation procedures having been established, she could step in to a dispute and say to both sides, stop it for 28 days while you talk. And it would be to the unions you don't try and down tools, you haven't used your conciliation machinery. And I said to the employers you must return to the status quo before the incident which may have precipitated the strike, like dismissing a worker. Because

employers could be arbitrary as trade unions, you know. So if an employer suddenly said to a worker, well you're a trouble maker, off you go, and sent him packing, you couldn't be surprised if the union said out of solidarity down tools. So you said to the employer reverse that decision, bring that chap back. And you said to the unions, a month of conciliation pause while you talk. I couldn't see any harm in that. But ,

### **They did.**

Well, it was interfering with the divine right of trade unionists, they knew what they liked, you see. And I understood them because the battle, I knew from my study of political history, the battles the unions had had to gain the freedoms they'd got. But I was making this part of a charter to strengthen union rights, not to weaken them. But I did say, OK, you were right but you have responsibilities and above all you as working people had responsibilities towards your own government. You put it there to solve your economic problems. You can't solve them alone , the Bevan message, which is why I call the white paper In Place of Strife.

### **Strife.**

Anyway, it caused a furore. I touched on the , I dared to challenge the principle of my trade union, right or wrong. I said - I won't say that about anybody. I won't say my government's right or wrong, I won't say my trade union, right or wrong, I won't say my church, right or wrong. You can't take from me my judgement. You couldn't take it from anybody. You shouldn't do. Well, I did cause a bit of a furore. And I tell you what I used to urge upon: look, if you go on unchanged, you're going to let in the Ted Heath and his Tory lawyers, you know. You're going to be in grave danger if you abuse the right to strike, it can be taken away from you by a Tory government. No, it made no effect. Though I think it did in a way, and I always said, you see, before the Secretary of State could act, the TUC should be given the opportunity to act first. Because I wanted it to become a real sort of , what's the word? Not controller of the trade union, but leader of the trade union. And so they were to try. And we asked for a change of rule to enable that, to step in. And another, one of the most frequent thoughts of dispute was the inter-union dispute. I remember when we nationalised steel. It's what they'd been asking for but immediately trouble started as to which union should be recognised. And I remember , what's the chairman's name? Do you remember it? Robert something came to see me. The newly nationalised industry, he said Secretary of State will recognise whomsoever they want. But he said we've been warned if we recognise the T&G, then the little smaller specialised unions will down tools. And vice versa. So we've got a strike whatever we do. You tell us what we do. And I thought, and I still think it is the responsibility of the government to provide a solution for that situation. So we set up the Commission for Industrial Relations which Donovan had recommended and gave it the right to solve these cases, but if whichever union , and when it had made a ruling, because somebody had to unless you went to have a fight to the finish, over the dying body of this national economy , when they had reached a decision and more than half of the members of that Commission would have been trade unionist, then the unions were under law obliged to accept the verdict, with a fine pm the union that didn't. Now we just imposed that fine but of



course if you refused to pay a fine, it's contempt of court and you're in a criminal then situation. Well, this was, you know, to murder all the **heroes** of the trade union movement, their memory. And it was therefore a great upheaval. And I remember going around the country and I used to talk to so many working people and the trade union rank and file. There was not the hostility to me or my party (**proposals**) that you would have imagined from what the leadership said. Jack Jones saying I was totally political and discredited, I mean such an idea, but I remember going to the Scottish TUC, and that's a pretty militant body, annual conference. And on the ferry boat going over, I - we'd been told there might be a strike of the ferryboat people, the workers on the ferry, to stop you getting there. So they said, well do you want you still want to go Secretary of State. I said, yes of course. I always march towards the sound of gunfire. And when we had gone on the boat, apart from downing tools, they all asked to be photographed with me as if I was a lifelong pal. And I remember going after the conference, well I'd had a bit of a stormy ride as you can imagine. But there was no real sourness in it. Heat but not malice.

### **Who undermined In Place of Strife then?**

Well, I'm afraid it was cowards in the Cabinet. Some old rebels like Jim Callaghan openly defied the Prime Minister because we were all - both members of the National Executive by voting for a motion which is in defiance of government policy. Because Harold Wilson backed my policy to the hilt and a reluctant Cabinet had sort of half heartedly let it go forward for further discussion. And Jim Callaghan voted against the policy. The NEC - Well, then others began to get cold feet. There were Parliamentary, Labour Party meetings, meetings with the trade union movement and all the rest of it. Douglas Houghton, chairman of the party at the time, made a great hoo-hah and Harold and I were faced with a terrific barrage of hostility □ members of the cabinet, some of the more timid of them began to peel off led by Roy Jenkins, who was then in the Labour Cabinet. And in his autobiography he said he felt he'd taken a less than heroic stand looking back. Well, we had to weather this storm. I remember the hours that Harold spent. He used to spend half the night with Vic Feather, who had succeeded George Woodcock as general secretary of the TUC and came from my native Bradford where he had been appointed with my father. And they used to talk over cigars and brandy they used to sit talking until two till two or three in the morning and I used to excuse myself, and slipped to bed. But,

### **What did you think of Vic Feather's part in this?**

Well, Vic actually, of course, I've always had a soft spot for Vic because he was, he was a □ very bright, wanted to be a teacher, was instead worked on a milk van for the Co-op. I think that's right. Of course, he had to leave school early because his mother was widowed and couldn't manage without his wage. The usual working class story of that kind. So there was an enormous bond towards him. I remember having a, giving him a little private dinner in Brown's Hotel, we had a private room the two of us. And all he wanted to talk about was my dad. I owe a lot to your dad, he kept on saying. Well, I kept trying to leave that but he didn't want to know. He just said, why did you do it, Barbara, and changed the subject.

### **Why did you do it?**



Do it. Introduce this In Place of Strife, you see. He was more an evader than a rebel and of course as General Secretary of the TUC he had to try and keep the whole show on the road. But when we got this solemn and binding undertaking, by the trade union movement, that they would do their utmost to prevent these down tool strikes which they never agreed to before. They wouldn't give us a change of rule, partly because they feared they wouldn't get it through the militant rank and file. And that's something one always has to remember. It's not necessarily the original sin of the leaders that is leading to problem but the pressures from below. Anyway I remember this was sneered at by the press. Solemn and binding it was called. Huh, you know, the union is not worth the paper it's written on and Barbara and Harold given in and so on and so forth, whereas we were both prepared to resign if necessary. But the trade unions didn't want us to resign. They respected us I think. But above all they respected Harold. I was the one that took all the flak as the evil genius although Harold was as mightily keen on it as I was.

### **But were they right - had you given in?**

Well, the point is, you see, is a very, very technical problem in a way. We wanted the rule changed. And they pleaded with us not to insist on this. And Hughie Scanlon said, almost prophetically (**pathetically**), you're the Prime Minister, you've got to realise I had enough difficulty to get my executive to endorse what I'm doing so far, even to discuss it with this dreadful woman - If I have to go back to him and ask for the rule change, I don't think I'll get it. And I forget who it was who suggested the exact form of the solemn and binding rule, I forget who it was. But I remember something one of them said. Look, Prime Minister, we have a formula in the trade union movement called the Bridlington Agreement which prohibits poaching by one union on another's union's members trying to poach them over. That's forbidden and it's not in the rules but if poaching does take place, then we're down on them like a ton of bricks and we chuck them out of the TUC. But it's not in the rule. Well, we had an adjournment to discuss this and my chief conciliation officer who, as I've said, was an extremely experienced person, he said, you know, Secretary of State, it is true that no decision under the Bridlington Agreement has ever been broken. I think you would find it very difficult to turn this down. And the last thing we wanted was to look like a couple of extreme peasants (**pedants**) who were going to insist on a particular form of words. And you know, this was right. We were right to challenge them and we were to accept that pledge because it meant that the TUC when a strike of any kind looked like coming, particularly an inter-union dispute, they'd move in, they'd take the responsibility of finding a solution which had to be a human one. And then, of course, the press jeered and said, oh ha ha they've capitulated. But I remember shortly after this agreement, there was a threatened dispute, an under unconstitutional down tools dispute - And they moved in and they avoided it. And I rang him up and thanked him. And he said, now you know love, I gave my word. And if I give my word, I keep it. And this is what the peasants (**pedants**) and the bigots never realised - is the human layer in this situation. Industrial relations is about human beings. And many is a time I've spent the weekend at the department of employment and productivity, not trying to solve the dispute myself but just sitting at my desk, hour after hour, while my conciliation officers moved between the two parties, employers here, unions here, carrying messages, you know. I used to call

it you know like the scene in a French farce moving from bedroom to bedroom. But I'd have to see them - And then if they ran into a political problem, they'd come to me. And, of course, in consultation with No 10 and the Treasury, I had to solve it. And this is again what I did when the Ford women machinists, sewing machinists, downed tools ,

**Right, I'm going to come on to that a bit later, but let me ask you this about In Place of Strife. All this time later, 30 years after that event, and in light of what has happened since, do you believe now that maybe it was a misjudgment on your part, In Place of Strife, or should you have gone ahead and pushed it through?**

No, I have no doubt whatsoever it was a turning point in trade union history and in industrial relations, and that the trade union's rejection of it helped to let in Heath, Ted Heath, into office in 1970 and led to that infamous Industrial Relations Act. Both of these proved my thesis right. I've had a number of people I had at the time come to me, you know, Barbara, from surprising quarters , a lot of trade union chaps , you know, Barbara, if only the trade unions had accepted your In Place of Strife, we'd never have lost the 1970 election. And not the '79 one. And it also proved that Ted Heath's attempt to legislate - to create a legal framework for tying a union's hands on everything wouldn't work. And his industrial relations court ended in mockery. There was Sir John , no, Donaldson ,

**John Donaldson.**

Donaldson, that's right. Sir John Donaldson who was president of the court rigorously trying to apply the law when the unions didn't obey its injunction they were fined. When they were fined and refused to pay, the question then arose of who was responsible? And the law tried the folly of something I always supported, namely of restoring the doctrine of agency which the Cafael judgement (**Taff Vale judgement**) at the beginning of the century had overturned thus giving the unions the great go ahead. Because that doctrine of agency said if any individual trade unionist caused any industrial action or damage, the union was responsible. And the purpose and the aim and the result was to ruin the trade union by taking all its funds. And John Donaldson tried to revive that. So when that happened, there was, of course, a monumental upsurge of trade union rebellion and - Sir John Donaldson quickly said, Sir John Donaldson quickly abandoned the doctrine of agency and he said, right if I can't get the union, I'll get the people. I'll get the dockers. And there was a famous case of dockers blackening (**blacking**) (the new freight trains into freight depot outside, just outside the docks, which was threatening their jobs. So they were fined by the court and when they refused to pay the fine, a bunch of them were sent to Pentonville - well you can imagine what that did to industrial relations. I mean it united the trade union and the legal (**political**) movements as nothing else could have done. And the official solicitor, this mysterious person whose origins I've never quite been able to find out about, was brought in to move effectively ..... And after that even Sir John Donaldson said, this act won't work and must be amended. So I got vindication of the fact that my argument that you can't have a rigid legal framework, but also my argument that unless we did something to control this, unless the TUC

did something to help us control these unofficial strikes, then the Tories would walk in.

**But when the Tories came back in '79, they had prepared the ground more carefully. What about all that legislation through the '80s?**

Well, you see, what was interesting , and Margaret Thatcher was as determined as Ted Heath had been to weaken the trade unions. But she wasn't - shrewd a woman as was she was (**not**) going to try and reintroduce the industrial relations act which Heath had effectively to abandon because she knew it wouldn't work. So you see she worked through economic means by a deflationary policy which increased unemployment, she was able to weaken the trade unions as no law could do. Again said she modestly, proving how right I was as a young woman all those years ago, to realise that trade union power is limited by the economic framework in which it has to operate. And it's been the , it was the systematic tightening of public spending and all this. She didn't need a statutory income's policy. She'd got an economic one , because, of course, every government has an incomes policy. The question is whether it should be a statutory **one** or whether it should be an economic one. If you create enough unemployment, you know, you'll keep wage demands down all right. Your union membership will decline. People will be out looking anxiously over their shoulder whether their jobs are safe. And it was economic control which was far more important than law. And so what we did in the 1970s when we came back, we toured (**too had learnt our lessons**) ..... and the Labour government of 1970- '74 came back with the concept , consensus. We will not do anything without consent. And so we tried to , they created the social contract. And what this was, I was by then Secretary of State for Social Services so I was in the heart of the social contract. I was the biggest spender in the government and spent more than both defence and education rolled into one , because one had all the national insurance, maternity benefits, the health service and all of that. And what we tried to persuade the unions was if you're going to demand too much in the form of cash wage, then the country won't be able to afford a high social wage as well. Make up your minds which you want. But don't then come moaning that you want a free rigorous national health service or a first class pension scheme, or good maternity provision for your wife. These cost money, love. In which form do you want your brass? Now I remember despairing (**of my colleagues**) because they didn't seem to need to know anything about communicating with working people. And I remember Dennis Healey was by then Treasurer, Chancellor. And, of course, struggling with the economic problems created by the increase in the oil price in the 1970s which had a blighting effect on world economy. And I remember saying to him, why don't we publish a really popular Daily Mirror type pamphlet on the social wage , pointing out what it's worth to the ordinary working class family. Taking in everything , what their wife would get should have a baby, what the kids get , because I introduced the child benefit. You see, at that time I was introducing a marvellous programme of social advance. And the earnings link for the up-rating the pension, the child benefit, state earnings pension, disability, help for the disabled, mobility allowance and that kind of thing. And I said, why don't we tot up the cost of this and say to them, to all the working folk, yes of course you want a square meal. We want to give it to you. But you know, this is what you're getting in the form of the social wage. Now that's got to be financial - And my experts calculated it was at that time , before some of the big

reforms had come in , worth .1,000 a year for the average family. Say to them, do you want that? Do you want us to continue with is policy? Because you've got to help. You're part of the economy, you know. You're not some isolated island. And I always remember Dennis Healey saying that the cabinet didn't think much of my idea. And the , I remember Dennis Healey saying, oh really, we don't need that mob. I'm about to introduce a popular edition of the Treasury bulletin. I said, dear Dennis, that is a contradiction in terms. But I couldn't persuade my colleagues -

**Is that why you said at the time that the social contract was being steadily breached by government?**

Well, you see, at the beginning I couldn't have said that because I got massive support for the work I was able to do at DHSS. As part of the social contract, part of the fulfilment of our pledge to the unions, you help us by voluntary wage restraint and we'll see that we make it up to you in social services. And we were keeping our side. I mean I was only there two years before Harold Wilson retired and Jim Callaghan came in and gave me the push , just as I was putting child benefit through , well, I just got it through the House of Commons. But it hadn't yet been fixed and put into operation. Well, as soon as that happened, they began to pull them back (prune back). There was the oil price crisis and Dennis Healey went off in that dramatic way to Washington to get the IMF to give him a loan. And they started, the party started coming back with social policies.

**The unions were keeping to their side of the bargain.**

Well, to a very large extent, yes. Yes. But the government was drawing in the horns deflating. And I didn't believe it should have been done in that way. That - we should have agreed things together with the unions and the cabinet.

**I want to take you up on one last subject. Perhaps it was your finest hour, in a way, equal pay for work of equal value in the 1970s. What are you able to say about that? Was it your finest hour?**

Well, I mean you drive me to sound immodest. I think it was one of many finest hour. I mean people often say I'll always be remembered for the breathalyser , when in its first year it saved 1,200 lives. You know. I don't I think , one of my finest hours was a massive integrated transport hat , the longest acting Parliamentary in history apparently which I was promoted to this other job in the middle of. No, but I was very pleased because it was done by .....(low cunning) and you have to do that, you see. Because the Treasury, we'd got a prices and incomes policy for heaven's sake. And you know holding down on wages. And the , I remember the Ford sewing machinists at Dagenham works came out on strike, or threatened to , I forget which , because they said they'd been unfairly treated under a job evaluation scheme. Well, I had the employer chap, he came and said, look, it's terrifying this because if the women's thing isn't adjusted, the whole scheme has to be renegotiated and it's like a jigsaw puzzle. It will all fall apart. And he said, look, they've misunderstood some of these things. But anyway I've got the Ford machinists in. And I said to my private secretary, move all the desks out of the way. Get the chairs in a semi circle and order a large pot of tea. Well, of course, to the press that was one of those

unworthy feminine gestures for which I did not apologise and they were rather surprised, a bit suspicious, they obviously thought oh (**Rosie – note this is Rosie Boland, shop steward**) she's trying to get round us, you know.

**Really? (Rosie)**

Yes - well as a leader of these women. And they went through their complaints and of course there was a Communist in the picture trying to make trouble -

**I'm going to have to stop you there, and reload, just make up again -**

Do you mind if we avoid my face as much as possible?

**OK that's fine.**

You're fine. But am I?

What's the time? We're going any minute now, aren't we? There's only about five more minutes.

**Yes just about five more minutes -**

Well, I mean you see, you've all annoyed me so much I've got to break something.

**We're just going to take a few still pictures while you're talking to me like this before we kick off again.**

Two shots. They're the curse of all interviewees. Stupid, unnatural.

**One more secretary of state, one more. That's why you're secretary of state. Remember what they used to say to you? This way. Just one more. Two more minutes secretary of state. That's what we want. The stills - not many of them are around still - We're back on again.**

Rolling, are we?

Yes, we're rolling

**Oh good.**

Rolling, rolling, rolling.

**I'll remind you of the setting. Rosie and the lady machinist ,**

Yes, well you ask the question.

**In a semi circle , I'm talking about ,**

Oh, I got to that, have I?

**And you were saying that Ford was saying that any changes there would disrupt the whole thing.**

So I took their complaints to the personnel officer Blakenham, from Ford and he said, maybe you don't understand. And I said, well you go in and talk to them and so we all sat in this semi circle. And he cleared their doubts about the job evaluation scheme. Then Rosie says, that's all right then but we can't say that's strike called off unless we go back with something. And it was Blakenham who said, look, I , oh dear, I'm getting tired - Blakenham said, look, I've always been worried by the big gap between the men's and women's wages. I think we could narrow it a bit without doing anybody any harm. So we narrowed it a bit , satisfied the girls. They went back. I had, of course, to ring No 10 and the Treasury who agreed before I could OK it. And the press, of course, attacked me viciously, saying that I'd let the chance, I'd stabbed the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the back who was nobly trying to fight inflationary demands, you see. But it stuck in my mind because to get through this, this morass of industrial relations at Ford's, I got the list, the table of their wages hierarchy , and it ran skilled, semi skilled, labourers and women. And I thought, well I'm not putting up with that. And it was one of the major factors which made me accept this what the press said was a wicked breach in incomes policy. You see these arid minds, they're the ones who do the damage. Not the Rosies who got a genuine grievance or the Blakenhams, who are generally, genuinely trying to help. But it was because of that when I jumped at the opportunity which was given by the fact that the prices and incomes bill was going through the Commons, continuing it, and the women led by Leena Jaeger, who was then an MP, a labour MP, put down an amendment that the new norm was not to apply to increases which were designed to move towards equal pay. Well, of course, ..... and I was sitting on the bench, front bench in the middle of this mess, maelstrom, and Roy Jenkins, as chancellor, came and sat on the bench next to me and said, how's it going, Barbara? I said to him, Oh Roy, you know we're going to be defeated on this amendment. And he said, we're not are we? And I said, well, I can only think of one way of stopping it. I believe that in these situations you always play positive and play it long. If you would allow me to get up and say, the government is moving towards equal pay in five years' time. And then they'll be a halfway house of 90% so that we can see that progress is really being made. He didn't like it. There were mutterings in the Treasury. So I said, all right. I wasn't exactly working hard to stop the amendment being passed. And he agreed. And the amendment was withdrawn. And in 1970 I introduced the equal pay bill which we got through just in time before the election , because I knew the Tories would never have introduced it. And so the , we did move.

**And to Rosie and her mates at Ford. You were a great heroine.**

Well, no. It was very funny really because some years later Ron Todd who was then general secretary of the T&G to which these women belonged, had a little anniversary of equal pay at Transport House and I was invited and they had done a commemorative plate. There was Rosie and most of the sewing machinists' friends and we chatted, you know, like old mates. And the commemorative plate said



something like a free equal pay achieved by the women of Ford and no mention of the Secretary of State or the way of how I'd have to outwit the directorate, or those valiant Labour women on the backbenches. And I think that had, that typified what was wrong with the trade unions' attitude to government at that time. Anything that went wrong was the government's fault. Anything that went right was the trade union's achievement. And there wasn't a sort of wheel **real** integration and partnership and understanding, that we're both on the same side trying to achieve broadly the same ends. But we might differ over methods, we should discuss the methods. Now that has always been my philosophy.

### **Has that changed? Do you see the TUC in a better light today?**

Well, I think there is, you can't, it's an incomp, it's a situation you can't compare because, of course, Thatcher had knocked the stuffing out of the trade union movement by her economic policies, reinforced by her social policies. And they were naturally in a very subdued mood. And we won. Of course. And that's why they have taken lying down, the, Tony Blair's refusal, no favours for the trade unions - fairness but not favours, you see. He's developed and arms and length relationship with the trade unions.

### **Is that right?**

No, I think it's a pity because I still think in a democracy you've got to recognise that working people have a two facet life. On the one hand they're voters. And once every four or five years, they can cast a vote for a different government, and, but one as people in the workplace who are experiencing the effect of other people's power over them every day. And I think if you had to have a recreation of that sense of solidarity without the restoration of any abuse of trade union power, then I think you've got to talk to them in terms, just, you know, just as working colleagues. That sense of a social contract. That, I mean I think it is a strange morality which says we can take .1 million from Bernie Ecclestone. You know, the big power chap, for the party funds. Oh it mustn't be spent on the trade unions or any money. And I do think there was an abuse of trade union power in the past, not least in the party conference, as I've explained. You know, the arrogant, he who pays the piper, calls the tune. That's not my idea of a democracy, nor is it my idea of democracy to say, for a Labour government to say to the trade union movement, you'll just get fairness but no favour. You amount, mattered to us no more than business. Well, I think that's shedding too much of our history, too completely and unnecessarily. I still believe that what, that the social contract means, you say to them working people in the Party, and I don't only mean blue collar workers, but others. You say to them, the scales at the moment are tipped too heavily against people at work and in favour of their employers. And we therefore are going constantly to seek to adjust that balance, but at the same time you must realise that economic policy must be planned for the nation as a whole by the government. And you have no right to press sectional interests to the point at which they destroy that economic policy. It's an educational business. And I think you've got to go on telling working people if they want the social weight, if they care about a national health service, if they care about a good state pension scheme, a good state education scheme, then they've got to, they've got to face up to the fact that they cost money. And if they are going



to take their payment primarily in the cash wage, there will be less for the social wage. That's ..... and which, of course, was never discussed in Margaret Thatcher's day because she doesn't believe in the social wage. She doesn't believe in state education. She doesn't believe in the national health service. She doesn't believe in state insurance. She believes everybody should go private. Everybody should fight for their own corner and get as much as they can out of the economy and then pay privately for everything. Those are the two major breaches of the philosophy, breaks of the philosophy between them. The old Tories and us. And I would like to see new Labour studying its history of the party a little more closely than it has done, giving more credit to old Labour where credit is due and taking on the burden of giving working people a philosophic analysis which will make them feel they really have got to use that much abused word a stake in society.

**Excellent Barbara. Thank you very much indeed. We've covered a load of ground there.**

Well, you'll trim it I suppose.

**Well it will all go into the archives for students and people -**

Good.

**People who** □ -

**You've got a very good recall there of events that happened a long time.**

**You wouldn't like us to throw your views on what the trade unions should be doing in the next millennium.**

No.

**No.**

No. I think that's, if you , forgive me so saying so. It's a silly question. I mean honestly, love, I mean anybody -

**So there's nothing else you want to say?**

No. I want to get rid of you all.

**Alright, we'll go.**

(General discussion about the garden etc.)

You can see why it saved my life (the garden) through all years of Cabinet struggle.

**To get back here.**

To get back here.

**Sanctuary.**

Yes.

**I can understand that.**

Oh yes.

**Not that you did get back terribly often during some periods -**

Well I mean you could always, I could always work on the boxes in the study you see, no -

**Before there was a call from Conrad Heron or Andrew Kerr of -**

Yes

**Smith, Douglas Smith?**

Oh Douglas Smith was a nice chap, yes.

**Derek, Derek Robinson?**

Yes but my best - my best private secretary, principal private secretary was Norman Warner at the Social Services and of course he - they don't reveal what they are, but it was clear to me he was one of us and he knew about the - his father had been a trade unionist or something. And -

**Do you realise what you said there, you said he was one of us?**

Oh yes -

**There was somebody else who used that phrase.**

I know, I know but it's still the only phrase that really works because he really was spiritually one of us. And he and Jack Straw .... got on like a house on fire and then when Jack became Home Secretary he took Norman on as his political adviser.

**And he was good?**

And now he's in the Lords.

**Oh there you are you see.**

Yes he was made a Lord.

**Well just wrapping things up, we'll see yo before we go.**

**We are in Buckinghamshire, in the Chilterns in fact, at Hill Corner Farm, the home of Baroness Barbara Castle, whose real bed of nails I suppose in that Labour government in the 60s was her two year spell at the Department of**

**Employment and Productivity. And did she go through it there, she was, as she put it, right in the thick of it.**