TUC: Len Murray:
Transcribed by Ailsa McKillop for Gil Pearson

Lionel Murray, or Len, as he is better known in the Trade Union movement, was General Secretary of the TUC from 1973 to 1984. Enobled as Baron of Epping Forest, he lives on the edge of the Forest.
What kind of war did you have?

Well, I was in the infantry, the Shropshire Light Infantry, I was untrained for anything except in the infantry, when I finished I was a platoon commander and lieutenant in the D-Day landings in Normandy.

You were in the D-Day landings?

Yes.

And were you in danger then? You must have been.

I suppose so. Yes, I was terribly frightened at times, numbed at times, appalled at times, but this was a long time ago and I'm still here, not like some of my friends.

And then fought across France and ... ?

No. No, no, no, no. After a spell of fighting I was evacuated with what was then called combat exhaustion and eventually was discharged.

What do we call combat exhaustion today?

Oh, I don't know. I think they still call it battle fatigue or something. They called it shell shock in the First World War. I might well have been shot in the First World War, instead I was given proper treatment and survived. I felt terribly guilty when I was eventually discharged.

Has that guilt stayed with you?

Yes, as it has with many ex-servicemen. I remember hearing Enoch Powell talk about his wartime experiences and about his profound sense of guilt at having survived, and this was the first time that I realised there's somebody else felt the same as I did without talk ... because one doesn't talk to people about these things, not to ex-serviceman, but I did find a lot of people like me felt just the same. Guilty at being alive.

Do you still feel that?

To a much lesser extent. I'm grateful and in a sense finding as I look back ... finding part of my sense of vocation and service, if this doesn't sound unduly pious, as having derived from that.

And you came back and ... ? Your old headmaster said: Go to Oxford?

Yes, he did! I was working in Wolverhampton, I joined the union, I was very briefly in the Communist party, brave new world, Joe for King, Stalingrad and all that, our debt to the Russians didn't survive long, I was courting, enjoying life, and then he said, if you want to make something of your life, go and get yourself some proper education. And because he was my old headmaster, I didn't dare say no. Yes, sir, no sir!

What union was that? What union were you first a member of then?

Transport and General in Wolverhampton Engineering Works.

And you were working as an engineer?

No, I was working in the stores, I was totally untrained for anything. And I was in the stores ... I was an assistant material controller, I'll have you know!

But you were happy, I mean, you... ?

I felt very happy, very happy, I was going to get married, I was active in politics, in the union myself.

How did you meet your wife?

Oh, this would be during the war, she was born in the same village as I was and I went over to visit her parents and here was this lovely red-headed nurse and I swooned and ...

And she swooned too?

I'd like to think she did. Yes, that was 53 years ago.

And I'm sure it's been a happy marriage.

It's been a very happy marriage.

And she's supported you all the way through?

Oh, yes, indeed, when I look ... the debt that I owe to my family, my 4 children, eventually, particularly to my wife, is quite inexpressible, it is, to come back and nag her after a difficult and rough time with some brutal trade unionists and to find the support there was tremendous.

And so you went and read ... instead of reading English you read ... ?

I did politics, philosophy and economics, PPE, bottom grades, which was just the right thing for me, it brought together the half-formed views about philosophy ... it all depends on what you mean by politics, and I'd been quite active in politics and economics, and I'd read the first two pages of *Das Kapital*! And so I was an expert. Value price and profit and so on. It brought together the three strands of these inter-penetrating subjects and showed me that much of economics is based on political presuppositions. So when I heard people pontificating about monetary economics or planning or whatever, I learned to look behind it and ask what their political motivation was.

And were you a member of the Communist party at this time?

I was just about on the way out, I joined in, as I say, a fit of enthusiasm and ... idealism, but when I joined it I realised ... it gave me discipline, it gave me perseverance, it got me up in the morning to sell the *Daily Worker* outside the factory, it kept me at a branch meeting till 10 o'clock at night, it gave me these things, but it tried to impose on me a framework of ... harsh framework of discipline which at that time my questioning mind and my critical views I couldn't accept, so I would never have been a steel-hardened *apparatchik* but I valued the time, the short time that I spent in the party, yes.

And it must have helped you to see contemporary politics of the time in a wider context?

Indeed, it helped me at least to understand what the CP, the Stalinists were driven by what they meant by the thing they were proposing, it certainly never gave me any idea of what the Trotskyites were about, for whom I had a supreme contempt. I had some regard for the old stalwart CP, for the Mike McGaheys of this world, etc. for the men of integrity, but not for these deviationists.

Right. And later, when you were dealing with them, from a position of power, you must have understood where they were coming from better?

I think so, to an extent, at least I understood the vocabulary a little bit, and I understood that they were in general men who, within the Trade Union context, would drive a hard bargain but would stand by it when they got it, this was the thing I valued among them more than some of the other people I dealt with. If you made a bargain with a McGahey or a Ken Gill, then they would stick it.

Why would that be so? I mean, you would think ... ?

I think it was their sense of solidarity with the Trade Union movement, their sense of loyalty, their sense of belonging to a cause, that if they committed themselves, then they did it in the full knowledge of the political limits that they were operating within, and they knew where they were and were prepared to stay with it.

I see. And ... just about yourself. You're Lord Murray of Epping Forest and Baron of Telford in the County of Shropshire? Why did you choose those places?

That's grand. I was born in Shropshire and grew up in Telford ... what is now the Telford area, and so did my wife, and when I was offered the peerage, and my name was Murray, then there were other Murrays in the House of Lords, and so then you get two for the price of one to distinguish you. So my first was of Epping Forest which is where I live now, and of Telford in the County of Shropshire which is where I came from to distinguish me from the other Murrays who were then in the House of Lords ... all great nonsense, isn't it.

Is it a nonsense, do you think, the Lords?

Oh, not the idea of the Second Chamber, I would never have accepted a peerage, if I hadn't had a high regard for the role of the Second Chamber and bicameral system. But of course the trappings and the frippery which surrounds it is a nonsense and I'm delighted now that Tony Blair is stripping some of it away, helped by Lord Irvine.

And you support that, I presume?

Oh, yes.

And do you go a lot?

No, I'm driven there by the whips, though, there's so much legislation going through, and I'm bidden so often by three-line whips to attend, to vote.

And then you feel you have to go?

That I'm there usually four days a week and sometimes very late in the evening, but not entirely by choice, there are other things to do in this world which I regard as more important than merely attending the House of Lords.

What's more important?

The voluntary courses which I've evolved for which I retired early in order to work with national children's ... Action for Children, work with homeless people, disabled organisations, these to me, the voluntary organisation has always been important to me, the trade union was I regarded as the organisation which was created by working men in order to wrest power away from the employers, and from the State, to some extent. And I ... I have a great attachment to the role of the voluntary body, the voluntary organisation in society, the co-operative movement, disabled organisations, child care organisations and so on.

How do they relate to the trade union movement?

Well, they're akin to it, aren't they? They come from the same great stream in British history of self-help, you know, curiously Samuel Smiles is in the same tradition. The assertion by ordinary men that Jack's as good as his master, that when Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman, all this great tradition, this great river, which has flowed throughout history, has expressed itself in the 19th century in particular in co-operative movement, mutual societies, friendly societies, trade unions and later on charitable organisations.

So you see the trade unions far more broadly based than simply fighting for better wages or whatever?

Oh, gracious yes! Gracious, yes. The trade union is about ... it's about dignity, it's about enabling the ordinary man to answer the boss back instead of cowering and being afraid and terrified, being able to stand up and say, but hang on, because I've got some friends here who take the same view as me, and we think ... now the only power that the employee can have is ... comes from combination, and trade unions are about power, they're about empowering people, they're about dignity, wages, conditions, pensions are important, but they're secondary. They're not the ... they're not some sort of slot machine in which you put your sub at the top and you take your wage increase out of the bottom, this is a very partial way of looking at it.

So how do you think that impression has got about, that trade unions are just about wages and conditions?

Because they're the most conspicuous part of their identity. The most obvious part, hence the test which many trade unionists apply to their trade union, and it's a test which many members of the public apply to the trade union, not surprisingly. But it's only the outward and visible sign of an inward state of grace. And the improvement of conditions is of course important but it's a special case of the total purpose, which is why trade unions will survive. They are insurance companies in a sense, that they provide protection and benefits to people in the same way as your car insurance provides to you, but because they are much more than that, because they come from this strong tradition, you can see it now, they're surviving in spite of the onslaught that's been on them in the past 20 years, still, what, seven, eight million people in trade unions, without coercion, and I'm sure this will continue.

You say British trade unions ... are unions abroad ... do they have a different attitude?

They come from the same stock and same provenance. The same drive ... after all, we literally exported trade unionism to some countries, to Australia, to Canada, to America, the early trade unionists in America were ... in the USA, were British, Sam Gompers (?) for

example, but they ... they worked there, they took root, because the same needs were there on the part of working people. And by contrast the way in which trade unions degenerated into part of the state apparatus in the Soviet Union or in fascist Spain or in Germany, demonstrated that the heretical view of trade unions as arms for the State couldn't be supported and they didn't fulfil the proper purpose and therefore didn't survive.

And did you reach all these views of yours very early on, or has it taken a lifetime of working in the unions for you to reach this?

I think it was pretty early ... I started working, not before, then I had some romantic view of Socialism and that, I'd hardly heard of trade unions, but when I started working, and I realised that the union was there all the time and was dealing with the problems day by day of people, with a quick response to their needs, and I compared and contrasted this with the political method, with the political system as such, much more distant, much more remote from the experience and the needs of working people, but it was then that I realised that my interest lay much more on the trade unionist side than on the political side, so it was quite early, but of course my views have matured over the years, and by observing what's happened to trade unions in other countries and contrasting it with our own experience, I realised that ... what the essence of trade unionism was as this thing from the superficial attractive to some.

You must then have worked to make this view become reality right through your life?

Yes, indeed, much of what I believe and much of what I worked for were because I learned from other people, notably George Woodcock, arguably the greatest General Secretary the TUC has ever had, Walter Citrine in a different way, was of course a great General Secretary. But I worked under Woodcock, and Woodcock had this highly developed view of trade unions as part of society, and as having a role in society and a view of government as being *primus inter pares*, as being one very important, possibly the most important, but only one of the institutions through which people found self-expression and improved themselves, and so going on from there, arguing for unions to be brought into consultation, and employers to be brought to consultation by governments on joint organisations to reflect on and to come to conclusions about the the conduct of the economic and social affairs. Now people talk ... call this corporatism, this is nonsense, in the sense that Mussolini's fascism was based on corporatism. But this view of trade unionism comes from recognising that this strand of experience and knowledge ought to be tapped and is a strength in society and should be brought to bear on the position perfecting society as a whole in a co-operative way, in a consensual way as part of the total State activity.

And you ... so Woodcock, then, was your great mentor, was he?

Yes, indeed. Oh, yes, indeed he was, he had the most highly developed philosophy of trade unions of everybody I know, but he in turn had got much of this from a man of whom perhaps you've never heard, named Milne Bailey, who was head of the economics department of the TUC before the War under Citrine and he wrote a great book on trade unions and the State which I read before I went to the TUC and which enormously impressed me, and the inwardness of which I only realised when I observed Woodcock and what he was doing.

What kind of a man was Woodcock?

An austere man, highly intelligent man, almost intellectual, but perhaps not quite, a man with an Achilles heel, a man who found it difficult sometimes to come to terms with the inadequacy of some of the people that he worked with, and who on occasion showed it, so

therefore a man who never quite succeeded in putting into effect all the views and the strength of those views, that he had.

And you must have got on with him very well?

Yes, to the extent that anyone could, as I say, he was an austere man, he was a difficult man to get to know, or to establish a close relationship with, he could be humorous on occasion, but a man of towering ability and great independence of mind, too.

Who else has impressed you in the union movement?

Oh, well ...

Did you know Ernest Bevin?

Hardly at all. Hardly at all. I didn't know him. The only time I ever saw him was in the early 1950s when I was writing the minutes to the meeting when the Labour government couldn't get its way through the operation of Cripps, getting some bout of wage restraint or something ... Bevin would be brought in to dominate these giants of the General Council, and to persuade them to do things which probably they should have done anyway. So I only observed him on a few occasions, and in a direct way.

So who else impressed you?

Well, Jack Jones in particular, a man of very highly developed and shaped abilities, and he was about trade unionism. A great democratiser. At the same time, a man with a great strength of character, on occasion almost an autocrat, but with a very genuine desire and ability to bring the representatives of ordinary people into decision-making in contrast to the previous style of some of the General Secretaries of the TGWU. There are other people who were less conspicuous, there was Alf Allen of USDAW who was a very thoughtful man, a creative man, a man who didn't carry as much weight inside the trade union movement, but to whom I always looked up, then Harry Urwin of the TGWU, never General Secretary, but these will be names known to people in the trade union movement.

Yes, of course.

But a man of enormous reflective capacity and incisive power of putting into words the results of his reflections ... I feel I could go on.

No, it's interesting to know who really impressed you.

Yes, indeed. I'd have to mention Hugh Scanlon, the best, the cleverest negotiator, whom I ever saw in operation. A man of infinite guile, capacity to move round a circle and look at things from the 180 opposite and home in and find a solution.

Is there any particular occasion that you remember?

Oh, well, that, there was one occasion I particularly remember of Hughie was when we were trying to persuade Ted Heath in ... 1974, would it be? ... '73, '74, to allow the miners to settle by using some provisions of the Prices and Incomes Act and we ultimately went to see Ted Heath to try to persuade him to allow this one exception, we'd hold the rest back. And there were five, six of us. And these other people selected Hughie to be the one to put this to Heath, and to argue it with Heath which was a measure of their esteem of Hughie, and Hughie did in a most remarkable way but didn't persuade Ted Heath.

He didn't?

And a great shame it was for Ted Heath that he didn't accept what Hughie was saying, what we were saying, because it would have got him home and dry with some problems that he got, but that's another story.
Well, oh just ... your name is really Lionel, but everybody calls you Len; why is that, sir?

It started during the War, the use of Len, and continued until I retired, and then my wife said I'd got to reclaim the name Lionel, and since then I've been ...

Do people call you Lionel?

To people's astonishment, they say: ... there used to be a chap named Len Murray, but who's this Lionel?

Which do you prefer?

Well, I have to defer to a wife in retirement, don't I?

Yes, you do.

I owe her such a lot.

And why ... just to go back to the very earliest days of your life, why did your parents place you ... ?

My parents weren't married, my mother wasn't married, I was illegitimate, that's why I was fostered from birth, I went to a lady in Wellington, and was a street arab for the first seven or eight years of my life, raking the roads and generally running wild a lot of the time, then she died and I went back to live with another foster mother who was I think technically my guardian for a bit, for a couple of years, and then I was sent to live with an uncle, so-called uncle, I think he was some distant relative of my family, my mother's family, I was there two or three years as a farm boy, then I came back to my guardian, because my uncle didn't want me to go on being educated, and then I lived with her until she died and I went up to college.

So you didn't know your parents really at all? You didn't know your real parents at all?

No, I was only told who my mother was, who lived in the same village, but I was about 14, it was a tremendous shock to me ...

So you knew this woman, but you didn't know she was your mother ?

I knew this woman but I didn't know she was my mother, no.

That must be extraordinary

That was very sad, wasn't it? I've always felt terribly sad for her, I don't suppose I've exchanged three words with her in the course of my life. Great shame for her ...

Amazing.

... that that should have been imposed on her, she was very young. She was very young and her parents wouldn't let her marry this man, who ever he was.

You didn't know him at all?

I don't think so, no, no, no, no.

And you don't even know who that is today?

No, I'm not sure, I have my suspicions. But, no.

That must be extraordinary. Is that a kind of loss you feel?

I did for many years, it was quite traumatic, and then of course finding out about it really knocked me absolutely sideways for a long time ...

At 14?

... but I knew there was something different about me, it was only at 14 this whole thing was uncovered and that really knocked me sideways.

It must have done.

It took me a long time to come to terms with it. But then, looking back, I've realised that I certainly wasn't unique, and who knows, the experience, the trauma of it, may have done something to help shape my subsequent life.

So Murray comes out of where?

Oh, out of my guardian's thoughts about ... when I came back to live in that village where my mother lived, I couldn't be called by her name, and so the guardian had to find a new one, and that's where Lionel came from, and Murray too, if it comes to that.

Just invented?

Just invented. Oh, I don't know how, I never asked her how or why.

How extraordinary.

It could have been Elkin Allan, think of that?

Could all that happen today in the social ... ?

I doubt it, the idea of your parents not being married is so much more common and accepted nowadays, etc. But I do a great deal of work, I'm vice-chairman of a major children's charity which ... and alot of the children – we're dealing with troubled, troublesome children. Children of single parents, i.e. in this case, parents who'd already married and sometime I think there's probably some little bit of their life, of their shaping, that is not quite as it ought to be, that may be a reflection of my own attitude, I don't know, I think there's something.

But you must have a keen interest in them?
Yes, I don't think it derives ... it doesn't derive so much from my own experience, the sort of trying to put right things that were wrong, it came from my wife's side, she had aunts involved in that charity many, many years ago, that's where it came from, but perhaps my

interest was sharpened by my own experience. But I'm not trying to put something right which went wrong when I was early ... I'm not trying to use them in a sense, to fill in a gap.

No, I see that.

That would be heresy.

It must give you a sympathy with people who are involved?

Perhaps, I don't know, I haven't really thought about it. Well, I like to think of them as people, as people in their own right, these youngsters, these young people, these children, etc. not as objects of my interest or anything else.

The other great traumatic thing of your childhood was to have been your uncle's death, gored by a bull?

No, it wasn't a trauma, it happened after I'd left the farm and I was living away.

Oh, I see, you weren't there?

But this was ... life was rugged, life was very rough in the Shropshire countryside at the time. People going about were getting gored by bulls, evidently they weren't ... no, this wasn't a trauma, very sad, but ... very sorry to hear it.

What are your memories of the thirties?

Well, my memories of the thirties are conditioned largely by memories of myself. I was very ... poor in the ... certainly when I lived in Wellington for the first seven or eight years. We were grindingly poor, looking back I realise it, but I wasn't sorry for myself, I wasn't very conscious of it, because everybody was poor then.

How poor is poor?

Well, poor was ... we lived in one room, up and one room down, with a little bit of a kitchen stuck on it ...

How many people?

Three, there was the foster woman, then there was two of us. She managed to take it ... she'd get some washing to do, we always had food so far as I remember, I don't remember getting hungry but ... ragged sort of clothes and things but I wasn't sorry for myself because everybody was like this. And I have no sympathy whatever with some of these politicians who came from middle-class, even upper-class families who claim to discover at the age of three that they were driven off the rest of their lives in order to put right the poverty which they observed in their neighbours and such, I think it's bogus. Living on a farm was still pretty near the bone because at that time it was a small farm ... agriculture was in a rough way, my guardian herself was the local school nurse, she didn't have very much money, etc. so I was always very conscious of being short of money, later on, when I went to college I didn't have two pennies to rub together because I considered I scraped into college, but I don't think this shaped my life or destroyed my life in any way, they were just facts of life. Certainly I was aware of unemployment, unemployment wasn't as bad round my area as it was in some other areas, but it was certainly a lot of unemployed men hanging about and I clearly remember then.

Miners mostly, I should think?

There were some miners, yes, there were some miners, more particularly in our area, they were engineers from the local car-works etc. but yes, there were a lot of miners in central Shropshire.

But the way you're talking, it doesn't seem that this inspired you to do something about it and all that? No?

No, it didn't. I was hardly conscious of politics at all at that time, so far as I was, it was a sort of airy-fairy romantic literary kind of politics. I was never. involved in politics until after the war ... well, I was criticised during the war by the Bolsh- ... sensible smilers who were serving in the same battalion as me, that's where my politics started.

Talking with ... ?

Yes, that's right, talking about their experiences and about where they'd come from and so on, not the ...

When you say it makes you angry when you hear middle-class people say they were inspired to fight for the poor people ...

At that age. They'd go back and say: When I was three I felt this was a terrible form of society, I must do something about it. I'm exaggerating.

You don't believe it?

I'm exaggerating.

But you do hear people say that.

That's right.

And you just don't believe that? It's self-dramatisation?

No, I don't ... I have contempt for it. They've got to invent something which is not realistic.

And you have memories of people being evicted?

Yes, my uncle had to sack a man from the farm, for what reason I don't know, but as a result he left the tied cottage he lived in, which was a bit of a hovel, but it was a roof, with his ... I think it was three children, and I remember seeing them under a tarpaulin by a hedge. What happened to them after that, I don't know.

But again, you accepted that just as part of life?

I did, I'm afraid, because life was hard, life was real, life was cruel, life was earnest, and it owed you no favours and you showed it no favours.

Yes. Now as you grew up, there must have been the Spanish Civil War going on?

Yes, I was conscious of Potato Jones and running food to Bilbao or whatever, that was on the periphery. I suppose that was the first time I became conscious of political development, but this wasn't some great eye-opening thing, this wasn't some great excitement which made me turn my attention to fascism or what have you, that came a lot later.

When would that come ... during the War?

I was a peasant, I was still, although I was at grammar school, I was pretty thick and unsympathetic to the broader things of society.

What books and writers influenced you early on?

Oh, gracious me. I was omnivorous.

I mean, William Morris, for instance?

Aldous Huxley, John Buchan of course, Jules Verne, I would take anything, I deliberately in the local library close my eyes and go for the bookcase. And pick one out.

Really? And take that home and read it?

Take it away and read it. I'd have four or five more, but always one or two. And sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn't. There was also a local doctor who allowed me access to his books, so I'd find it difficult to put my finger on books. As distinct from school books, as distinct from set books and so on, because ... David Rudyard was coming onto the scene, oh ... Upton Sinclair, Upton Sinclair, now he did have an effect on my thinking about the harshness of life, particularly in America and so on.

And then how did you get into the TUC? I mean, where was that?

Oh, because I was interviewed by George Woodcock.

And how did you get to that?

I applied for the job. I was working up in Liverpool, there was a job going in the TUC so I pulled my fountain pen ...

But how did you hear of that job?

I don't remember, I think I must have read it in the *Economist*, something like that, I was regularly reading the advertisements and I think I must have seen it in the *Economist* and written for the kind of job I was in off to the TUC. More in hope than expectation. Many were called but very, very, very few were chosen.

But you were called?

I was called and I was chosen. By Woodcock.

Yes. And how did that happen?

Because I told the truth.

Tell us about that.

Woodcock said to me: Well, Mr Murray, what do you think should be the attitude of the trade unionist towards monopolies? I knew the stock Socialist answer: monopoly's a bad thing, exploit working people, it should be abolished, nationalise the what have you. And I thought: sod this. And I said: Well, I don't see why trade unionists shouldn't do a deal. Monopolies are in a position to do ... to set prices, to get decent prices, to make reasonable profits and to pay proper wages. And so there's the advantage of stability to a trade or an industry then it

benefits the relationship of the two sides, each seeing the fair demands of the other. But as it happens, just as it happens, this was exactly in line with Woodcock's thinking, because he'd been brought up in the cotton industry in Lancashire, and he'd seen the depredations of competition there. And the benefits that came from cartelisation. So it just suited Woodcock to hear this, I think that was the reason!

And has that stayed your view?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, indeed it is, indeed it is. The idea of competition as a solvent for all problems is nonsense. Competition has a part to play, of course, in a proper competitive situation, with a constant tendency within competition is, for example, the mergers and takeovers, drive competition out and to enable the owners of the assets to set their own terms and to determine their own pricing systems. So there is a constant tendency towards monopoly. Now insofar as other people manage to inch their way in, or inventing variations or innovating them who will be challengers to that, but at least they'll be unstable sort of stability there.

But it's a given that we don't like monopolies, we have Monopolies Commissions and so on?

Well, yes, but ... well you say it's a given, it's a given, as I say, we don't like monopolies, I was always very dubious about the Monopolies Commission, or rather about the failure to take into account the work of the Monopolies Commission the advantage that can come from, on occasion, monopoly on occasion, cartelisation, to surround that with limitations, if you like, for social purposes to put limits to what they can do, but to acknowledge that at some stage in the development of an industry or process, the idea of monopolies that it reflected in patent law, for example, so that when Resale Price Maintenance was abolished by Ted Heath, I was very much opposed to that, I thought that gave stability to ... it gave the working man the ability to say: I'm going to get five pounds a week regularly rather than be unemployed or sometimes get 2.

And for instance ... Microsoft today is a total monopoly and is being attacked by the Monopolies Commissions in America, but you would be in favour of ... ?

I'm in favour of Microsoft who would never have had the level of innovation applied if we hadn't had Gates applying his mind to it. On the other hand there comes a point at which they can exploit the thing unreasonably, and so I think there should be parameters established by the State, but as part of those parameters, as I say, there should be an acknowledgment of the value of the single channel as well as the threat that can ... in terms of prices or exploitation of employees. It's the balance between the two pounds.

This view of monopolies must have put you at odds with a lot of your colleagues on the left?

No. No, no, no, no. At that time there was a general view, a part of trade unionism was the advantage of some stability, as distinct from the instability which we later saw with the growth of unemployment and the arbitrary decisions taken by government.

So there you are, you've got your job with George Woodcock, with the TUC, and you went in as what?

An assistant in the then research department.

And you worked there how long as a ... ?

I was the assistant to the research department, about I suppose eight or nine years, and then the job of head of the department became vacant and I applied for that and got it. I had the choice of that or the head of the international department at the same time, but I wanted the economics department and I was head there for ... I haven't done my arithmetic, for nine or ten years, then I became ... this was just at the time that economics was cock in the middle economics was the key to the golden door, this was the ... everybody was talking ... it was the planning and the economic development and investment and all these things ...

Are we talking about the fifties?

This was 1956, I think I became head of the economics department, then I became Assistant General Secretary in ... 1969, would it be? Yes, and General Secretary in 1973. So from '56 to '69, 13 years, I was head of the economics department.

And you became General Secretary when?

General Secretary in 1973. Until 1984.

And was that a huge difference, being actually the General Secretary, or was it just part of a process which you ... ?

Oh, it was qualitatively different. Quite different. As Assistant General Secretary I was ... and indeed I deliberately set myself the task of dealing with administration and structure, it was a bit ... Woodcock with all his great qualities, was never a good manager, although Victor Feather, there's a bit more interest in that, but things which needed to be done, restructuring of some committees, the development of some new kinds of industrial communities and the regional organisation, and development of the education front, although they had a very good head of the education department. But these are things that interested me more in those four years. So I was out in the main swim of policy development and of ... the involvement with the governance during this period; occasionally I wasn't all the time, but in '73 I became General Secretary, I was right on the leading edge of developments and economic policy and industrial relations policy and the rest of them on the board of government.

[SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED]

And suddenly your life changes because you've become a player on the world stage?

Yes. Yes.

It must be very odd, that?

Well, the first thing that I had to do was to establish myself with the General Council. They'd known me as head of the Economic department, they respected me professionally, Assistant General Secretary in the background, but now I was in the big league, I was with them, and indeed, I had to fight my corner, to establish myself. There was an attempt made to abolish the post of Assistant General Secretary, which I had to resist, which the cabinet of the first Finance and General Purposes Committee committee, had to go to the General Council and fight this. Well, I felt pretty awful about it at the time, but it was a very good thing that I should, because I fought my own Finance Committee and I won, at the General Council, which wasn't a bad thing to do. So ... but it took me about a year to establish myself as General Secretary, and I was told by a chap whom I respected after my first full Congress in 1975, he said: Len, you're General Secretary now because I'd fought ... I'd fought a collection of unions on a particular motion, a particular resolution, and I'd won, I'd managed to persuade them to withdraw, one member in particular, and then I was told: "you're

General Secretary young lad", and so that was the first thing you had to do. But then of course, the next thing, the big thing, was the miners' dispute, the miners' strike, the back end of '73. Heath ...

The first miners' strike, '73.
The first, yes, had a three-day week and all that jazz.

Well, take us though those. Tell us about the miners' strike?

Well, it was Joe Gormley was General Secretary, and I've known Joe for quite well for a long time, I was working quite close to Joe and talking to, I think it was Derek Ezra must have been the chairman of the NCB, the National Coal Board, a very wise man, a very able man, he was a skilful negotiator but a man who knew where he'd got to be. And I was in some privy discussions but wasn't getting very far and Heath of course was getting himself more and more entwined with the consequences of his own incomes policy all the time and digging himself deeper and deeper into the mire. Harold Wilson wasn't helping on the very important side, he was making nothing but difficulties for the miners by trying to intervene in ways which were not useful. So the whole thing was messy, and then of course we had this ... we had the oil crisis and then we had the three-day week and an attempt by the Heath government to put pressure on the unions to put pressure on the miners by depriving them of work, driving them to the three-day week which wasn't working. Now Heath took the view, I didn't know at the time, it was a curious and very odd view, very uninformed view, that I was playing politics. I never was a political General Secretary, not in the sense that Victor Feather was, for example. I took the rather distant view of party politics, I was interested in politics, and involved in politics, dealing with ministers and dealing with people who might one day become ministers. But I wasn't bothered about the party business because that was ... that was counter-productive, if you got into that, then the government of the day wouldn't listen to you, so it was very odd that Heath should take this view. I was trying to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for him, trying to help him do that, and he was worried that if the miners settled above the level that he wanted then everybody would go through. So we had to stem that, we had to seal it off, which in effect we did by consulting the unions and getting their agreement that if the miners got a good settlement, other unions wouldn't charge through the gap. And we took the initiative, had the National Economic and Development Council meeting with Barbara in the chair, but we kicked it into touch. And I wouldn't take no for an answer, then I wrote to Heath the same night and said, look, this is a genuine offer, can we come and talk, have a couple of meetings, but he wouldn't be persuaded. He wouldn't understand that this was a genuine offer and one we were pretty sure we could make stick, he didn't think we could make it stick.

What was your actual offer?

The offer was that if the miners were allowed to settle above the norm in the prices and in the incomes legislation, other unions would not use that as a precedent for trying to get more of the same themselves. We'd had a special conference, we'd put this and nearly everybody had voted in favour of doing it. Now either we could have held that, in which case Heath could have said: I made these people control themselves, I made the TUC exercise some authority and I forced them to do it, or we would have failed to stop the other unions going through, in which case Heath could have said: You see? These people are totally unreliable, that's the justification for my legislation on industrial relations. So he was in a no-lose situation. But he didn't see that, he grasped at it but it didn't have the sensitivity to reach out and really get hold of it. So what I got out of all that was first of all for the first time really knowing what it felt like from the inside to be operating at the highest level with government in terms of negotiation and bargaining generally. For the first time to be involved in a major union in trying to help sort out with the employer some sort of basis on which accommodation could be reached, and thirdly I observed for the first time the difference

between a prime minister who could grasp what was within his power to obtain and go for it, or fail to go for it, contrasting Heath with Macmillan or Wilson, or whatever. So these were some of the lessons that I learned in the first six months of being General Secretary.

Quite a baptism of fire?

Oh, it's lovely, isn't it? It's just what you need, it's just what you want, ... at the time you're ... I'm reminded of Cowper's poem, you know, *Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.* Well, I sing that in my Methodist church. But I first learned it at school. Often and often and often I've realised the truth of that, the things that you are terrified about, you're apprehensive about, they happen and they come and they are and then you think: well, thank goodness for that, that's marvellous, thank goodness it's happened. {SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED] The Labour government won the election and Wilson came in, and inflation was soaring away. Fifteen, 20, 25 per cent. So the next big issue was how could we get a grip on this inflation, either we went through that summer manoeuvring and pretending and hoping it would go away before we faced up to the brutal reality that only a very rough period of wage restraint would temporarily do it. I say temporarily provide a breathing space while other things could be got into place to tackle the underlying causes. And out of this there came the so-called Social Contract, largely the brainchild of Jack Jones. Well, no, no, that's not accurate, the Social Contract was really the brainchild of George Woodcock way back, he'd always been looking for this kind of thing, Jack picked up the ball and ran with it very, very effectively. And also it was Jack who initiated the idea of the flat-rate £6 policy which would give rough justice across the whole field, and which turned out to be very, very effective in terms of beginning to turn the corner on inflation, or rather, bringing it down from the peak. And started to get some sort of grip on the situation ... that was the next thing, a very big thing it was too.

And did you see the sense of that immediately or did you have to be convinced?

Oh, I always knew, I always knew that the only way in which we were going to tackle this was by combined action between the government, the TUC and the CBI. I say and the CBI because employers could have wrecked that policy as they very often wrecked incomes policies by giving too much away. Now that may sound paradoxical for a trade union official to say, but this was always the downfall, the downfall later on in '78, because employers, Ford, for example, were giving very big wage increases which were more than flesh and blood could bear to say no to, so ... oh, I always knew that the idea of the social contract, I didn't like the name, but the idea of the social contract, the concerted action, consensual action, was the way ... which had got to be the only way in which it could be tackled, particularly before they took ... sledged out in negotiations.

And then what other major problems did you have later in that ... in the seventies?

One of the by-products of the social contract was a very sharp fall in the number of industrial disputes, and days lost in industrial disputes, so that for two or three years we were ... well, a couple of years anyway, we were relatively free from some of the over-arching disputes of the sort we'd had previously. Notably, the most recent one would be the miners' dispute. Then from about, I suppose, the '76 into '77 we started to drift into some major disputes, for example, the firemen's dispute. What was it ... '77? I don't have a memory for these things. That was a very difficult one in which we hadn't got any formal, by this time any formal contract with the government but in which we were acknowledging implicitly that the government's then ten per cent norm was one which we would try and hold people to. And firemen were bent on breaking through the ten per cent, partly for political purposes. They were a bit left wing, not only did they want the money, but they'd have also the kudos of doing it as well. And we managed with the agreement, one can say it now, of the then

General Secretary Terry Parry, lovely man, and the President in discussion with Merlin Reese and then Jim Callaghan to find a formula for getting them off this hook. But you will remember the Green Goddesses and the dangers of fire and all the rest of it, and the braziers and the firemen warming their hands in the frost and the snow and so on, on the television every night, I'm sure you ... this was very traumatic, but it was a very difficult but very rewarding negotiation which got us out of that, but it got us out of that because eventually the General Secretary, then Terry Parry, said, Len, I can't go back to my executive and sell this. They're going to take me apart limb from limb. He said: you've got to push it down our throats. And so in the public debates we had with his executive, he was calling me all sorts of things and denouncing me as somebody selling the working class to the enemy, and so on and so forth, but privately he was working with his executive and eventually we had to force the golden sovereigns down the throats of his executive, coin by golden coin, the best thing that ever happened to them, because they've still got the agreement now which their pay is related to a manufacturing industry and it's kept the peace.

So it was all a charade between you and ... ?

Well, charade's a very rough word, there was a certain theatre.

A theatre.

But that was my job, very often, as General Secretary, was to be blamed, a General Secretary would go to his executive and say: oh, the TUC's doing this to us, Murray's threatening us with the rules, they're going to put us into rule ... oh, I don't want to do it, brothers, but we have to do it! We have to do it!

Was that so with Arthur Deakin earlier, when you had a great public falling-out with Arthur Deakin?

Did I? I don't recall a big falling-out ...

About workers' representation on the boards of nationalised industries, was that not a very similar thing?
We might have had an argument in the economic committee, but I've forgotten.

Well, when the Callaghan government came in, you had first of all very cordial relations and then that ...

You're not talking about Deakin now, are you?

No, no.

No, Callaghan.

When the Callaghan government came in, you had very cordial relations ...

Yes.

... and then later, later it soured rather?

Well, it didn't really sour, it was a bit disappointing, I had a very high regard for Jim Callaghan as General Secretary, sorry, sorry, as Prime Minister, not as Chancellor, I didn't rate him at all previously as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and part of the reason for that was, that Jim was at his best of a brilliant best when he was thinking with his stomach, as

distinct from ... he'd got a good brain, got a good mind, but when he got trapped in the Treasury ... methodology and the statistics and the quantities and the equations and so on ... he lost control. He lost control of the situation. Then he was thinking his way through politically and as an ex trade unionist, which he had been, then he knew what he could do, what we can do, and he had the toughness and the ability to force us to do a little bit more than we thought we could do or knew we could do, and I rated him, as I say, very highly indeed, next to Harold Macmillan, I would say of the Prime Ministers that I had any dealings with. So in the first phases of ... the phases when he picked up the ball of the social contract, we were getting on very well indeed, we knew where we were, he knew where we were, we knew where we'd come from, even at times when formerly we hadn't got any formal negotiating relationship with the Labour government, they took their policy, we had ours, we could still get things done. But it was when he started at the end, towards the end of a policy, and he got back into the meshes I think of the Treasury, and he started to read the equations and then they started saying: Prime Minister, if we get wages settled on five per cent, we'll be able to get prices down to five per cent in six months' time, and he started to think in Treasury terms, then his judgement went awry and he thought he could get things done and he could persuade us to get things done and make us get things done, which frankly we couldn't do and we knew we couldn't do and we told him we couldn't do it, and we told him, and told him, and told him. So it wasn't sourness but disappointment, and I was still thinking at the end, it could have been different if Jim had been a little bit more flexible on the basis we'd advised him to do it. We had a good relationship.

How do you mean, thinking with his stomach? How do you mean that?

Intuitively.
Intuitively?

I think politicians are very often ... Mrs Thatcher, for example, it was her intuition at the time of the 1979 election which won the election for her, for the Conservative party, rather, and Macmillan too was a man who whatever his rational thought processes, he had a sense of what could be done, of what was possible, this whole R.A. Butler's *The Art of the Possible*, you know, in which Butler explores the nature of politics and the nature of Conservative politics in particular, brilliantly. And I think that politicians are at their best when they're working like that and not treating everything as some sort of desiccated calculating machine, as Nye Bevan called Hugh Gaitskill with some justification.

Now we're onto that, your pecking order for Prime Ministers is ... Macmillan top, is it?

Well, I'm talking about those whom I observed at close quarters.

Yes, certainly.

I never observed Clem Attlee at close quarters, so I'm not bringing him into the arena. But Macmillan was a very wise old bird, a very wily politician and a man of great empathy too, he was a man who ... he'd never forgotten or let you forget that one of the shaping influences of his life had been serving in the First World War, in the trenches with ordinary British tommies getting killed by the dozen, the score, the hundreds, the thousands and it seared into him, getting wounded very severely too several times, it seared into his consciousness and shaped his attitudes towards life. So always he had this sympathy, and it showed right the way through, the House of Lords and the ... in the debates after he'd gone to the House of Lords, so that there was this great ... he had many sources of strength, literary sources, emotional resources, historical, but I had very high regard, as you see, for Macmillan, and Jim too. More than for Wilson, a clever man, but a man who could be pushed in a way that Callaghan couldn't be pushed, and Michael Foot, God bless him! He didn't even have to be pushed, a man who sort of pushed himself and who gave us things that he should

never have considered giving to us in terms of concessions because he wanted to make us happy!

And Callaghan, you really respected ... you came to respect, clearly?

Oh, yes, oh I had respect for him before, the way in which Callaghan stood up to the half-baked ideas of Barbara Castle "In Place of Strife" whatever the ... whatever the merits, to have taken them out in that way, and then to present those proposals in the way that she presented them to us, in a rather desiccated, mechanical, mechanistic kind of way, they didn't deserve, they didn't deserve to be discovered, to be debated. And Callaghan, it was Callaghan who saw that this was not on, it was impossible, he just said: this won't work.

Wilson, of course, was supporting them?

Wilson was supporting Castle until he defected at the end to an intense anger, and ... but this was it, as soon as Wilson took his pen out of his pocket and started scribbling things down we knew that we'd got it, Callaghan would never have done that, Callaghan would never have allowed himself to get into that position.

What other Prime Ministers ... Thatcher? How do you rate her?

Well, how can I, because she would never let us get near to her. After she became ...

Start that bit again?

Yes?

And how about Thatcher?

Well, how can I answer that, because she would never let us get near to her to establish a basis of understanding, this was totally alien to her. After she became leader of the Conservative party, I'd never had much to do with her, certainly as Education Minister this had been handled by the head of the Education Department. So I wanted to establish a relationship, at least an understanding. And I asked Jim Pryor, who I knew very well, if he could fix up a meeting between a couple of us and a couple of them in order to just exchange views. Getting to know you, kind of thing. It took him ... oh, weeks and weeks and weeks, and then she agreed to meet us one evening, 5 or 6 o'clock, and she turned up with Keith Joseph and Jim Pryor, there were three or four of us on our side, and I think it was in the Ministry of Labour or somewhere like that, we were sat down with a glass of wine, and she harangued us, she told us about the enormity of trade unions and the inadequacy of the way in which we were structured, organised and our policies and so on and so forth, we could hardly get a word in edgeways, and it went on until the time for it to finish. And so I then said to Jim: Well, that's all right, it's par for the course, she's very loquacious, but that's all right, she's got it off her chest now, perhaps next time we can settle down to an exchange, so that she at least understands us, where we come from, and we'll be able to understand similarly the assumptions that she's making. There never was a second time. She never would agree to see us again in the same informal way in order at least to establish some sort of ... not agreement, even, but rapport. Which is very sad. And again, after she was in office, our relations were ... and our meetings were of the most formal and indeed frigid kind, well, I wasn't used to this, you know, this is the Prime Minister, you're likely to disagree, Jim or Macmillan or whoever it was. But at least you talked and you ... and then you parleyed, you know, set out the area.

Where does this come from? From an arrogance, do you think?

Insecurity.

Insecurity?

I think, yes. I think she was an autodidact as far as economics and industrial relations were concerned, she'd been instructed by ... very thoroughly, you know, in his own lights, by Keith Joseph, Keith was always giving me pamphlets, sidelined ... You must read this, Murray! Which I very often did, you know, then I got on with Keith Joseph, in a sense. But I don't think that Mrs Thatcher ever understood what industrial relations were about, she wouldn't want to, she didn't see them as being relevant, and I always thought that her view of economics and of industrial relations were coloured by her experience as a physical scientist, that she thought in quantitative terms, she thought that you could do an experiment, in which you added some liquid to another liquid you could read off the change in temperature, the change in colour, the change in density and so on, on a scale, and she thought she could do the same thing with money and with labour and investment and you could read it off in terms of the balance of payments and level of inflation and so on and so forth. She was very ... she was misled some ways, to think of economics as being a kind of science, but there she was, how are the mighty fallen, and that was very sad too, wasn't it?

You think it's sad?

Oh, well, you have to feel sorry for her, don't you? You do, because it was so ... there was so much anguish there, I've often ... I wasn't sympathetic with her policies or many of them, looking back there were some that I see the value of marginal things, but the nature of her going, the way of her going, one has to have a bit of human sympathy for her.

Yes, absolutely. And what about her successors?

Oh, Major. He was a nowt. George Woodcock used to talk with contempt of sending a lad on a man's errand ... this was the worst thing he could say about anybody, except when he used to say: this is a woman doing man's work! Even worse! Sending a lad on a man's errand, and I think that Major was the lad sent on a man's errand.

Really?

Yes.

And now Blair?

Well, I'm not sure that I fully understand the man, of course, because I'm of a different generation. I have ... I've never had any dealings with Mr Blair, he became an MP I think in 1979, and I never had much dealings or truck with back bench MPs anyway, so I never knew the man very well. I have enormous regard for his ability, and I think I'm just beginning to get some glimmer of understanding of the rationale of his policies, of the way in which you see the shift from the old working class basis of politics to this recognition that middle-class aspirations are valid. I have trouble ... it was Ernest Bevin, wasn't it, who said the chief enemy of the working man is the poverty of his ambition. And now it's come to fruition, one has to take account of it. So that I'd give the man very high marks for achievement, for at least the achievements that he's promised us, he didn't promise us the earth and the sky, I grumble about disability, I grumble about child care, I want a bit more cash for this and that, but ... as I think about it, as I look at it in perspective, then I acknowledge the achievement, the fact that he won the election, we wouldn't have been in power at all, and remember I come from the trade union tradition, I work on instalments of progress, I don't expect the whole thing to be changing, revolutionising overnight, but if I can see things moving towards

an objective which I value and which will be of value to working people, then that's good enough for me.

What about partnership, which is the great cry now?

Well, his view of partnership, it's not quite the same as mine. My view of partnership, certainly in industry, resolves the partnership which was mediated through institutions, through trade unions, through employers' organisations, through government. He sees partnership as being something much nearer to the ground, I think, which I would understand, but in which work people and particular employers work together to achieve particular things, but which to me lacks the dimension, the national dimension in which you put these things together and make a national approach to them. Partnership more generally of course comes from his ... his idea of partnership comes from the same stable as me, it comes from the acknowledgement, the recognition of each individual as being enormously important and enormously valid, and as having the right to form a view and express a view in concept with his fellows about things which affect him or her. Now that comes from the Christian Socialist background which Blair and I both share. And this goes back to my view about trade unionism, trade unionism is about the individual, is about Charlie Jones and his ability to stand up, his right to have a view, and express a view, to be involved in decisions affecting his well-being and the well-being of his mates, and the well-being of his family. So that as is central to Blair's thinking, but the way in which he expresses it and the attitude ... his formal attitude towards trade unionism I find a little bit odd. Now, he's got to distance himself from trade unions because he sees trade unions as being a sort of millstone politically and intellectually round the neck of the Labour party. As I suppose to some extent they are, or were. Certainly he shares some of the mythology, he suffers from some of the mythology, the fact that the trade union movement, the winter of discontent, for example, the exceptional nature of the violence and the distress which was caused by trade union action. Very atypical indeed. But both he and the public generally see it in that way and I can understand it. He wants to distance the unions politically from the Labour party as such, so do I, always did. I would much rather have been able to negotiate with the government ... with governments, from a rather more separated stance than then was available to me, too often governments at the time, Labour governments, rather, thought of trade unions as bodies which can deliver for them policies and purposes which were valued by the government but which were totally unavailable because of the attitude of our members. And they thought that they could do that and should do that because of the traditional relationship between unions and the Labour party, only half our unions were affiliated to the Labour party, and half were not, and I was always very, very conscious of and very sensitive to that, so when Blair wants to separate ... to draw a distinction between the role of trade unions and the role of government, it's one which I would acknowledge and approve, and I think it would be helpful to trade unions as well as to government, or to the Labour party, if you like, to have that ... those roles distinguished and the separateness of the functions acknowledged. So in many ways I'm very sympathetic to what Blair is doing on that front.

And what do you think the lessons are to be learned from the earlier commitment to voluntarism? I mean, now they're asking ... the government is asking the unions to limit their bargaining powers, is that on, do you think?

They've got to make their mind up, haven't they? We're either in a market situation or we're not. So ultimately incomes policies, wage restraint, have broken down, the exercise has broken down for two reasons, partly because employers, some employers are willing to ... are anxious to buy in skills which they couldn't obtain and to pay extra in order to get it, and that was because they were in a market situation and they had to survive and trade unions, we're in a market situation, and you're selling a skill to the highest that you can get, and you can't in any permanent way, or a long-term way, suppress that. So what this Labour government must avoid at all costs is falling into he same trap as previous Labour

governments and other governments fell into. Which is to elevate wage restraint over and above labour market policy, to say they can solve the problems by having doses of wage freezes instead of tackling the problem at its roots, which is to improve skills, to increase training, to make available the number of people needed for particular occupations and trades, which we've signally failed to do since the end of the war, and that has been our biggest single failure on the industrial relations front.

Is that a British failure or is that a world failure?

A British failure, not so much a world failure ... look at Sweden, for example, which recognised the importance of this, Germany to a large extent, Japan to a considerable extent, and some of the South-East Asian countries in terms of the emphasis on education and training, and obviously acknowledges this. The choice is sometimes you will get in a corner there and you have to ask people to restrain their wage demands for a short time. Because there is a clear and obvious need to do it, and it can be defined and explained and justified. That is quite different from relying again and again and again on so-called incomes policies or even on wage restraint for long periods of time, because the market forces do not permit it. The thing to do is to go forth, training and education, that's the answer.

So what's missing? What should be done in order to improve training and education?

I'm 14 years out of being General Secretary now, so I don't know in any precise detail what should be done.

But in general terms?

But when Blair talks about education, education, education, and within education he includes training and skill development, that has to be the right approach, but exactly how you'd go about it I wouldn't pretend to pontificate about.

You told the *Guardian* that you frequently suffered for your beliefs?

Did I? I cannot remember this. Don't believe everything you read in newspapers.

Yes. Terry Coleman, it was.

Frequently suffered for my beliefs?

I just wondered what that meant?

No, it sounds like a self-pitying kind of miserable individual.

You don't feel that at all?

I may have been talking on a very narrow area, or I may have been ironic, I might have been grinning at him ...

Absolutely. Well now, then, in 19...

No, I didn't. I didn't suffer for my beliefs. On the contrary, my beliefs gave me the most satisfying life that anyone can ever conceivably have.

Well, let's talk about something you did suffer from. In 1975 you had your heart attack. Now was that a ... '75? 76.

‘76. My first heart attack. Yes, I did.

Now, that must have been a terrible blow for you?

No, on the contrary, it was a great blessing, it wasn’t a major heart attack, it was enough to put me into hospital for a time, but it ... like many other experiences in my life ... was one which at the time seemed a vicissitude but which really was a blessing, because it put things into proportion for me. It taught me, for example, because I was away from work for six weeks or so, during which they had to hold a special conference on the Social Contract which went swimmingly successful ... it taught me that I didn’t actually have to be running on the spot to keep the world going, you know, and revolving on its axis. It taught me that I could take time off, that I could rest and it was a value to me in those respects. It taught me also to make use of Epping Forest and to walk more in Epping Forest and to look at trees and realise that they would still be there when I’d passed off and passed away, and to give things more a sense of proportion and perspective, so ... yes, it was a bit of a blow at the time, but I learned from it.

You had another heart attack since then?

Yes, I collapsed on the Tolpuddle March, just before I retired, after I’d announced that I was going to retire, caused a kafuffle, but that took me into hospital and gave me a bypass heart operation which has given me 14 good and valued years of life in retirement which has been absolutely splendid, so money for the NHS and thank you to my Maker for giving ... for ringing that little bell.

What do you think caused the heart attack? Have you any idea ... ?

Stress, I suppose.

Just stress?
Well, my smoking couldn’t have helped. I started smoking at the age of eight when I was raking the roads in Wellington, and I finished at the age of 62, so I had 54 guilty years of smoking.

Which you now regret or you don’t?

No! No, no, no, no, no, I don’t, not at all. There are very few things that I regret in my life.

Really?

I’m trying to remember, I’m trying to remember things that I did that sear me ... I don’t think so, because I’ve had this capacity to have things to reflect on, to learn from and to value, experiences, and that’s partly a religious background which has helped me to do that ...

Have you grown more religious or less religious as you’ve grown older?

It’s deepened of course, and I was out of the church for years until the early 1950s, but I came back in by observing the Methodist mission in Whitechapel at work with homeless people. In the 1950s the then superintendent. And being puzzled by ... (a) why they should be doing it, and (b) what kept them at it and so on. Eventually, very slowly, and very, very reluctantly, I had to accept that it was the strong Christian beliefs of Arthur Clipson (?) and his wife which explained it, and then I had to go on and ask why he’d treated people like that coming from the ... the Good Samaritan and the idea of my brother’s keeper and who is my brother and what do I mean in trade union terms by addressing people as brother, and why do I call people brother and sister and so on, and to come back to the common origins of

trade unionism very often in Methodism, and the early Methodist preachers, and so this is ... it all fitted together.

It came together?

Very slowly.

Yes. The barracking of the construction workers at Scarborough was something I ...

I don't recall this, I saw some sort of question here, but before my heart attack? It couldn't have been much worse than usual, I hadn't remembered it at all. It was very unimportant. No,I think it was just that I was having a hell of a time at the time and I was running here and running there and up by train and rushing from the station to the ... from the hotel to the station and so on and so forth ... I don't recall the construction workers barracking me. No more than usual, anyway.

You retired three years before you had to?

Yes.

Was that because of the heart attack?
No, not at all, not at all. When I became General Secretary at the age of 52 ... at 52, I sort of pencilled in without saying it to anybody else the idea of serving about ten years, because I thought that would be about it. And indeed I tried to persuade the General Council at the time to reduce the retiring age to 60, but they told me not to bother. But when I passed 60 I started asking myself ... I'd had this one heart attack, but I asked ... what I would do with the rest of my life. And I was involved with some charities and voluntary organisations on a low level, homelessness and disability, child care ... and the more I thought about it, and the more I realised that the pace that I was living and working at would probably exhaust me completely by the time I was 65, then I thought, well, why don't I go off and do something else for the last years? Change the shape of the curve, regard being busy, while I'm still capable of thinking clearly and working hard, carve out a new pattern for myself, with my wife, because I was involved in many of these causes with her in a low-level way, and so it was then that I started to think at the age of 60, well, what about it? And then by the time I came to the age of 61, 62, I thought, well, this is about the right time to go.

So leaving wasn't a terrible wrench for you?

I went through a bit of agony before I reached the decision. But I got my agonising over before I retired, I tried to persuade my wife to tell me what to do, but she said, no, no, no, you make your mind up what you want to do, I don't want you coming back to me after you've retired and say, why did you make me retire, and very sensible of her. Very good advice. So I had to go through this process before I actually retired, and once I walked out of the Congress, and finished with the Congress, then that was all behind me, and never after that, and you can check this out with her, I've never felt in any serious way: oh, I wish I was back there. And I've never felt that in a serious way, thank God I'm not back there. Because I've carved out a new way of life, in association with my wife, with voluntary organisations. And one of the charities I'm involved in, RSVP, an offshoot of Community Service Volunteers, is involved in trying to persuade people coming up to retirement to think through what they want to do after they retire, to get involved in volunteering before they retire, so that they can move through that barrier which for so many people is so traumatic in an effortless kind of way. So if ever you're thinking of retiring which probably you won't, and you want to know what you might do with those years, come and see me and I'll find you a square hole for your square peg.

[SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED]

Really? What's your proudest achievement, looking back, do you think? What are you most proud of?

Pride's a very dangerous thing, isn't it, pride?

You're allowed a little bit of pride in this world.

Well, if I'm allowed a little bit of pride it is the fact that yesterday afternoon as we sit here, one of my daughters, her husband and a couple of the kids came and we had a lovely time together, and over Christmas we shall all be together, you know, and after Christmas we shall all go to see *Dr Doolittle* together ... pride is pride in my family, I think, it's not quite pride, it's satisfaction with the fact that they do come back, that they enjoy each other, that they want to see us and they're very friendly together as well, it's a real family situation, I suppose, I'm now going back and contrasting it with my own childhood, etc, perhaps there's something in that, but pride, satisfaction, call it what you like, but I enormously enjoy my family.

And your greatest disappointment?

It was so mixed, though, it was so mixed. Not going back to war after I'd had combat exhaustion.

Really?

Yes. I wanted to and I didn't want to. I was so tired, so stressed, I suppose I wouldn't have been capable of doing it anyway. But I felt so guilty, so guilty.

And what would you say was your greatest failure?

Ah, now we're on easier ground! My greatest failure I think was not recognising when Mrs Thatcher won the 1979 election, that she'd tapped into some profound changes in thinking and attitudes among British people, including British working people, including British trade unionists and believing that at that time she was a passing phenomenon, a passing breeze which would blow itself out, and failing to grasp that underneath this, although I didn't agree with the way in which she tackled those problems, or addressed her mind to those problems, those problems were there in terms of relationships between members and their trade unions, and trade unions and society which really ought to be tackled, which really needed to be looked at very carefully indeed. And I think I blinded myself in a sense by believing that she was just being arrogant and obstreperous, I blinded myself to the real things which lay behind the changes that were taking place in helping her to power.

What was the consequence of that, of your not ... ?

We delayed far too long in making some changes that were patently necessary and got stuck in a rut of opposition to Thatcher which ... the opposition was certainly needed, but it should have been accompanied by new thinking, fresh thinking, about changes that we ought to be making, structurally and in terms of policies.

And that, at last, we've reached now with Blair, have we, do you think?

With John Monks. Not with Blair, John Monks is doing this endogenously, I have great admiration for the man. he combines, I think, both a sense of the tradition and the purpose of trade unionism on the one hand with an awareness of the need for change and continuing

change and continuing response to change in the changes to society in which we live. Changes which I don't myself understand and which I would be totally unequipped to come to terms with, but John Monks seems to have a firm intellectual grasp and an organisational grasp on what needs to be done.

Can you give us an example of that?

The new approach to organising ... I don't know much about it, though, because I've deliberately kept myself at a distance, but as I understand it, the new approach to organising and the principles which are being worked out by the TUC and unions on the basis on which you appeal to people to join trade unions. Using the word "appeal" in the objective sense, not in the impassioned sense.

[SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED]

So ... what's the role, do you think, of the trade unions in the next century?

The same as the role in the last century. The purpose doesn't change, the purpose is concerned with the wellbeing of the individual worker and it derives from the imbalance of power that there is in any employment situation, any employer is a monopoly in himself and so there must be some means whereby the person who works for a living can answer back, can question, can suggest, can help, can provide a source of wisdom as well as a pair of hands and for that purpose combination is necessary, he must talk to his, she must talk to her, fellow workers, and together they must form a view, and in order to be able to express a view, to give effect to that view. Now that's what it's all about. All right, so structure's a function of purpose and must be related to the circumstances of the time, structures may change. They have changed in my time, the emphasis on decentralised bargaining, for example, Thatcher bargaining compared to bargaining at a national level was a profound change at the end of the War. But the basic purpose is there, mutual support, mutual reliance.

And why do you need a trade union organisation for that?

Because otherwise it gives the employer, whether it be a private employer or a public employer, an inordinate power to do what he or she wants to do, at the expense of the wellbeing of the people who are working for you. And if all power tends to corrupt, then the power to employ will lead to corruption in that area too and extend to exploitation. And the individual has ... the individual worker has as much right to a view as the individual employer.

And what do you think stops people from joining unions?

Well, I'd put it round the other way. I'd say: why should people join trade unions? I have people come to me and say, should I join a trade union? My response would be: is your house insured? And if they say: yes, I say, why bother ... unless you think it's going to burn down tonight, why bother? Unless you think an employer some time is going to act in a way which will require you to find some support among your mates or among the organisation, keep your money in your pocket. If you're quite sure that the employer ... public employer, private employer ... is going be so benevolent, so generous, that you don't need to bother, that's fine, unions are only a means to an end, they're not an end in themselves. But ... they must think through themselves, if they think circumstances may arise where they need a little bit of help from my friends, need somebody at my back that's going to look after me, somebody to pay the legal bill, if I injure myself and the employer's saying, oh no, I don't want anything to do with you. If I get sacked unfairly, then it just makes sense to join the trade union. That's the lowest level of reasoning for joining a trade union, if you like. There

are more noble reasons, more philosophical reasons, but very often those can come later on, but the basic reason is simple. Best insurance policy a man can have in his pocket.

Tell us about the noble reasons? What are the noble reasons?

Oh, wanting to serve, wanting to help other people, thinking: well, other people need my help, you know, I am the Samaritan walking down the road, there's a bloke in need across there, thinking unselfishly as distinct from thinking selfishly.

Now if a young trade unionist came to you and said: I would like to be General Secretary of the TUC in twenty years, what advice would you give him?

I'd say, there's no reason why you can't be. But first of all, I would ask him why he was a trade unionist, and I would be listening to the sort of answers that he gave me, and I would want to find in that some element of service as distinct from the commission ... provision of commercial services. Second, I would want to ask him what kind of education he'd had, the same question that I was asked, you know, if you want to work for this union, you'd better get some proper education. And because some training is necessary as well as having the original motivation. And thirdly I would say ... I would ask him, supposing you're not General Secretary in twenty years' time, what would you do then? And if he says: oh, I shall finish off, I shall go and become Chairman of GEC or something, I'll tell him not to bother. If he said: oh, there's still a life, it's still what I want to do, I want to be at whatever level I can do it best, then I would encourage him to think in those ways. Or she, or her.

Why haven't you written an autobiography of your own?

First I have a profound distrust of political autobiographies. By that I mean biographies of people ... autobiographies of people who would engage in politics either as party politicians or as trade unionists are engaged in politics, be they ... with a small p. Because most of these books I observe are self-serving. Most of them prove that what the person was doing at the particular time was always correct, even if it is the opposite of what he'd been doing on the previous day. There are exceptions to this, for example Denis Healey's recent autobiography, or R.A. Butler's *Art of the Possible* are two which leap to my mind. For the most part I think that biographies are much better than autobiographies.

[SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED]

How would you like to be remembered? When you're looking down ... ?

Like Abou Ben Adhem, as one who loved his fellow men.

When you're looking down at your memorial service, what would you like to hear them say?

He served to the best of his ability, it may sound a bit pious, but it's true.

[SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED]

Are the ideals of socialism the ideals for which you've worked all your life ever likely to be achieved?

Not fully. I don't think they can. But I think you should act as if it might be possible, you've got to keep on moving forward, keep on pushing forward, keep on trying to do things for people, and with people which will bring nearer the idea of a world in which selfishness

becomes unimaginable and in which the idea of service freely given, is the norm by which people live.

But aren't people essentially too selfish for that aim?

Oh, I believe in original sin, I think almost certainly selfishness has its merits as a way of moving from one level of standard of living to another by people. So that I don't think that I can imagine this world without selfishness, but that's why I put my faith in another world, and not in this one.

[SECTION NOT TRANSCRIBED]