[Side One] This is the twenty-sixth of November 1992, this is the BECTU History Project. Interview number 269 Harry Courcha conducted by Alan Sapper. The recording rests with The BECTU History Project.

Harry, mm, when were you born?

Second of March 1925.

And where?

Sixty-seven Queensdown Road, Holloway, London, N7.

And you went to school of course, and did you leave school at fourteen in those days or when?

Yes, I left school at fourteen with no qualification whatsoever.

And can you remember when you were a kid Harry what, what did you want to be in life?

[Pause] Mm, mm. [Pause] Well, that sort of sets a few hairs going. Mm, I had a father who was, mm, what you would call I suppose a working class intellectual and the, mm, took hold of me at an early age and began to turn my mind in directions of study, academic matters, profundities, philosophy, religion and politics and so on. So, mm, I was sort of immersed in deep thought, mm, at an early age. I don't know that I'd ever clarified it into anything concrete. Certainly my thinking was sort of academic at a very early age. Unfortunately he died when I was eleven.

Oh.

[Pause]

And what was your first job?

Mm, well, [Pause] on the report from school at fourteen it showed no signs of, mm, any belief in me whatsoever. It just said 'suitable for manual work'.

[Laughter]

So in fact, mm, I just drifted into ordinary casual [Pause] work. I was working, mm, as a tea boy in a big, mm, metal works near The Angel called McCreedy Metal Company when I was fourteen. Mm, I unfortunately set it alight. [Laughter]

So...

And they dispensed with my services. That's a long story.

Yes. [Laughter]

I then went into, mm, a firm making sieves, wire workers.

Yes.

And from them I went to, mm, a firm that was making torches. Metal plating, chrome metal plating, polishing. I, just before I was called up at eighteen I was working in a firm that was making ammunition boxes for the forces.

And you were called up at eighteen into which part of the Army, which regiment did you get into?

I, I received my calling up papers at seventeen and three quarters. I was, mm, directed to barracks at Warley near Brentwood. As soon as I reached my eighteenth birthday I had general training there, mm.

Was this the first training you'd really received apart from school?

Yes.

Yes. And what were you trained as then?

As a, as a foot soldier.

Foot soldier, yes.

Oh they, they interviewed you and again decided that I had no ability whatsoever.

Yes.

[Laughter] And I wasn't suited to do anything at all except going to be canon fodder.

Yes.

[Laughter] How right they were. [Laughter]

And you were canon fodder and, mm, when you'd finished your square bashing where were you posted?

Royal Fusiliers, which I was very pleased about, by sheer chance because it's The 1st City of London Regiment and as a Londoner I was naturally pleased to be in a London regiment.

Yes, yes. And, mm, when did you go abroad, what was your first engagement?

I was, mm, again they watched very carefully [0:05:00 044] [Laughter] and as soon as I was three months off nineteen...

Mm.

I was told I was going abroad. Of course, in wartime situation obviously you weren't told where you were going and, mm, I actually celebrated my nineteenth birthday on the boat.

Mm.

You couldn't go abroad until you were nineteen you see.

No, no.

And, mm, [Pause] we had to go to Scotland in the dark, in a darkened train, where I'd never been, I'd never been hardly out of, out of London before that.

No.

And, mm, we embarked in great secrecy in darkness on a boat, which I believe it was the Clyde we were going down, and, mm, eventually found ourselves out in the Atlantic wondering where on earth we were going as we appeared to be going to America, but it turned out eventually they were trying to avoid the U-boats which meant going right out into the Atlantic and then coming up quietly to Gibraltar after two weeks.

Two weeks?

Yes. In which I nearly died of seasickness.

Yes.

I was always rather poor physically.

Yes.

And, mm, we crept through Gibraltar quietly and eventually realised we were heading for Italy.

Mm.

And we landed at Naples.

And what year was this, can you remember?

1944.

Ah, yes.

I was called up in Forty-three.

Yes.

I was there 1944 in, mm, well it was March right after my birthday.

Mm, and when you got to Naples, mm, what did you do from Naples, did you engage the enemy at all?

Yes. We were, mm, immediately sent to, mm, a camp where there were remnants of the 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers were resting where we were regaled with horrific stories about fighting and casualties, mm, and all the...

Mm, and maiming, yes.

All the poor fellows had been killed and how we were destined for the same fate, et cetera. [Laughter] And, mm, some more training and then eventually we were told that we were going to the front, which at that time was static.

Mm.

The Germans had set up a very extensive, mm, barrier called the Hitler Line and the Gustav Line, there was one behind the other as sort of second defence. This had been very heavily defended and it went through the town of Cassino.

Mm.

And, mm, there had been extensive battles. There had already been three battles of Cassino before I got there and in none of them had the Allies succeeded in breaking through. But we were told this time we were definitely going through because there would be the most extraordinary, mm, concentration of artillery, aircraft, you name it, et cetera, et cetera, tanks, et cetera and there was no way we couldn't break through, and, mm, which didn't sort of [Laughter] reassure us much. And I must confess I did expect to die.

Yes. [Laughter]

I certainly did expect to die.

Yes, yes.

[Laughter] And, mm, because we knew all what had happened.

Mm.

And how many people had already died, Americans as well, as well as British and all the various Allies that were fighting there. Do you want to hear the...?

Briefly, yes. About the...

I could go on.

Did you go out, did you capture the Cassino itself, Monte Cassino?

Well, it's an unfortunate fallacy is current still after all these years that Monte Cassino was a scene of battle. It wasn't, it just happened to be a, mm, a Benedictine monastery, the centre of the Benedictine Order. It was extremely important in the Catholic Church and still is and the Allies with, mm, their well, their well known incompetence and false intelligence decided it was a centre of German resistance. It wasn't, in fact the Germans had quite honorably made appropriate arrangements to, mm, respect it as they did most, mm, religious and architectural and historical monuments in Italy. Mm, so the Allies suitably bombed it, destroyed the bloody thing for no particular reason at all, there was nobody in it except a few priests. The fighting was all in the area of the monastery.

Mm.

On the hill around it and various other hills and mountains and in Cassino town [0:10:00 090] and the remainder of the lines stretching on both sides in Italy.

Yes.

I crossed the, mm, our, our particular task was to cross the Rapido River, which as it's known, name indicates...

It was rapid?

Was very rapid. [Laughter]

Yes. [Laughter]

And very narrow river.

Yes.

As I couldn't swim and I wasn't even supposed to be in the water, I'd hidden the fact that I had ear problems, which would have meant I couldn't fight and I wanted to do my duty.

Okay, yes.

Mm, I wasn't even supposed to be in the water. Anyway after an enormous barrage from our side smoke was dropped and we then had to go down to the river with the boat, collapsible boat. To cut a long story short I nearly got drowned but I didn't. You don't want to hear the details, I could go on.

No, not the details, just the broad, broad strokes.

I got across anyway where we were pinned down in a ditch, lost very heavy casualties. Mm, I then led an assault.

Mm. [Laughter]

[Laughter] The reason I led an assault because being so foolishly brave...

Mm.

I'd allowed myself to become the machine-gunner.

Mm.

And I had a very heavy Thompson sub machine-gun which I could hardly carry, it was so heavy and I'm a bit rather short, [Laughter] and the machine-gunner leads. So I led the way up the ruddy hill where one company had already been decimated.

Oh God.

The day before and expecting to die at any second. Until I fired this machine-gun. The sheer power and force of it pulled me up, I stopped running and didn't go again. Quite funny really, should have been filmed. And, [Laughter] mm, when we got to the top the Germans surrendered. I won't say any more than that because there's a, quite a story here but, mm, let's say the Germans surrendered and, mm, that was the beginning of the breakthrough.

Wow.

That particular day. It was, mm, I think it was May the, I think it was the nineteenth, I'm actually sure about that.

Yes.

Anyway that was my baptism of fire as they say.

Oh.

And from then I spent the rest of that year in the frontline fighting our way up Italy.

And, mm, at the end of that, that campaign was it the end of the war? I mean did you fight in Italy until when, when...?

I, yes, yes. Well, what, right at the end, mm, well I was in hospital. I won't go into details, I was in hospital.

And were you wounded?

No.

No.

But I was in hospital several times.

Yes.

With one thing or another and, mm, due to the, the privations and so on.

Yes, yes.

And, mm, right at the end I was in hospital when the war in Italy finished.

Yes.

It finished early.

Yes, it did, yes.

Earlier than, mm, the rest of, mm, Europe. I was then, mm, when I came out of hospital my unit had gone back to England, they were preparing to go to fight the Japs and I was left in Italy. So I did various other jobs, quite interesting actually like train guards.

Mm.

Because the Italians were starving.

Yes.

They used to raid...

Yes.

Bandits.

Yes.

Guns and everything. Used to raid the, the trains and also, mm, I went on guards on lorries.

Yes.

Supply lorries, again for the same purpose.

Yes.

To guard them. It's long stories, I won't go into details.

No.

And, mm, I ended up as a prisoner of war guard when the Germans surrendered.

Yes.

They came down to Ancona.

Yes.

Where we had a prisoner of war camp where they were sorted out and Nazis and so on and war criminals were...

Yes. Were sent to America, Latin America?

[Laughter] Many of them, yes. And, mm, mm, after we'd disposed of the Germans and they were then all sent off and then the war finished completely, and then we had this enormous number of what were called DPs - Displaced Persons. These were the people that had been lost their roots, lives and families and homes, largely by German actions were in fact wandering around Europe in all kinds of circumstances. Mm, I then found myself guarding on the staff of a Displaced Persons camp where I stayed till I was demobbed.

Ah, ha.

In Forty-seven.

Did you communicate with any of the DPs?

Yes.

Yes.

They were Yugoslavs.

Mm.

They were what's known as Chetniks.

Oh dear, yes.

Yes. Well, I didn't, I was quite innocent at the time you see and I didn't, I wasn't really up with politics and, mm, [Pause] it wasn't till I was demobbed and studying politics afterwards that I really understood who or what they were. [0:15:00 0138]

Yes.

But, mm, actually I got on quite well with some of them. Particularly the ladies.

Yes, I'm sure, yes. And so you got back to England, demobbed?

Yes.

Did you get a demob suit?

Oh yes, [Laughter] oh yes still remember the demob suit. Standard wear for everyone.

Mm, mm.

[Laughter] A pair of shoes. I'd not worn any shoes all through my, mm, career, partly from principle because I wanted my feet to keep hardened.

Yes.

So I wore Army boots the whole time [Laughter] I was in the Army. I felt most peculiar wearing civilian clothes.

Mm. And how, did you get a job immediately when you got back?

Almost immediately. I was given a certain amount of, mm, leave and, mm, for the first time I had a fair sum of money in my pocket because I' got various kinds of, mm, accumulated savings.

Mm.

And demob money and so on and, mm, I was able to take it easy for a while. The pay while I was in Italy, if I remember right, mm, was it a pound a week or two pounds or something?

Yes.

Minimal. Which we hardly ever used.

Mm.

So I took my time and, mm, I saw a job advertised in the paper for a boot and shoe company.

Yes.

So I went there and got it as a sole cutter.

And, mm, can you remember your wages as a sole cutter?

Five pound a week to start.

Not bad.

Which seemed terrific to me.

Oh it was, it was very good, yes.

[Laughter]

And so how long, did you have, and what was your, a series of jobs or did you stay there the whole time?

I stayed in that industry for, mm, nine years.

Mm.

Mm, it was there that I was introduced to trade unionism.

Yes.

By sheer chance meeting a fellow that was canvassing round the gate and, mm, it all sounded interesting and worthy to me. I'd had some aspects of struggle.

Yes.

Which I, which I won't get into now while I was in the Army.

Yes.

Developed certain revolutionary tendencies.

Good, yes. [Pause] So when did you have your first job at Kay's in, in our industry for instance?

I...

Was it Kay's, was it the first job?

Yes, what happened there was that I was eventually put off in a slump.

Mm.

After, mm, being in that industry for nine years, eight years in the union.

Yes, yes.

Which is, mm, NUBSO.

Yes.

I then, by sheer fortune, mm, we were living at Finchley. My wife made friends with another lady that was, mm, she met at the clinic where they went with their babies.

Yes.

She happened to be the wife of a film director.

Mm.

A very, quite well known one actually, the name of Francis Glassin [ph 169]

Yes.

Do you know him?

Yes.

Francis and Cathy.

Mm.

So we become friends with them and he said would I like to go into the film industry? So I says ‘yes, I certainly would’. You know, it all seemed very creative.

Mm, yes.

And intelligent and so on. So he got me the job at Kay Laboratories where the manager at that time was, mm, Reg Dace [Pause] who asked me, he said ‘I have to ask you this you know’, he said ‘you know we do government work, are you a member of the Communist Party’?

Mm.

Well, at that time I wasn’t you see .

No.

So I said ‘no’. [Laughter]

Yes.

Although I had been.

Yes.

Before that. And, mm, [Pause] that’s how I started in the film industry.

And what was your job at Kay's, your first job at Kay's?

Oh menial as you can imagine, mm, the lowest which was the despatch.

Deispatch, yes.

Which was very interesting because I immediately began to meet people coming...

What was your wage at the time can you remember? Well, did you get a wage increase from five quid a week?

Yes, but I'm afraid I can't remember what it was when I started, but whatever it was was the union rate.

Mm.

Because although it was, was a traditionally independent company...

Mm.

Family business, they did keep to the union rules.

Yes, they did, yes.

Or most of them. Mm, I can't remember at this stage what that was.

Mm. And so you, from despatch what was your next grade you worked? You...

Mm, [Pause] I was never very good at, mm, [Pause] ingratiating myself with anybody so I didn't get the lift ups that many other people got into a suitably, mm, affluent jobs. So I went from there eventually, mm, after about five years I got into developing.

Mm.

Which is where I stayed.

Yes, and when did you first join the union, when you first got there? [0:20:00 189]

Yes. Because I was already in this other union.

Yes. So it was a transfer?

And by then I was active you see. I'd become active in, in that, in that boot and shoe union. In fact too active some people say. [Laughter]

Mm.

And, mm, I transferred automatically. As soon as I got there I went to see the shop steward, a certain gentleman called Laurie Ward.

Yes.

[Laughter] Of ill repute, and insisted that he transfer me immediately.

Mm.

Which he did.

So you were now a member of ACTT. You were in, in despatch when you first joined the union?

Yes.

And you became a developer?

Yes.

A developer. And did you get elected on to the Committee?

Well, my progress was curious. Mm, I began to take an interest in the union for personal reasons. I, I soon grasped that the union wasn't active in this company, mm, but I had my interests anyway so I used to buy *The Journal* and read it.

Mm.

And started contributing articles and letters. These were seen and read by the staff there who grasped that I was some kind of a union...

Intellectual?

Well, yes, whatever you want to call it. And, [Laughter] at a certain stage I was approached and asked would I like to be their secretary, because their Committee didn't have anyone that could write. [Laughter]

Mm.

And, mm, so I began to do minutes and eventually found myself actually creating notices. And, mm, as there was a complete lack of, mm, thinking or action or stimulus at all I began to find myself in that role as well.

Mm.

So what happened there was that the, mm, shop steward went sick, had an operation, for about six months and I found myself willy-nilly.

Yes.

I didn't ask for it, cat… catapulted into the shop steward.

So you're shop steward? And that was in the late Fifties was it or early Sixties?

[Pause] Yes, it was April Fifty-eight when I joined the company.

Yes.

Mm, it was some years later by then. I had not [Pause] rushed into union activity, I was still suffering from the traumas of the previous one.

Yes. [Laughter]

I realised that I wasn't in a real union company, I was in fact keeping my nose down.

Yes.

Till I, as I say I was more or less… [Pause]

Yes. Now when you were, mm, a shop steward, mm, you were still in developing were you, you were still...?

Yes. What happened was that this happened to be the time, mm, when the whole question of Kay's, Soho Square...

Mm.

Had reached a stage where they were considering shutting it down. Now the previous shop steward, and I'll be perfectly blunt here, who was an employers...

Nark?

Or governor's man as they say.

What was his name?

Harry Brislin [ph 234]

Mm.

Had immediately agreed, as they agreed with everything, the management's proposal that they would be made redundant, mm, which I thought was scandalous you know.

Mm.

And there were other people thought the same. And by then a certain gentleman called Brian Anderson became an associate of mine.

Ah.

And, mm, [Pause] by then we're getting the union, the Committee actually working and functioning as an independent body and, mm, I went along to Labs Committee and said my piece and of course, they naturally agreed with me.

Mm.

I said it was a scandal because no one had ever investigated whether it was necessary, it was just an arbitrary statement by management, who in my opinion had not studied the matter anyway.

Mm.

Just a panic measure. So what happened there was that although I was still not the shop steward officially in fact I thwarted that plan.

Mm.

I got the Labs Committee to agree with me and they then sent a, a letter telling them, you know, no way was it acceptable.

Yes.

What happened then was that, mm, [Pause] Brian Anderson and myself, they said 'well, if you reckon you can accommodate them you go and sort them out then'. So Brian Anderson and I went to Soho Square...

Yes. [Laughter]

And ourselves personally...

Right.

Interviewed every single man and woman there, found out what they could do, what they couldn't do, experience and all the rest of it, and we came down to, to, mm, Finsbury Park and sorted out jobs for them.

Yes.

And they were needed.

Yes.

Because Kay's at that time at Finsbury Park was doing quite well and they did have, mm, jobs, you know, in effect. At the same time as this [0:25:00 245] they were, mm, also speculating about the whole prospect of going into colour, which was then becoming an issue, you know, to transfer from black and white to mainly colour. And, mm, so we first saved them from being closed down and we then had a further possibility of accommodating some of them in the new premises at Highbury and, mm...

Mm. Ii was an old laundry wasn't it?

Yes.

Yes.

It was originally an old laundry. The owners of the company were the Martinow [ph 253] family, mm, David we dealt with mainly. They were the old type, gentlemanly English type not the thrusting, [Pause] mm, pushy, ruthless, mm, capitalists of yore.

Mm.

At least they weren't then, and, mm, they were very happy to, to make any accommodation to keep the company open. They looked on it as their sort of, mm, link with the past and the nolstagia and all the rest of it of the film industry.

Yes.

So we met the Martinows, [ph 259] we got on very well and, mm, everything was hunky-dory. But of course, in the process of all these activities as you can imagine, without, mm, any exception the management hated the bloody sight of us because we were making them look silly.

Yes.

[Laughter] In fact running the company for them in effect.

Did you feel that your union activity kept you from further promotion?

Oh yes.

Yes.

Definitely without a doubt. Mm, they began to, mm, push me about it immediately. Mm, at some stages there were no openings but when there were possibilities they were very keen to sort of pull me over to quieten me.

Mm.

Do you want to move on to that?

Well, just a brief, yes, keep it, you know, neat?

Well, the Martinows [ph 269] found that although they invested I think it was a million, a million pounds in the new premises in fact it didn't work properly, it didn't work properly. And my answer to that is that the old management had no proper managerial training, didn't know how to, to, to, to run a large complex operation and, mm, no one had any idea at all what they were doing so of course, it didn't, it didn't work out

properly. So then Martinows [ph 278] then brought in the management consultants. Mm, this was Deal, Golightly and Company.

Yes.

Based in America.

Yes.

But also with offices in London and Geneva. And, mm, [Pause] like all management consultants completely impartial and completely ruthless. No, no protection of anyone.

Mm.

And of course, the heads began to roll. And, mm, these consultants are very clever people, they don't care a damn who you are.

Mm.

If you, if they think you've got something they want you're the man.

Mm.

So, mm, the heads began to roll, and there was an attempt to make my head roll as being the person behind all their misfortunes.

Mm.

Trade unionism in other words. But the consultants didn't see it that way and then they brought in Mr Marshall Cushman, mm, also a consultant of this company who actually eventually took over as Managing Director.

When did he actually take over as Managing Director, what year, can you remember that?

Well, he was there quite a time before he actually took over. I would say it was probably Seventy-one.

Seventy-one, yes.

It was in that area.

Yes.

And, mm, [Pause] there was then, mm, [Pause] the whole company was then being redesigned, restructured to fit into a modern managerial practice.

Mm.

Which of course, obviously we, we applauded, and make it viable and bring it in in among the big, big companies on a competitive basis so it could compete properly with, mm, Rank and Technicolor, et cetera. And at a certain stage I was approached. Mm, this was an awkward time for me.

Mm.

And I know you're going to ask me now why I took over a management position.

Mm.

Well, the situation was that, mm, my erstwhile colleague [0:30:00 305] had by then, mm, began to compete with me - Brian Anderson.

Mm.

Mm, I myself had made the mistake of bringing in, bringing in another person by the name of Ricky Novak.

Mm.

Who had got the sack from Colour Film Services.

Mm, mm..

I recommended him and he was interviewed and taken on. And, mm, another fellow that had been very useful and helpful went with him, Denis Frostick [ph 312] at that time left me and went with them. So in fact I found myself in fact… [Laughter]

So there was a division in other words, that you were being pushed out?

Yes.

And, mm, and they gathered unto them various allies?

Yes, yes.

Like Ricky Novak and...?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes. Mm, part of it is my own fault in so far as my personality is not always, mm, it's a bit abrasive at times with some people and, mm, [Pause] mm, maybe I'd become a little arrogant perhaps. Mm, well I'm sure I did, and in fact, you know, I, I was making enemies as well as friends.

Yes.

So in fact, mm, they plotted to overthrow me and they did it via, via the, mm, consultants, [Pause] They made my position pretty untenable.

Yes.

And then I was offered the job on management. I didn't immediately take it. In fact I re, rejected it. And, mm, and then Mr Cushman saw, [Pause] Brian Shemmings, Brian Shemmings saw the other officers and they said they thought it would be a good thing if I took it.

Mm.

And, mm, a good thing for the company and a good thing for the union.

Yes.

That I could do a useful job in helping make a bridge between management and union. So I said I'd only take it under certain circumstances. One, oh, the job was Personnel Manager.

Yes.

Which is the only job I particularly had an interest in.

Mm.

[Cough] And, mm, One was that I was prepared to do all the functions of the Personnel Manager - hiring.

Firing?

Not firing.

No, yes.

Hiring, training, selecting, promoting, et cetera, et cetera.

Yes.

But I would not, I couldn't feel, find myself able to sack any one. It would have to be done, if anyone was to get the sack it would have to be by somebody else.

Yes.

I didn't feel that was something I could do.

Yes.

Mm, eventually I was given the job on that understanding.

Yes, and that was by Cushman gave you the job?

Yes, by Cushman.

Mm. Was this the time when it was said there was almost workers' control there?

Yes.

Mm.

Yes. From arising from that situation and...

Yes, and how did you see workers' control? Was it really workers' control?

Well, I spent an enormous amount of time myself studying the, the subject.

Mm, yes.

You know, we had developed a situation where I was in effect a full-time shop steward.

Yes.

We were more or less running the firm.

Yes.

Mm, very successfully in my opinion.

Yes.

Mm.

And, and the firm was doing well at this time was it?

Yes.

Yes.

Well, it was beginning to climb up, you know.

Yes.

From, from its previous disaster. And, mm, there was a lot of talk about my being a full-time steward and maybe the union should pay me.

Yes.

Or maybe the workers should pay me and so on. Mm, I'd got by then, after a lot of struggle I'd managed to get a union office.

Yes.

Phone, files, et cetera, et cetera. So in effect it was largely a workers' control.

Yes.

Partly because the management were so ineffective anyway.

Yes, and was Pace there still at the time?

Who?

Mm, Pace was it?

[OI] Dace?

Dace.

Dace, Dace?

Well, Dace was one of the heads that rolled.

Yes.

They decided he was, mm, one of the persons that, mm, was responsible for their problems.

Yes.

His head rolled and, mm, the finance man, Charlie Sweet, was, mm, I think he diplomatically resigned.

Mm.

The, the story was that his hand was caught in the till.

Oh.

Mm, and there were others and they all felt in jeopardy. And, mm, [Pause] George Hawkes nearly got pushed out.

Mm.

He, he was lucky. [0:35:00 371] They tried him out as manager, decided he wasn't good enough and they were going to sack him. I was shop steward at the time.

Yes.

He unburdened his heart to me one day.

Mm.

Probably wouldn't remember it now. The only way he hung on... This is interesting.

Yes.

Is because he had developed a very large number of contacts, customer contacts.

Yes.

He was actually the colour...

Contracts?

Manager.

Yes.

But he had developed a large amount of contacts outside and shown in effect what was skill in, in sales in effect. So on that basis he was able to keep on, and that's the function he had till he actually retired.

Oh.

Mm, he was slightly younger than me but he'd been there all his life.

Mm.

And many of the Kay's chaps hadn't taken part in the war, they'd been there right the way through since...

Was it a reserved occupation?

It was a reserved occupation.

Yes, yes.

Although Reg Dace was one of those that insisted on fighting.

Yes.

He went in the Army.

Yes.

[Pause] So, mm...

So, so you had a position there where you were management, the Personnel Manager?

Mm.

Mm, the, the, the Laboratory was doing well?

Yes.

Mm, Marshall Cushman was the manager?

Yes.

When did that all break down and why did it break down?

He'd become the Managing Director by then.

Yes.

Complete supremo.

Yes.

[Pause] What my part of it you mean?

No, the company it lost its work didn't it, some of its work? [Pause] And at what point did you resign?

[Pause] Well, part of the whole management consultants' report was that they must obviously have managerial, mm, functions, operations.

Mm.

That fitted in with the big time.

Yes.

With the modern managerial world. Cushman done his best. He, he, he went round the industry, he went to social occasions, chatted up people and so on trying to find the kind of people he wanted, that he felt could lift the firm up.

Yes.

Overcome the dead wood of the past.

Yes.

And he tried various. One was a gentleman called Craden [ph 407] who, who for example felt that, mm, painting all the vans green was going to make an enormous difference, [Laughter] we could never understand why but he painted the vans green and painted all kinds of things green.

Yes.

But, mm, [Pause] there was no, mm, sort of disastrous fall-off, there was a kind of indeterminate up and down situation.

Yes, all the time?

Yes.

Yes.

Mm, but they were reasonably viable.

Mm.

Bearing in mind the vast sums they were spending on all these various things arising from the changeover. It was quite, doing quite well really.

When did you start doing the video work there? What time, what period of this?

Well, Kay's, what happened there was that, mm, Cushman with his American contacts was more conversant with developments in the industry technical wise than other people

in this country. And he hired a man, an Englishman that was in fact very clever, a whizz-kid and, mm… [Pause] God I've forgotten his name now.

Mm.

He was, he was the Technical Manager and, mm, this fellow was also up, he'd read all the books and knew what was going on so they went to America and they found out about the new processes and so on. There was a thing coming in called Hot Stock.

Mm.

A new way of developing that meant you could go much faster. And there were new stocks, there was all kinds of new developments and in fact they brought them into Kay's before the other labs.

Yes.

So in fact they had the advantage in many ways.

At this period of time who were your main customers?

Pardon?

Who were your main customers?

Well, they, mm, they were still at that time still partly British.

Mm, mm.

But there was the aim and desire to get into the American market.

Yes, and when did you first get Warner's work? [0:40:00 444]

Warner came quite, a fair bit later actually.

Ah.

But, mm, there's a lot of ins and outs here, it will take a long time to talk about them. But, mm, [Pause] what happened was that in due course despite all these advantages they'd had, and of course, obviously many of the changes were correct and necessary.

Yes.

And meaningful. Despite all these advantages they still could not beat the big time boys.

No.

Which was basically Rank, Denham and Technicolor.

Yes.

So they began to wilt shall we say.

Mm.

And it was then that, mm, the, mm, Martinows [ph 458] eventually got tired of the whole business and decided to sell out.

[OI} Can we just stop there?

Okay Martinows [ph 460] selling out is the last point.

Side Two Tape One.

So the Martinows, [ph 001] mm, decided to sell out Harry?

Yes.

Mm, and that was what, in the late Seventies?

Yes.

Yes.

And, mm, [Pause] I should explain that in the period, mm, that I'm speaking of that, mm, with the many developments that one would entirely agree with to make them on a meaningful competitive basis and so on there developed many things that were completely contrary to the union and to trade unionism as we understand it.

Yes.

And agreements within the union, ACTT/AFLE agreements. Mm, [Pause] unfortunately the gentleman that had taken over from me went along with these.

Mm, that's Brian Anderson is it?

Yes.

Mm.

And the other gentlemen I mentioned. Now there was a lot of, mm, sirens singing, shall we say, about what they'd get in return, which did include the thirty-four hour week.

Thirty-four hour week?

Yes, officially.

Was this, was this the time when everybody thought it was twenty-seven hours?

Well, I wouldn't say everyone did [Laughter] but there were...

I mean the union did, it was in 'The Journal' here.

Well, I'm afraid that isn't correct.

Yes.

There were some people who in fact did less.

Mm.

Mm, in the circumstances of their own departments.

Yes.

It was possible to, but officially the majority of people worked thirty-four hours.

Yes, it was thirty-four hours. And the rest of the industry how long did they work, forty?

Well, that went on until quite recently. In fact it didn't end till after I'd retired and it's only recently they've gone back to forty hours a week.

Yes.

Mm, my time as, mm, the Personnel Manager was rather brief.

Was it, yes?

Oh yes.

It seemed a long time.?

Well, I was clever you see and, mm, I make careful arrangements for an escape route.

Yes.

Because I know how these things go.

Go, yes.

I made careful arrangements for an escape route, which was basically that any appointment was on a three month trial basis.

Yes.

And I made sure I got one. [Laughter]

Yes.

I said it to myself.

Yes.

And, mm, it become clear to me that I was just being used.

Yes.

I was given the alternative, I could even be a complete ruthless bastard...

Yes.

And go along with everything they were doing.

Yes.

Mm, or I'd just be a clerk. Well, I wouldn't be a ruthless bastard.

No.

[Laughter] And, mm, so I found myself in fact with little or nothing to do.

Yes.

I mean obviously were going to make things hot for me as possible.

Yes.

Mm, my erstwhile colleagues showed little understanding or sympathy or concern.

Mm, mm.

And, mm, I was entirely dependent on my own resources.

Yes.

So I took the ball by the horns after three months, went to Cushman and says ‘I’m pulling out’.

Mm.

‘You can’t do that’, he says. ‘I’ll fire you’. I said ‘Mr Cushman, mm, you remember we had a three month trial for all jobs’. ‘Not having it’, he says ‘if you pull out you’re fired’. I said ‘okay then’. So [Laughter] I informed Brian Shemmings.

Mm.

I may have informed you. I can’t remember.

Yes.

[Laughter] And, mm, he was told in no uncertain terms that I had the right to pull out if I wished and he withdrew his threat of sacking and, mm, eventually I just walked out of the job.

Mm.

Walked straight down on development floor and said ‘right, give me something to do’.

Yes.

The supervisor was paralysed with terror.

Yes.

[Laughter] And, mm, it worked in other words.

Yes. And you became a developer again?

I became a developer again.

Yes.

In the meantime [Pause] the workers had become very much disillusioned with the, mm, operations of the new union there and I was, mm, soon the centre of a shall we say a counter-force again.

Yes.

[Laughter] And, mm, [Pause] although I never actually, I was careful, I was cunning you see I never went back as shop steward.

Mm.

One thing it would have been difficult because, mm, I probably wouldn't have got the vote. For another it was too isolating. So what I did was to remain on the Committee and take other jobs.

Yes.

Subsidiary like Chairman.

Yes.

And Vice.

Yes.

And Health and Safety.

Yes.

I did all of them - Secretary again.

Yes, yes.

And so on. So I didn't take the brunt of whatever was going on.

No, no.

And, mm, not too involved with the policies.

Yes.

That obviously were not union wise. Mm, and, mm, [Pause] and that's the way it went on for some years. [0:05:00 044 No one apart from myself came to meetings at head office or Labs Committee or General Council.

Was this the time when you got elected on to the, the Executive Committee?

Yes. I did do that rather cunning thing, which was very helpful at quite an early stage, as soon as I got off the personnel thing.

Yes.

I saw to it that [Pause] via the Labs Committee that I was on to the...

Yes. But you were very active on the Lab Committee?

That's right.

When I used to go to the Lab Committee…

Oh yes.

Mm, you were the main voice virtually.

Yes, yes. Well I was Chairman at one stage.

Yes, exactly.

Yes.

And then you got on to the Executive Committee?

That's right.

Yes.

Now I realised that was a source of power for me.

Mm.

Because the, mm, at that stage they were still very worried and frightened about the union, you know, so my being on the Executive and a friend of yours personally…

Mm.

That built up an air of protection round me.

It did, yes.

Mm, they tried as you know several times...

Yes.

To, mm, sack me or do something or the other and you always came forward and protected me.

Mm.

I believe Cushman brought the subject up with you more than once.

Yes, he did.

[Laughter] So that way I managed to do what I wanted to do, which was not necessarily a question of power.

Yes.

But to do a good job.

And remind me when did you first started your, mm, academic career, at what point?

[OI} Was it a this point Harry?

It was, mm, round about, mm, [Pause] Seventy-two.

As early as that?

Yes.

[OI] Seventy-two?

Yes. Because what happened there was that, mm, my, mm, understanding and knowledge of trade unionism had developed one way or the other.

Mm.

Through meetings, studies and writing and reading it and goodness knows what.

That was before you became Personnel Manager?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes, before.

Yes.

And in fact, mm, without my understanding, realising it I'd become, you know, very knowledgeable.

Yes.

About trade union matters in depth. And, mm, somebody said to me... Oh it was my wife.

Mm.

Who, who was, mm, the Chief Librarian at Middlesex Polytechnic as it was then.

Yes.

It's Middlesex University now.

University now, yes.

And she said to me 'Harry, you know, why haven't you come to the college and do a diploma in Industrial Relations'? 'Oh', I said 'oh I couldn't do anything academic Mary, you know'. I'd had bad experiences at school, I wouldn't have the confidence. She said 'what you know, what I know you know and can do will take you through with flying colours'. So she persuaded me, and she was right, I got in with no trouble at all. They read an, an entry essay I gave.

Yes, yes.

And said it was marvellous 'you are in' and, mm, I did my three years, three years part-time.

Yes.

I couldn't afford to give up work.

No.

[Pause] And, mm, ended up with a good average mark.

Did you get any, any time off work at all?

Oh no, nothing like that.

No, nothing at all, no?

I had no time off work. I had no financial help whatsoever.

Whatsoever, really?

None at all at any stage.

But you got, but over three years, so in 1975/76 you were a graduate?

Yes. No, no that was Industrial Relations.

That was Industrial...

Diploma.

Oh that was a diploma, yes.

Diploma.

Yes.

And, mm...

You got the diploma?

Yes.

In Seventy-five?

At the end of it the head of the course said ‘why don’t you go on for a degree’? So I said ‘well for one thing as far as I can gather there is none in any area I wish to do’. He said ‘well Social Sciences’. I said ‘well to be honest that isn’t what I really want to do, that’s what I’ve been in up to now but it’s not where my real interest lies, my real interest is in Literature, Music, Art and so on, the Humanities’, I said ‘that’s where my father took me and it’s something I had to stop’. He said ‘well, have a look at this’, and he showed me a syllabus and all the subjects on that syllabus I knew.

Yes.

I knew all about. They were about authors.

Yes.

And matters to do with their writing so I knew all about.

Yes.

And I looked at it and I thought ‘well, I could do this and I’ve got all kinds of opinions’, you know.

Yes.

So, mm, I entered what was called the Diploma of Higher Education, DipHE.

Mm.

And that was at Trent Park. And, mm, again I did three years and came out with flying colours.

Good.

Mm, [Pause] I revelled in it, you know, it was really up my street.

Of course, you had a friend at the time who was writing a massive novel and then a massive book wasn't he on sex?

Oh Pat Kearney?

Pat Kearney, yes.

[Laughter] Yes, that was a, I came across these stuff, mm, in turning out my papers the other day. Yes, Pat was always obviously bright but he had no schooling. He called himself an anarchist and didn't appear to have any, [0:10:00 090] mm, depth shall we say.

Yes.

Or academically but in fact secretly, [Laughter] nobody knew this, he was a great supporter and a great help, always loyal, always honest, always with us.

Yes.

And never with the management. But Pat all this time was going, was a member of the, mm, British, mm, Museum Reading Room.

Yes.

Mm, whatever it is, he had a special ticket.

A ticket, yes.

And he had permission to study works that had been stacked away that no one was supposed to read and that on, mm, erotic subjects.

Mm, erotica, yes.

He'd been doing this for years without any, anybody knowing and he suddenly came out, [Laughter] he was amazing, he suddenly turned up and saying 'have you seen this in *The Times.* What's this'? A review of his… [Laughter]

A review of his book?

Yes, *The Times, Sunday Times, Observer* and *Times,* mm, *Guardian* and so on.

[OI] What was his name?

Pat Kearney.

[OI] K-e-h…?

And this wasn't just a book.

Mm.

This wasn't just another, this was enormous.

It was probably about 600 pages wasn't it?

It cost forty-five pounds and it was enormous. [Laughter] Obviously only, mm, libraries and academics and such were ever likely to be buying it. It was a very special book and, mm, you know...

And did he, after that he seemed to disappear after the publication of that book?

Well, what happened to him eventually was he was never quite satisfied in his role in life.

Mm.

And eventually went, [Pause] he wasn't happy with his marriage and he broke up with his wife and then he made friends with an American lady and went with her to America.

Mm.

He was last heard of, goodness knows what he's doing now, he was last heard of, mm, officiating in the library of… There was this very wealthy billionaire who had an erotic...

Library, yes.

And, [Laughter] Pat was in charge of his library. [Laughter]

Most incredible.

Pat was a great union man.

Oh he was.

Yes.

He, very impressive.

I, I'd always depended on him.

Well, that was Pat. Let's get on to you Harry?

Yes.

Mm, you were now an academic, you were a graduate?

Now hang on I'd only got as far as the, mm...

Diploma?

Yes, what the situation was that, mm, you could round up your studies by points to make a degree.

Yes.

So in fact the Diploma Industrial Relations and Trade Union Studies counted for one third.

Yes.

The DipHE, Higher Education, counted for another third.

Yes.

So I was still one third off.

Ah, I get it now.

And I actually abandoned it believe it or not.

Did you?

I, at that stage I abandoned it for three, mm, yes, three years. Because I thought it wasn't possible, well it wasn't at that stage, to take a degree part-time in Humanities.

Yes.

There weren't any available. But then it turned out eventually there were and Middlesex started up a part-time degree course.

Yes.

At their other premises at All Saints in, in, mm, in Tottenham.

Mm, mm.

And so, mm, I was persuaded to go back again, and I then more or less carried on in the same area that I'd done the DipHE in, which is basically Literature, Drama and so on.

Yes.

And that was when I done all these massive works you've read.

Yes, yes, yes.

And, mm, really enjoy it. I just loved writing.

You really did?

I really love it. There's nothing, I'm never happier than when I'm studying, researching.

Yes.

Writing, arguing.

Mm. And you eventually graduated?

Yes. You may or may not remember how my, mm, trade unionism and my politics did in fact reflect in this area.

Mm.

You may or may not remember.

Yes.

But what happened was that [Pause] I was branded by the establishment fuddy-duddies of the university as some kind of a nutter, a left winger, trouble maker, an alien influence.

Mm.

Not genuine, not one of us sort of thing. And, mm, the, the younger more progressive element had entirely opposite impression which was that I was really remarkably clever.

Yes, yes.

Progressive and original writer and thinker.

Mm.

In the areas that I was writing in. So what happened was that I was getting many essays, mm, marked up as As or B1s [0:15:00 138] whereas the reactionaries were giving me Cs and Ds.

Yes.

You know, [Laughter] and, mm, but nevertheless I did manage to keep a level, an average level, which is what they base your degree on, an average level that should have given me a First.

Yes.

What happened was the very last session study they combined in effect to really make it hard for me.

Mm.

And, mm, I was told quite unofficially by one of the friendly tutors that was on the examinations board…

Mm.

There'd been a big argument and a row about me.

Mm.

And, mm, they wanted to give me a First and the establishment said 'no'. So in fact I didn't get a First despite the fact that I had the right number of points.

Yes. Couldn't you go for appeal on that?

I did debate it. Then my, my pride, I'm such a fool, you know, my pride, 'well, what the hell, they can go to hell'. I didn't really care anyway, I was only doing it because I enjoyed it.

Mm, mm.

Not what I got out of it.

You got a Second did you?

I got a Two One.

Yes. Which is good?

Yes, a Two One which was enough for me in fact to go on to do a PhD.

Yes.

And I was encouraged to do a PhD, and in fact I was going to do a PhD on the relationship between culture and language.

Yes.

With emphasis basis, mm, on the Irish, Gaelic culture.

Yes, yes.

And language. In fact I made all the arrangements. I had a tutor in London and another one in, mm, University College, Dublin.

Oh yes.

A famous academic and writer, he appears quite often on television.

Yes.

I got a letter from him praising my work and saying he'd love to take me on but I...

You haven't decided yet?

I never did it, I should have...

But you can still, you can still decide?

I can still do it, yes.

But you've got to decide on that. Well, listen now can I call you now a graduate?

Yes.

Okay you're a graduate?

Yes.

And you're on the Executive Committee of ACTT still?

Yes.

And you, did you ever go to, you went to annual conference?

Oh yes.

Did you go to the TUC at all?

Yes.

Yes, you were there at the TUC?

Yes, mm, mm, mm.

So you were very active in that area?

Oh yes, still fairly active indeed. In fact I was probably more active because I wasn't tied down at work so much.

Mm, [Pause] when you became a graduate and you were, did you look at your union activity differently, with more discipline?

[Pause] Probably.

Yes. Did it, did you feel in yourself that you had developed intellectually because of the disciplines you imposed upon yourself?

Yes, and also because I felt more, mm, objective, because I felt I was on the national level and I could look at Kay's, or Metrocolor as it become, mm, more dispassionately.

Yes.

Without being directly involved, you know. I had this enormous advantage that, [Pause] as I said before, I developed this sort of, mm, ambiance, aura of being different than them. I was national, I was head office, they saw me almost the same as they saw you.

Yes.

See. So I was in a much higher status really.

Yes.

Than when I was shop steward.

Yes.

And detached and they were all scared of me to be honest.

Mm.

Including the management.

Yes.

[Laughter]

Because you could, you could bring anything they did…?

That's right.

Right to the national and present it?

Which I did.

Yes, you did, yes.

They knew if, if I was to take something up it would go to you.

Yes.

[Laughter] And as they were frightened of you they didn't do anything about it.

No, no. And, mm, how long was this period in your life, was it another three or four years before you eventually retired?

Oh it went on much longer than that.

Yes.

It was, mm, it could be up to ten years.

Ten years?

Yes. I can remember I didn't retire till Ninety.

That's right.

We're talking round about Eighty you see.

Eighty, yes.

So I took my degree roundabout Eighty-one, two.

Yes.

So in fact the last ten years I had this sort of super role as it were.

A super, you had a super role and image of course?

Oh yes, everyone came to me.

The world, yes, they did. Yes, you were a sort of a guru.

That's right.

Of the Laboratory industry?

I was the guru, yes.

Yes.

And I had a high reputation nationally with the union.

Yes.

And the Labs Committee.

Now who were the main figures in this period of your life in the Eighties for instance, mm, who, who were the baddies both in the union and in, in… I mean there were, we do have bad people in the union, mm, and in, and at work?

Oh well, mm, the baddies at work continued to be the ones already spoken about.

Yes.

But their lack of success did tend to blunt their sort of enthusiasm [0:20:00 189] and their pro-management enthusiasm. In other words they began to feel because they were being shit on as well.

Mm, mm, yes, yes.

And they, this is a joke, although they'd pushed me out and kept me out...

Mm.

To please the management still...

Mm, yes, yes.

They came to me as well.

Yes.

So in fact [Laughter] I had everyone coming to me and getting me to help them.

Yes.

It was a joke really. My enemies as well as my friends.

Yes, and at the time of course, mm, mm, Kay's went down didn't it? Because I remember...

That's right.

They were fighting for the BBC work.

Yes.

And they lost half of it.

That's right.

And, and what, what happened industrially to Kay's and Metrocolor, mm, in the Eighties?

Well, what happened was that...

Did they lose their television work?

They lost so much work that was traditional to them including BBC, commercials, mm, particularly commercials, that had been one of the aims that the consultants had pointed them at.

Mm.

That they should push right into commercials. They never made a success of that and that was one of the reasons that Ricky Novak wasn't a success. They'd given him that job you see.

Yes, yes.

It couldn't be done. So in fact over a period of time the big boys squeezed them out of those areas they wished to expand in. They were then forced to do all kinds of dubious work.

Mm.

Which you may remember.

Yes.

Including pornography.

Yes.

And, mm, and ultimately they were more or less dependent on some, on MGM, the NVM connection which then went to Warners.

Yes.

Lorrimer et cetera.

Yes.

Connections there with bulk print. So in fact they became nearer to, mm, the trad, the, the archetypal big lab.

Lab, yes.

In a sense they were for the first time doing massive bulk...

Bulk print?

Print work.

Print work, yes.

Of big features and so on, and, mm, which they absolutely needed.

Yes.

Mm.

Well, it's very profitable for a lab.

Well, I'm told, of course, I'm not, I haven't got my ear very close to the ground now because I'm not here very often but I'm told that they've now lost a lot of that.

Mm, they have.

And that they're coming back with the BBC, well I don't know the ins and outs of that.

Mm. So you went through a period when you were working there, it was quite dodgy really?

Oh yes.

Because they could have declared redundancies after redundancies?

Yes, yes.

And you could have been amongst them. But you retained your job until retirement. This was the incredible thing Harry.

Well...

What do you put it down to?

I put a lot of it down to you Alan.

Mm.

Because you've got to remember, mm, despite all the changes you still had a very unsophisticated simplistic management.

Mm.

In other words they didn't have a, that much confidence in themselves.

No, no.

Apart from the one they've got now, Compton who's a nutter anyway.

Yes.

But most of them didn't have confidence.

No.

And they really thought that, mm, you know, they had no alternative but to, the union power frightened the life out of them, you know.

Yes.

But this man is a nutter of course.

Well, he's, he's very ill I'm afraid.

Mm, yes.

Mentally ill. Mm, but I was always concerned that you would get the boot.

So was I, [Laughter]

Always.

Got very near it.

You got very near it, yes.

Many times.

Many times. But you retained it and this was much to your credit.

Well, I'm one of those people, and, mm, you've probably come across them many times in life, who actually thrive under pressure.

Yes.

Who actually thrive. I found that when I was in the Army that in fact the greater the danger the more it stimulated me into, mm...

To being more positive and more...?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes. In fact although I had the threat hanging over me almost on a daily basis, mm, it only stimulated me [Laughter] to greater efforts [Laughter] and I always come out on top. You know, it was partly my cheek.

Mm.

You know, I was telling you lunchtime [Laughter] I was reading a letter, I've got so many letters that I've been digging out.

Mm.

That I actually wrote to George Hawkes at the time he was manager. One of the ways you, you destroy trade unions and shop steward is, is by putting fear of them personally about their job and that.

Yes, yes.

And, mm, it's putting you in a position where you make mistakes or magnifying the mistakes that you make.

Yes, yes.

That other people are not ignored, you hope to squash them and frighten them so they'll drop their trade unionism.

Yes, yes.

You know, you threaten them with discipline and maybe the sack and losing your position, et cetera, et cetera.

Mm, yes.

Well [Laughter] when I read this letter I thought 'my God how the hell'.

Yes.

The nerve. It was a very, I'd call it now pompous from me.

Yes, yes.

To George Hawkes criticising him for criticising me.

Yes, yes. [Laughter]

And putting him in order.

[Laughter]

It starts off 'I'm sorry to hear Mr Hawkes that you do not understand [0:25:00 245] the relevance of work practice to the question of efficiency and appropriate and making mistakes', et cetera.

Yes, yes.

[Laughter]

How did he take this letter of yours?

[Laughter] I can't recall, I think fuming silence as far as I recall. [Laughter]

Yes. Well, that was incredible. And so let me say this to you Harry, you, you survived?

Yes.

Through your own efforts and allies. Who were your other allies at the time?

Well, you've got to remember that I existed to a very large extent on the national level.

Yes.

So I had all kinds of, mm...

How did you get on with the barons of television at the time, you know, who I'm talking about?

Well, how, how did anyone get on with them?

Yes.

I got on with the more intelligent and the more progressive and the more principled ones.

Yes.

Which was, tend to be, mm, often women.

Yes.

You know the younger...

Mm.

People coming up full of, of ideals.

Yes.

And principles and so on. I got on very well with them because they often knew far more than the fuddy-duddies anyway.

Yes.

I always got on very well with them, and, mm, fitted in with them in their various interests and pursuits and developing the union and so on.

Yes, yes.

So anything progressive I was there, you know.

Yes.

Mm, and I think that's basically it. You can work out from that the sort of people that I'd get on well with.

Yes, mm. I mean did you, you got a lot of sympathy from the old brigade of ACTT like the Sid Coles?

Oh yes.

Mm, when they were active and Ralph?

Yes, but of course, I got political sympathies as well.

Yes.

That naturally influenced me.

Mm.

And I should say, because I haven't said it so far, that a large part of the antipathy and antagonism towards me was on political grounds.

Yes.

Because, mm, they knew I had enormous sympathy and interest towards the Soviet Union and the Communist block.

Mm.

[Laughter] And many of my activities were obviously, mm, left wing, socialist...

Yes.

Activities and this was very well known. So I fell under the stigma that everyone did in the Cold War.

Yes.

You know.

Yes.

I suffered from that like everybody else did.

Yes. Anyway...

That operated nationally as well as locally.

Yes, as well as locally, yes.

Mm.

Now you've, mm, you've retired?

Mm.

In Nineteen, mm, in 1990?

Mm.

Mm, you've, you don't live in London any more?

No.

You've moved to Ireland?

Yes.

Tell us about Ireland and why you moved to Ireland?

Well, it started I suppose basically when I married a, an Irish girl.

Mm.

Mm, I, I knew already from my political stud, studies about Ireland and its history and what happened in 1916 et cetera, et cetera.

Yes.

Mm, and Connolly et cetera, et cetera.

Yes.

But, mm, I had no particular interest in it until I married a girl who was a very strong Republican.

Really, yes.

Oh very much.

Yes.

[Laughter] And, mm, started visiting Ireland and met many of her friends who obviously are of a like ilk.

Yes.

And then came the, the, mm, latest period of revolution, Sixty-nine, Sixty-eight, Sixty-nine.

Yes.

And the starting of the Civil Rights, et cetera. So, mm...

But you were a member of The Connolly Association weren't you?

Oh I did belong to it at one stage, yes.

Mm, yes.

Because, mm, I felt quite, mm...

Because you introduced me to it

Did I?

Yes.

Oh I remember that now anyway, that's right, mm. And, mm, obviously, I say 'obviously' [Laughter] I wasn't involved in violence.

Mm.

But, [Laughter] mm, one always had an uneasy concern as to who maybe or who may not be.

Mm.

When you get in those kind of circles. But, mm, [Laughter] at the same time I was studying not just the politics and the history but the culture, which interested me very much.

Yes.

And the literature which came into my studies at college, and in fact as you no doubt recall much of the work I did at college was on Irish authors.

Yes, it was, yes.

Mm, like, mm, Shawna Casey.

Mm.

Mm, Yates, Singh and so on.

Mm.

You know, that was a lot of my work in that area, mm.

And are you still carrying on studying the literature and the culture of Ireland?

Oh yes, indeed. At the same time I fell in love with the country. I found it a beautiful country and very largely unspoiled. A small population and not many people going there, visitors. Not surprising.

Mm.

After the up, uprising in the north. [0:30:00 305]

And is it always raining there?

Well, it certainly rains a lot.[Laughter]

Right.

I can't deny that [Laughter] but I still love it. The place I'm in I actually chose.

Mm.

It's out in the wilds. I chose it deliberately, one because it's an Irish speaking area.

Mm.

What you call the Gaeltacht.

Mm.

Mm, I chose it. I saw it advertised in *The Irish Post* in London, yet it was in a rural area that I'd never been to, it's well away from the northern problem in the south east and there was good communications. So I thought 'well this is ideal' and I bought it what was in effect just a ruined cottage but a very sizeable piece of land, about one and a half acres about fifteen years before I actually retired. I spent the intervening years in gradually building it up.

Yes, yes. How far have you got now?

I'd say it's pretty much finished. It's certainly, I don't feel embarrassment any more if anyone calling or visiting or wanting to stay. There's still some things to do but, mm, it's very impressive.

Is it?

The original old ruin has been transformed into what you would describe I think as a, almost like a Mediterranean villa spread out all round. [Laugher]

Lovely.

And I planted the whole area up as a wildlife, two thirds as a wildlife garden. I got a...

You let it run do you?

I let it, I chose, I, I, I did it carefully. I took advice in London from landscape gardeners.

Mm.

Planted everything that I was asked to plant. That part, yes is wild, apart from the things I've planted.

Yes.

The other third I'm still trying to come to terms with the weeds on one third of it ,and that's, it's all planted up.

Yes.

One way or the other.

Do you grow any of your own vegetables?

Yes. I've got a small plot down one side of the building. Mm, I'm having problems with the, the climate is, it's rather high up and it's not as warm as down below.

Mm.

And it's windy. But, but my son's coming over Christmas, he's going to build me a conservatory at the back of the house.

Mm, mm.

So I can get tomatoes and things growing earlier.

Yes, yes.

How do I spend my time?

Mm.

A lot of it just contemplating. [Laughter]

Yes.

Just enjoying the peace, the silence, the lack of pressure, the ease, the casualness, the friendliness of the natives.

Yes.

Who, who show no signs whatsoever of, mm, antagonism.

Mm.

Their attitude is one more of curiosity and interest.

Mm.

In fact they like having an Englishman there.

Yes, yes.

It's something different.

Yes.

Breaks the monotony, the routine.

Yes.

Someone from the outside world.

Yes.

The religion, I'm, as you know, I'm actually Huguenot descent so I'm obviously Protestant but, mm, they know that, it doesn't bother them in the least. They did ask me would I like to, they'd like it if I went to Mass with them.

Yes.

So, [Laughter] I go to Mass with them.

Yes.

I don't do anything.

No.

I just stand up and kneel and all that stuff.

Yes, yes.

So I go to Mass with them on Sunday mornings.

Mm.

The priest doesn't, said nothing to me. I wouldn't, I wouldn't join the religion.

Right, no, no.

But it's just a social thing.

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

I take part in the local activities.

Mm.

I, I'm very energetic still, I jog every day.

Do you?

I go out every morning at eight o'clock and I jog round the village, come, get back at quarter past nine.

That's very good.

Every morning when it's not raining.

Mm.

Sunday I go out at half past two and I'm back at five. I do a much longer one.

Right oh, yes.

I'm a, they view me with extreme interest and amazement.

Yes.

At these sort of things, you know, they're very curious and, you know, extraordinary.

Don't the kids run after you and shout things?

They used to.

Yes.

But not now.

No.

I'm 'Harry' now.

Yes.

Harry has got his peculiarities.

Yes.

And Harry's the runner.

Yes.

They, they go by in their cars, they honk their horns. Oh yes, yes.

Mm, yes. Which is good. Well, it's like a family isn't it?

That's right.

Yes.

It's just like a family.

Yes.

Very much.

So what are you actually writing now Harry?

Mm, [Pause] to some extent what we're talking about today. I'm trying to sort of, mm, I don't know, I think I want to write about life.

Mm. Which aspect of life?

Well, exactly. Yes, exactly. [Laughter] Mm, I've become much more artistic. I now have the tranquility that I can relax.

Mm.

And the creativity can come forward easier. I write poetry and I read a lot of poetry and, mm, I was always inclined to be, mm, basically a sort of romantic, a romantic poet and I'm sort of developing that shall we say. [0:35:00 371]

Yes, very good.

I read a lot of Shakespeare.

Yes.

I love Shakespeare and other poets. [Pause]

Well, that's excellent Harry. Mm, I mean in five years time we'll do another session and you can tell us what you've published and where you've been. Do you, before we finish Harry because we've nearly finished now.

Mm.

Have you the resources, sufficient resources to do what you want to do?

Yes, there's an object lesson you know. So many people spend their lives worrying about how much money they can accumulate and worrying about retirement.

Mm.

And they destroy their lives trying to create more and more money, and by the time they retire they're, they're half dead anyway.

Mm.

And they retire away with huge sums and then they die. [Laughter]

Yes.

Well, I, needless to sa,y had the opportunity time and time again offered under my nose money if you do it our way.

Mm, yes.

And [Laughter] I never did. So in fact, mm, my pension is quite, a very modest one. Mm, I've accumulated what I need to do, what I want to do. Now if I had everything done in advance what would I have done in these free years?

Free years. Yes. It's critical post, very good.

So I've enough to, you know, carry on modestly.

Mm, mm.

I'm now saving for a car. Built a garage.

Oh very good.

[Laughter]

[OI] You need one out there?

Pardon?

[OI] You need one out there?

Oh I very much need one, I'm eight miles from the nearest town.

Mm.

The local farmer takes me in on a Friday to get my shopping and we go to the local farmers' ba,r you know.

Yes.

For drinks. And oh I'm very much liked.

Yes.

You know. A lot of people don't like me but they do, I don't know why.

Yes.

But they find me different.

Yes.

From the outside world, you know, a sort of sounding board. You know what I mean?

Yes, of course.

Yes. [Laughter]

Well, thank you Harry Courcha. I think, mm, we can say you're a technician, an academic, a trade unionist, a philosophic explorer and a socialist?

Very much.

And thank you very much Harry Courcha.

How long was that?

That's, mm, an hour.

Oh.

[OI] A continuation of Harry Courcha's interview.

Well, I didn't explain before that one of my main interests is, mm, conservation, nature, wildlife and all that kind of area and in fact, mm, I belong to the, when I was in England I belonged to everything going, like The National Trust, London Wildlife, mm, et cetera, et cetera. But in Ireland I joined The Wildlife Federation and, mm, I recently with them in County Clare, it's a place called The Burren, it's a really wonderful, mm, place for nature and wildlife.

[OI] Mm.

And all that. Got some extraordinary peculiar rock formations. Very famous, and there are things growing there, plants and that that grow nowhere else.

Is it a micro climate there?

Mm, it has that element. Yes, it has its own peculiar, mm, climate, partly due to the geological characteristics.

Mm.

But there are many plants that grow there that don't grow anywhere else in Ireland or Britain.

Mm. Of course, there are many fern species growing in Ireland?

That's right and particularly ferns.

Mm.

And Ireland is an absolute treasure house for anyone that's interested in nature, wildlife and so on, you know.

[OI] And fishes?

Or for fishermen.

Yes, and this time of year...

The rivers are full of fish.

There must be a lot of fungi growing?

Yes, yes. That, I was out recently on a fungi, mm, expedition, expedition and, mm, it's, mm, [Pause] it's very interesting to be in a different country, with different people, you know, with different outlooks and, mm, everything is different what you're investigating and the kind of conclusions and outlooks and that. It's very interesting because one of the characteristics about Ireland is it never really got developed industrially, which means that the way of life, kind of thinking and so on.

Mm.

Is still very different than the rest of Europe - Britain, France, Germany and so on.

Yes, yes.

Mm.

Well, it kept its agricultural heritage didn't it?

Yes, and of course, the, the Catholic Church maintains a hold on Ireland that is probably greater than any other Catholic country.

Mm.

So the kind of thinking, [0:40:00 444] the kinds of social morals and that are still very, what we might call, laughably primitive shall we say.

Yes, yes .

You know. [Laughter] Mm, this I, I think fits in with the Irish character.

Mm.

Because the Irish character is still very, mm, lacking in reality.

Yes.

[Laughter] And it fits in with, mm, non real things, you know, principles that can't be applied in real life for example.

Yes, yes.

And pretend they can. It fits in with a reality that is not based on, on reality, that's based, shall we say, on fantasy, the imagination. You know they have a whole world of their own, it's in their heads mostly. [Laughter] So, so the Irish therefore are very lovable but very difficult and, mm, irritating people to try and cope with them, you know, and their attitude to everything is so different. Because of this lack of development the urban areas and the kind of ideas that develop in urban areas are very limited, so in fact the kind of primitive thinking that you connect with the ancient Ireland is often still there in these vast rural areas.

Mm.

And the farmers still control the politics, and the main party is in fact the farmers' party, Fienna Fáil.

Mm, mm.

And, mm, and therefore the rather primitive farmers call the tune.

Mm.

Which makes it very difficult for any government. And they don't have much of a concern for sophisticated things like nature conservation, wildlife and so on, all they're concerned about is the, their cattle and their sheep and so on.

Mm, mm.

They shoot anything that gets in the way. [Laughter] You get no campaigns there about badgers.

No, no.

Or foxes and so on, well, no major campaigns, just a small minority of people shouting in the wilderness as it were. So there's a lot of differences but, mm, very interesting differences and a very interesting country. It's still very beautiful.

Yes, even in the rain?

Yes, the weather is all part of it.

Mm.

You know it's a fact that when, mm, when Julius Caesar conquered England and he got over, eventually got over to the west coast and he looked across and he said 'now', to his advisors 'tell me about this country over here', and they called Ireland, you know. 'Shall we go there'? You know, 'what, give me a sort of report on it'. So, [Laughter] the chief advisor, now this is not a joke.

No.

This is true.

Yes.

It's in his memoirs. The chief advisor said 'well, sir', he said 'I don't think it would be advisable to go there at all because it never stops raining and the poor, poor miserable natives are sitting around in tents shivering and sheltering from the rain', he says 'it's a terrible country'. So Caesar said 'oh well, we won't bother then'. Now that is not a joke.

No.

That is true.

Ah.

[Laughter] But it can be hot Alan, Alan in the summer.

Yes, yes. Oh good.

I've known it to be hot.

[OI] Okay shall we stop there then because it's running...?

Yes.

[End of Recording]