

After Hiroshima Project
Bruce Kent Interview (2)
Date: 20.01.16

Interviewee: Bruce Kent (BK), Born 22/06/1929

Interviewer: Sarah Woods (SW)

SW: Right. That's going, now it's quite happy. I'm going to turn up the ... Can you just tell me what you had for breakfast?

BK: For breakfast, what I always have is a piece of toast and a banana. That's what I have for breakfast every day.

SW: Perfect.

BK: I probably look like one now.

SW: Do you have the banana on toast or separate?

BK: Separate. [chuckles]

SW: Interesting.

BK: That's important, to get that down!

SW: [laughs] It's all in the detail.

[laughter]

SW: Right. So the story of your change, your move to being anti-nuclear, you said that it was gradual, and you said that it was a moral decision for you.

BK: Absolutely.

SW: I wondered if you could explain that, sort of. Because you talk about the cadet corps, and then obviously, at the other end of that, you've got the police round. I just wonder if you could – particularly with focus on that moral? The moral.

BK: Well, I'll talk and you ask me some more questions, if you want to. When I went to school, which was a traditional British public school, a boarding school, a Jesuit college up in Lancashire, and before that I was in Canada during the war, but nothing came up then. But in the boarding school, through my formative years of about 11 until about 17 – something of that sort – I never heard any question about the morality of British warfare at all.

We did History. Now, the history seemed to end somewhere in the middle of the 19th Century, but the ethics of any of these wars was never presented. We had Catechism classes and all sorts of religious instruction, but the wars were never part of it. In fact, militarism was absolutely, thoroughly, deeply part of the school. I think it still is.

Every meal we had – I've probably said this before – we had four VCs' portraits on the wall,

looking down at us, about 300 boys sitting to eat. They were four old VCs. They didn't put up saints or holy men, they put up VCs. They thought they were holy men, I suppose.

Every Wednesday afternoon, I think, we had a cadet parade or activity of some sort, some quite exciting, like rope ladders up trees and all this sort of stuff. We went off on shooting courses and things. The priests, I think the interesting thing, the priests who taught me all sorts of good things on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday morning, turned out to be officers in the cadet corps on the Wednesday afternoon.

That never bothered me in the slightest. I thought that was completely normal. You're not a Catholic, I suppose? The great religious procession every year is the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament, which trails around the grounds in closed communities. The parade with it would be a platoon of the cadets. They weren't armed with rifles, I don't think so, but anyway that was like that.

It was like that. We had all kinds of Old Boys coming back and telling us how wonderful things had been. We admired them, and they were very brave. I'm not knocking them. There were all sorts of very, very brave people.

When it came to leaving school, the automatic thing at that age – I'm talking about 19-- ... When did I leave school? 1947, I think. No, the winter of '46, I left, but then I did some cramming things. But when I left school, the thing to look forward to was your call-up. I never heard of anybody who refused the call-up. I never heard of anybody, I never heard the word 'conscientious objectors'. It never occurred to me. If I had heard of them, they would have been cowards. That's what I would have thought of it.

In fact, there was a famous film at that time, called *The Four Feathers*, in which the hero refused to do something or other. He spent the entire rest of the film in the Sudan or somewhere, dressed up as an Arab, trying to regain his courage and so on, and to save his regiment. Which he did at the end, save his regiment. But it was a kind of purging of his original sinfulness [laughs]. That was my mentality. In the six years in the seminary, I don't think I ever heard anything about war and peace. It never occurred to me.

I remember the Coronation. Was it about '53 or something? I remember our great excitement because of the jets that flew right over the Coronation, and then ended up in Hertfordshire, flying straight over us. So we felt part of the performance. Brummmph! Very low level, they came across. "Oh, the Queen must be down." If I'm saying too much detail, but that's where I came from.

When I was ordained and I went to a parish in Kensington, I was put in charge of the youth club – young priest, youth club. Logical. It went very well. Twice a week about, I had about 50 or 80 kids coming along, girls and boys, outings. Wonderful. Then someone came along and said two New Zealand girls – I'm sure this is what I've said before. The two New Zealand girls said they wanted to go on a summer holiday. I'd seen in the Catholic Herald something called Pax Christi, which I knew nothing about. But they were running what they called 'Routes' around Europe, where a hundred or so kids – kids 18-25 – would come along and go through some country area probably, and have a discussion on the way. It lasted about 10 days.

I sent them off. I forget where I sent them to. They were accepted, and they came back

delighted with the whole thing, and I forgot about it. Then some bloke, John Geary, who'd been in Pax Christi, who'd married a French lady, who knew about Pax Christi's origins, which in case you don't know, were just after the war. It was the housekeeper to a bishop, a bishop who had been in a concentration camp, and she – Madame Claude Dortel or something [Mme. Dortel-Claudot] – I can find her name for you.

She said to the bishop, “We've got to do something to unite the Germans and the French, so we'll have a rapport.” It was all holy, going on pilgrimages, meeting each other and so on, and saying their prayers. It was quite a brave thing to do at that time. Then it took off, and it took off in Holland, and it took off in other countries. I mean, today it's quite a big international organisation, but that's how it started.

This man, John Geary, came back to me and said, “You're the first priest [laughs], you're the first priest who's taken an active interest in Pax Christi.” I thought, “I've just sent two New Zealand girls on a Route!” He said, “Well, anyway, you're the first one. Would you be the chaplain?” So I said, “Well, all right. I don't mind.” I said yes to everything in those days. I said, “I don't mind being the chaplain, if that's what you'd like. What's it involve?” “Once a month we have a meeting, and somebody or other ...” So I said, “All right, I'll go along to this.”

I went along, and I found it incredibly boring, because actually what they were doing was going through various papal and church documents, and reciting them, reading them and looking at them. Maybe they did much more than that, I don't know. I'm being unkind, but that's how it came over to me at the time.

Until ... The first wake-up was this business of the South African, no, the Spanish, the Spanish embassy, when the Spaniards ... Again, I knew nothing about conscription in other countries, but the Spaniards put people in prison for atrocious periods if they didn't accept. Now, I didn't give a hoot if it was the Jehovah's Witnesses, because who were they? [chuckles] Who cared about them? But these were young Catholics being sent to prison, and I thought, “Well, this is not very good.” And the Vatican Council had come at that time. In the Vatican Council, in the final documents of the Vatican Council, there was a clear statement that people should be allowed for moral reasons, even if perverse, but for moral reasons, not to do military service as long as they volunteered to do something else useful. The implications ...

SW: So that was your ... That was the thing that ...

BK: Then I thought, yes. I was terribly orthodox. If the Church said, “X”, I did X. That was my line, and here was the Church saying something which actually coincided with my kind of morality. I thought people shouldn't be obliged to go and kill people if they didn't agree with the idea. So then I had this visit, which I think must have been in your previous interview. I had this visit to the Spanish embassy. I was then very respectable. The Counsellor came down, and I remember the phrase, “What you don't understand, Father, is to be a Spaniard and to be a Catholic is to be a soldier.”

I thought, “This is not very good.” So I became mildly more radical. I suppose this might have been about, I don't know what, 1960. I was ordained in '58, so it would be about 1959 or 60, I suppose. In contrast from the nuclear ... I mean, that made me begin to think about international relations and morality. It made me think. To show you how little I thought: in

1959, when the CND lot were coming from Aldermaston to London, they came down Kensington High Street on an Easter Monday. I had five weddings to do, and none of the brides could get to the church, or certainly not on time. I was livid. Who are these people wrecking my whole plan? [chuckles] I had no interest whatever in this march.

SW: Can you remember what you could see? What, if we were to try and sort of re-imagine what it was like for you on that Easter Monday? Does anything stick in your mind?

BK: All I remember was – you've probably never been there – in Kensington, our church was set back from the street by about 50 yards, there was a passageway to this church. You could see the end of the road, people going by all the time. That's what I saw, and got crosser and crosser, because in those days you planned a wedding, half an hour for you, half an hour for you. I've never had less than 20 what I call 'marriage envelopes' on my table, the documents that were required. So I was doing ... Every week I'd be doing two or three weddings. Easter Monday, of course, everybody wanted to get married on Easter Monday for tax reasons or something. Holiday reasons.

That must have been 1959, I think, or 1960. I was still pretty dim on nuclear weapons. It was one man who really moved me, and that was Archbishop Roberts, a most fantastic old man, a Jesuit, who had been a teacher up in a school in Liverpool. God knows how, but the Vatican got him. The Jesuits must have recommended him, but when the See of Bombay became vacant, he was chosen to be the next archbishop. I have no idea to this day what were the machinery that made that possible. Anyway, it was an inspired choice, absolutely inspired, because he went out to Bombay. He was a most brilliant pastor. There are all sorts of stories about him. He had two – were they goldfish, or chickens, or something? – but he would write in his weekly bulletin to the people, these chickens would talk to each other, or these goldfish. Everything was a dialogue between these two goldfish. They weren't goldfish, but they were something like that, some animal. Children would come in to see them, they wanted to see them. He was like that.

He was well ahead of his time. He realised that this business of Portugal and England having control of the city of Bombay was absolutely useless. Where were the Indians? There was this man, Gracious, who became eventually the Archbishop. Roberts just took off on an oil tanker, or something, and vanished for about two months, and left the See. So Gracious had to run it. He was the auxiliary bishop. He had to run the See. That was the kind of courage of this man, Roberts.

When he came back to England, when Gracious did take over, he lived in Farmer Street, and I think he was a bit of a tension down there. Because in the eyes of the English bishops, it wasn't so much his nuclear stuff that was worrying them, because he was very active. He was on a very just-war principle. He said, "I'm not a pacifist, and I don't like Communism. But there are some things you can't do as a Christian. You can't annihilate whole cities in the course of a war. It's traditionally the Augustinian principles of war. It's completely immoral. You can't do that."

SW: So, the Augustinian principles of war, without wanting to go too deeply in it, would say what? What would the basic...?

BK: That you couldn't indiscriminately assault civilians or non-combatants. There may be an accidental ... You drop a bomb on an arms factory, perhaps you by accident kill some

civilians. That's OK, apparently. But if you actually bomb the civilians, that's not OK. Which of course would actually condemn a lot of the bombing that went on in 1944 and 1945 by us on Germany at that time, but that of course was never brought up.

Anyway, Roberts was quite a bit of a prophet, I thought. I was very influenced by what he said. I think I went to see him at one time. Anyway, that really moved me into CND. Not CND proper, into Christian CND, because it was a subsection of CND which was very active, the Christian CND. So I became very involved in that. Everything else has been downhill ever since. [laughs] Well, you asked me a question! [chuckles]

SW: I understand that moral argument absolutely, that you should not be – that it's wrong to kill civilians. But you also talked about how the Church and the military were and still are, I guess to a degree, entwined.

BK: Oh, yes. Well, they were. Sorry, I'm interrupting you. The whole military chaplaincy business was exactly that. So when I began to get a bit stroppy and ask questions, I began to realise that this was going on. I remember the first time, when I went to Friars Lane, or I corresponded, there was some chaplain up there, or bishop – no, a bishop who said to the new chaplain, the relatively new chaplain, he said, “Don't forget you're going up there for the men, not the machines.” In other words, your pastoral care is for the men, drunk, adulterers, whatever. You're not there to talk about what the machines are doing. It's not your business. You're there for the men, not the machines. I've never forgotten that expression.

I started a correspondence in the year, about 1965. Did you see it? You haven't seen it?

SW: The Times correspondence?

BK: The *Times* correspondence.

SW: I haven't seen it. Can I get hold of it anywhere?

BK: I can ask Valerie if she can find it.

SW: I'd be really interested.

BK: I can lend you a copy.

SW: That would be fantastic.

BK: Oh, it was a hoot, because it went on for about three weeks. Eventually I was allowed to sum it up. Amazing, the *Times*. I did ... Clever little me, really, because I had a big head. Well, I have a big head. I said something like, “Granted the Vatican Council's condemnation of indiscriminate warfare, does this mean that the sailors will refuse to obey their orders? Or does it mean that they'll find a target that's discriminate? Clever, you know, because that's what set them all off. The Bishop of the Forces wrote some ... He's a nice man. Tickle, his name was. Tickle our bishop. We used to laugh like drains in Mass because [inaudible] you're not a Catholic, but you have to put a bishop's name in, who you pray for. Pray for Tickle our bishop.

[laughter]

BK: Everybody laughed. Anyway, he joined in. All kinds of people joined in, that these weapons were used discriminately and blah, blah, blah. But it went on for three weeks. It was extraordinary. There was some good ... I remember Christopher Derrick, or somebody, who ... There were some good people on my side. Then it petered out, so that was what launched me to fame.

SW: *Yes.*

BK: A national newspaper running something like that.

SW: *Yes, I'd be very interested. I looked online, but I couldn't see, I couldn't find it anywhere particularly.*

BK: I'll get it for you.

SW: *That would be great. Just to unpack that, the moral argument, a little more. You talked in the previous interview about it. You said it's sort of like geometry. You said it's sort of like an isosceles triangle, and I wondered if you could talk a bit more. If you were to lay, really lay it out, for somebody who hasn't thought about it much before, why is it wrong? What is that moral argument, in a really basic way? Does that make sense?*

BK: Yes. It's just-war principles, and they vary in number as to the person who's enunciating them. There were all sorts of things. One, the war has got to be declared by a lawful authority. OK, who's the lawful authority when half the countries of the world are dictatorships? But you have a lawful authority. So it's not up to Blair to start a war on his own, or whatever. A lawful authority.

There's got to be a confidence that the damage done by the war will not be worse than the injustice at present being endured.

That all means of reconciliation have been exhausted, which is another whole area now that we've got the United Nations and the World Court. When can we ever say it's been exhausted, you know?

The fourth one, that I'm just thinking of now is the question of the weaponry. That you can't use weaponry which is indiscriminate in its aim. If I can now remember to recite to you the Vatican Council: "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at whole areas along with their population, is a crime against God and man, to be unhesitatingly condemned". You can't get much blunter than that there.

How did they get out of it? How do they escape from this dilemma? The bishops, I mean? They escaped it, because they said, "Oh, that's doing it." But of course, if you intend to do it, you pretend you intend to do it, that's all right then. I'm not joking. That's how it all went. That nuclear deterrence rested on the willing to do something wicked, but you actually wouldn't do it. You know, if I threatened to knock your head off to get another copy of that, or something, I'm not actually going to do it, but it might make you give me another thing. That's one to one.

I can understand that morality. But in nuclear war, there's about 500 people between a man

making the threat and the person doing it. I've got evidence all over the place that people were tested for positive obedience. They would do it.

SW: Really?

BK: Oh, yes. There's all kinds of letters and things I've got from people. Well, I've got some letters anyway. People, airmen, saying, "I wouldn't be thinking of whom I was killing. I'd be worried about my family." This kind of language.

SW: Positive obedience? I've not heard of that before. That's very interesting.

BK: Well, that's what it was, I suppose. They just ... I was in the army, and I had no question of obedience. If I got an order, I obeyed the order. I think I gave you in the other interview, I remember so well how to clear a crowd that is being revolting. A mutinous crowd of civilians. How do you clear the crowd? Quite simple. You get your platoon, you make sure they're all armed, you give them all a number so their names don't come out. You march into the square, because they're always in a square, apparently. [laughs] If there's a riot, they're bound to be. And you get a loud hailer, and you get up on something or other, a chair, and you say, "I give you five minutes to clear the square, or else I'll open fire."

If they weren't gone in five minutes, you said, "Rifleman number three, shoot the man in the yellow jacket by the lamp-post." He would then shoot him. The crowd would then think, "Oh, God, he's serious." So I'd then say, "You have another five minutes, and you all clear off or I'll be shooting five people." Or something like that. Then you again ... They're all men, apparently. You never shot women. I don't know why. Women weren't revolting. [chuckles] But you then picked off somebody, and tell them. I would have done it. I would have done it, you know, because our country didn't do horrible things, and if there was an order for that, there was a good reason for doing it. I would have done it. That's 1947 or 48, I would have done it. Not twenty years later, but...

SW: There is still that now, isn't there? The feeling among people that, well, it must be the right thing to do. The idea that either we bomb Syria or we do nothing. There's a sense that there's nothing in between.

BK: That's right. Exactly.

SW: The same with nuclear, really, that either that we've got the bombs or we're being bombed. It's set up in a way that I think produces the same mentality.

BK: It does, it does. Exactly. That is what is so awful about Benn, Hilary Benn. Did you watch that speech?

SW: Unbearable.

BK: I think it was awful. He was showing off. Everybody was saying it was this wonderful speech, and I suppose in delivery it was.

SW: I didn't think so.

BK: But there was Corbyn behind him, and to do that to your leader, I thought it was

shameful.

SW: *Yes.*

BK: And not ever once to consider what would happen when you've managed to bomb everybody in Syria. Then what? Then what do you do? Never even talked about that at all. I thought it was ... I'm glad you thought that too.

SW: *Yes, absolutely.*

BK: I thought it was a dreadful, disloyal speech and it was disgraceful. His father would have been really shocked, I think.

SW: *I agree.*

BK: [aside] I turned the gas on, I'm going to turn it off now.

SW: *I suppose I'm interested, by unpacking this moral argument, in trying to expose some of the massive grey area that we have in between this idea of 'yes, bombs' or 'no, bombs'. The idea that actually there are a number of conversations that we need to have to get deeper into some of the questions.*

BK: Well, you look at what we've done in the Middle East over all these years. How many Iraqis, innocent Iraqis, were killed? I've seen figures of up to 100,000 mentioned. I don't know which one I believe in, but it's certainly thousands and thousands and thousands of innocent people have been killed by what we've done. The idea that we're the purity and they're the wicked ones, doesn't add up.

SW: *I know. So, the idea of the deterrent. You mentioned the deterrent argument, that that made it OK for the Church, that they would say, "Oh, well, we're not really going to do anything. We're just going to have it there."*

BK: Well, that's a lie.

SW: *It is, yes.*

BK: I mean, you're sitting behind a deterrent. That lock on the door is a deterrent from a burglar. He knows the door's locked. He's not going to come in without breaking all the glass, so he probably won't come in. That's a deterrent. I've got nothing against deterrents. It's quite sensible. If I go into a 30 mile an hour speed limit, I know that if I were to drive at 40 miles an hour, I'm likely to pay £50. So it's a deterrent. Nothing wrong with that. It's what a deterrent is attempting to tell you with its deterrence: if you drive at 40 miles an hour, I'm going to kill everybody on the street. [chuckles] It doesn't make sense, does it? But that's what it is, really. [aside] Hold on, hold on.

SW: *No, absolutely. [aside] I can do one more. They're really good, aren't they?*

BK: [aside] They're lovely.

SW: *So what would be your key argument against nuclear weapons as a deterrent, then?*

What would you say makes that ...

BK: Because A) they don't ... Who do they deter? Well, maybe they'll deter somebody, but they certainly don't deter the enemies whom we have at the moment, who are ... If they're ISIS, they are perfectly happy to go to paradise. That's part of their drill. So how do you frighten people to not do something, by people who are already willing to go. That's one lot. The other lot is that you can't deter people who don't have a territory. How could we deter the IRA? They haven't got a territory, so they're not deterrable. Quite apart from the moral argument at all.

What never comes out is the number of accidents and miscalculations that have gone on. Robert McNamara said about two years before he died that we were saved, not by our good judgement, but by good luck. I don't know if you heard that, but that's what he did say. I've read quite a lot of stuff about accidents. It's absolutely true. I think we are so fortunate, both in 1983 and the Cuban crisis, and many times since. I mean, there could have been lots of accidents that wouldn't have started a world war, but I can think of at least half a dozen that would have started a world war.

It's like – I don't know – driving your car down over a precipice, hoping that it's not going to fall. Sooner or later it's going to fall, isn't it?

SW: Absolutely. You talked in the interview about the Church's response to you. The smears that you had, but also the way that you felt sort of outside. I just wondered what that was like for you, as somebody who'd grown up to be obedient, and to do well, to then find yourself pushed outside. I would have found that very difficult.

BK: I found it very difficult. The world ... I remember when I burst into tears. My parish priest at Islington, I didn't know how to tell him. I knew I had to do it, and he was saying the 10 o'clock mass. I said, "George, would you come up afterwards. I've got something to tell you." I'll start crying now if I'm not careful. But I said, "I'm sorry, George, but I've got to leave you." Or something. Then I did, I burst into tears. I said, "I can't carry on in the position I'm in. I've got to go."

He was a lovely man, wonderful, so generous and compassionate. A marvellous man. I remember walking, walking down that canal path, down to the office in Upper Street or somewhere, and the whole world just revolving for me. Anyway, it worked out. It worked out. I mean, I constantly felt I'm doing the right thing. That's what I constantly felt: I'm doing the right thing. So it may be painful, but it's the right thing.

SW: That was enough for you, to know that?

BK: That was enough, yes. That was enough. I mean, I had a lot of supportive friends. I wasn't married to Valerie. I didn't marry her until a year and a half afterwards, but I had a lot of good friends who were with me, really. I think it would have been very lonely if I hadn't had that.

SW: There was never a point when you thought, "Oh, I'm carrying such a weight." You never wanted to just shed it, and go back? Because it's a more complex, difficult life in many ways, isn't it?

BK: I couldn't have done that. I couldn't have done that. I knew what I had to do. I couldn't have done that. I just could not have done it. Afterwards, Colonel Hume – I don't know if I said that in the previous thing – he wrote an article afterwards. He's a very nice man. I have nothing against him at all. But he said, "Bruce Kent had a choice to make, and I'm very sorry he made the wrong one." That's what he said. Or "he made a wrong..." He indicated quite clearly that there was a choice.

I had no choice. I had no choice. I had to decide what I was going to do. He regretted that I'd made the decision that I did make.

[00:30:05]

SW: And what was the decision between? Just what ...

BK: Between staying in the church and going and being a good parish priest or something and something. Because when I... did this the next, the '87 election was on the cards and I would have in those days, when the Labour Party was still... against nuclear weapons I'd have been out campaigning for, effectively, for the Labour Party, and his view was that no cleric ought to be ...doing that, um, so...I can see the difficulty but anyway.

SW: And what was the position that you...when you said you had to leave, what was your position at that point? When you left?

BK: Uhhh, I was um, I was aan honorary curate in the Church of Islington, I was saying I was working bloody hard, I, I was, I said the 7 o'clock Mass every morning for the Marius(?) brothers down the road, 7 o'clock, I was talking most, four nights a week, anywhere, getting the last train back, getting to bed at midnight and getting up at 6 o'clock to go next door and say the Mass for the brothers. That's what my life was and on Sundays I said the um... the, usually the 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock Mass, so I was doing my bit for the parish a bit.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

(31:26)

BK: It was funny about that because I remember it wasn't nuclear weapons, I remember when the Falklands War was going on, or started, and I made some remark from the altar about my ...doubts about the Falklands War, and there was a great bang at the back of the church [laughs]. I looked up, this man was standing up, he just... pushed the lever down and, and the church had two doors, an inner door, and then the... inner door banged loudly and then the outer door banged loudly, he, he wasn't [laughs]...he was a Catholic and thought the Falklands War was a good idea. I think I've had about half of these myself now.

SW: Yeah, they, they are really good.

BK: Nice aren't they? Hmm.

SW: So, I might move that past your tea cup if that's alright? So...

BK: Sorry?

SW: *I'm just going to put the recorder on the other side of your tea cup so that it doesn't ...*

BK: Oh ok.

SW: *If that's alright. Um ... it's, I mean but it...you say you, you, you burst into tears, there's a huge sadness isn't there in ... sort of leaving the life that you thought you were going to have and sort of going into the wilderness really of not knowing what was going to happen next, but you had a different sort of faith, or the same faith I guess.*

BK: I had the same faith. I thought this is the right thing for me to do. I wasn't stopping being a Catholic, I wasn't at all, I thought this is all I can do, and I got to do this, and um ... and quite a lot of people were supporting me, with letters and thing like that, so. And of course the secular, the non-religious world were delighted [laughs]. What's the problem?

(32:56)

SW: *Yeah. And it was a powerful voice. I mean, I remember um, I was born in '68 so I grew up very much aware of the work you were doing, and you were a hugely powerful voice to me as a young person growing up, and, and I think there was something about ... your faith as a Catholic, that ... added a gravitas, the moral dimension to it, that it wasn't just uh, a political argument, it was something deeper. And I really...it really you know, was a great thing for me, so, you know, I suppose ...there's a lot that you're unaware of, of the spread of...the ideas.*

BK: Oh yeah. You don't know. You meet people who say, 'I heard you in 1972 or something! [laughs] It changed my mind.' So I mean, you don't know what you do in life, nobody knows what, what the effect of any action is, you just do what you can.

(33:48)

SW: *And that's um, I think that's really important because...with the...some people say with the nuclear, uh, anti-nuclear protests, 'oh we thought it would be over in a couple of years' 'we thought we had it licked, it would be done'. So there's a, the sense that this is going on and on and on still now, and is a huge issue, um, and I'm interested in what you said about, you know, we don't know what we do, and we do what we can. Um, do you think, I mean that sounds like a very useful philosophy for people.*

BK: Absolutely. You have no reason to count on success. The anti-slavery campaign I suppose must have taken 80 years, um, from the first start with Wilberforce, even before Wilberforce, through to 1860 or something when ... it was wrapped up. And some things, like the old age pension, happened within 20 years. And other campaigns, you don't know. If you, if you set that as the, I'm not gonna ... doing this I get a guarantee I'll be successful in five years, well get lost, you know! No point...in starting really!

(34:51)

SW: *Right. And so for people...I'm gonna talk to a couple of um ... a woman who's working with CND at the moment and another woman who's um...a Japanese woman who uh, has been campaigning about the changes to the, to uh... the...sort of Japanese legislation.*

BK: Oh?

SW: So I'm, I'm going to talk to them. For, for people who are sort of, you know, getting tired but working hard, what ... what would you say needs doing and, and how, you know... how do you keep going with these things?

BK: Go for a long walk round Hampstead Heath, to start with. Um, you're getting tired dear, go and read some histories of people who've ... read the life of Hannah Brockway(?) or something and, and uh, realise that um, nobody knows when ... things are gonna happen. And remember that you're only here for ... 80, 90 years maximum and the world goes on, and you're just putting something into the stream that may come up, it may not come up in the, in the time. That's all. But I think people do burn themselves out, 'cause they just overwork and they get exhausted, and they make their families furious, um. You've got to have other ... respect for other people, um, when you're doing it, especially married ... people with children...

(36:06)

SW: I see. And what's the value of, you talk about putting something in the stream? What's the value of that? If you can't see that the world's going to change, if the world looks ... complex and negative, why ... do you keep ... what's the value of that? Why is it important?

BK: The world changes all the time, under our noses. And when you said, if you said to anybody in 1914 we were going to have a, a world court where people could be decided if [unclear] criminals ... [talking about a neighbour he can see out of the window] has that baby come yet? No it's not she's, she's due, she's due anytime next door, no she's alright, I don't mean this minute, um I saw her walking in the garden. No I mean it's not as if ... uh, change affects all the time, you're a woman, you've got the vote, well how did you get the vote? ... etc. I mean the idea that it's all so awful and we can't do anything ... well that's not Christianity. I don't know what it is but maybe it's some sort of religions like that, or philosophy like that, but it's not mine. I think it's so obvious that you do change things, and uh, positively and negatively.

(37:10)

SW: Yeah. And so do you feel um, that all that, all the work that you did and as you sort of, that day when you stepped away ... from the Church and you followed, you know, your, your faith, your heart, you feel that you've ... that, that work of that lifetime has affected change in different ways?

BK: I think I've contributed to change. I think I have, I don't think it's a big deal but I think I have helped other people to, to have opinions. And it's not as if I left the Church. I am an active member of my local parish church here, um, and we do quite a lot in justice and peace terms, so I, I, I never ... gave up my religion or my faith. I mean, it's under great strain lots of times but when you get someone like Pope Francis arrives on the scene, you think, my God, where have I been all my life? This man who condemns nuclear weapons and the threat to nuclear weapons bang! And his first trip out in Rome is to go to Lampedusa, oh that was amazing!

SW: Amazing yeah.

BK: And he was a conservative old bishop! In the Argentine...

SW: *Was he?*

BK: Oh yes, oh no, he's had a, a great mind change.

SW: *Has he?*

BK: I don't mean confirmative(?) over nuclear way, nuclear wouldn't(?) have been an issue, but he was an authoritarian uh, traditional, uh, [unclear] I heard yesterday, you can't use this 'cause I can't check it, but there were two Jesuits who went to prison allegedly because he didn't defend them. He went to Germany to apologise to them, um, that's what I'm told about it, I have to find that out. Well because a bishop, of course he's got a hundred clergy, and, and you can't pursue the case of each one um, to jeopardise the other ones, and if, so he's got to have some sort of balance. Anyway, that's what, the story I was told. Um ... so he, he, certainly he, no ... no doubt that he had a, he had a sea change in his mentality about the, the church in the world.

(39:09)

SW: *That's extraordinary.*

BK: Extraordinary.

SW: *That's extraordinary.*

BK: And to talk to, talk about moral issues being graded I mean I ... in, in uh, level of importance ... well that's actually, I mean, I'm quite traditional in lots of these moral issues but um, but that, that was a way of saying maybe birth control is not quite the same as dropping atom bombs, you know, there's a graduation! [chuckles]

SW: *Yeah. Yeah, yeah yeah yeah, yeah. And, and so, with the ... you spoke in the last interview about where we're, where we're at in a sort of, uh, big investment that's about to possibly be made into nuclear weapons, what do you, what would you say to sort of a man, sort of an audience who'll be watching this play, what should we be looking out for? What should we be, you know, thinking about, now in terms of nuclear?*

BK: I'd say what are you doing? Uh, my ... the question is, what are you doing? I go to these audiences and (unintelligible sounds). And I say, how many of you have ever written in the last month a letter to your local paper? ... Silence. And I say, why don't you write a letter to your paper, saying, because this hospital's had to close, we're sick of this spending £100m on nuclear weapons, why don't you make the connection? Yeah. You know, they, they don't think like that!

SW: *Exactly.*

(40:22)

BK: You know, I went to a posh school in, near you, in not Milton Keynes, somewhere out that way. Big, posh, Merchant Taylors', and uh, I said, I had a copy of the UN charter with me and the first line of which is "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war"

and I said to these kids well, kids, about 16, 17, 18 I said “how many of you have ever seen the UN charter?” I think about three people put their hands up, they had no idea. Our educational system is not geared to issues like that. That’s why I constantly have a row, a discreet row, I don’t have a row that I call a row but I’m always out of step with charities ‘cos charities willingly accept legislation that makes it impossible for them to take a position. I’ve just taken a group, before, I must say before you sound as if you were talking to someone who’s about to pop off your life has... no I know you didn’t but I’m very active still and I just took twenty people to Paris for the end of the climate change. Why? Because the one thing that wasn’t discussed in Paris was the impact of militarism on the world. The greatest out-putter of Co2 is military production; wars. And it was discretely [incomprehensible]. Why? Because the British charity law says “you campaign on this or that.” And some of the big church charities, they won’t do it. They don’t make war a poverty issue because it’s not popular, not in our agenda. I’m constantly having rows, polite rows.

[talk about snacks]

SW: So, yeah, I guess I’m interested in the... so, yes, we’ve got climate change to deal with and I think the bigger idea of militarisation and what we’re spending money on. In terms of the Trident, the renewal of Trident, um, the big investment, what, what’s the bit, what what would it be good so sort of, how would we, I’m thinking how we can open that up to an audience in such a way that they can see it differently, see it differently from...?

BK: Balance it, balance it. I’ve been doing a lot of that recently. First of all balance it with real needs; what you could do with the country with a 100 billion pounds. What could you do for the National Health Service, or housing, what have we got... grotty trains or whatever it may be... make them see that there are options and that is what is so often missing, um, people campaign for the NHS but they don’t say what we’re spending on war. But also, there’s simply the futility argument. You’re meant to spend all this money to get your security, against whom is this security guaranteed. Not against suicidal people but it’s exactly the ones that we’re actually facing. So, it’s ridiculous. It’s like, I mean how do we have, I often use this as an example: this is a little street, there must be 80 different families up and down in different houses here and we don’t all love each other, I get quite cross with some of them, you know, play loud music or park their cars where I like to park my car, or something but I’ve never thought of shooting any of them. You know, if there was a real problem... there has been, we’ve had burglars come through that door, then I get the police. We’ve got a structure and there’s a court. A way in which you actually, we’ve got a, whatever it’s called, the security thing... neighbourhood watch and all those things, that’s what you do. I mean we’re all going to die sooner or later, I mean you can’t preserve your existence indefinitely but there’ll come a time when you go, but meanwhile you do something stupid to advance that situation. We don’t do it domestically so why do we do it internationally?

SW: But people say “well if we don’t have nuclear weapons, we’re we’re we’re in danger we’re, um, making ourselves vulnerable in the sense that we lose our power somehow.”

BK: So rubbish. Which country? Nine countries have got nuclear weapons, there’s 196 countries in the world, something like that, the other 198, or something, all knocking in their knees. I mean, is Sweden terrified of something? I’ve used that as the best example because Sweden had a democratic debate, it took about 10 years, about whether they have nuclear weapons or not and they decided they would be useless and they didn’t have nuclear weapons. South Africa’s got no nuclear weapons and that’s why I wonder whether Ernest

Bevin is in your script? Do you know the story? Oh, look it up somewhere. This Bevin was called in by the American ambassador, I think in 1946, maybe '47, '46 and given a real rollicking because the spies (inaudible), and others, who were betraying the atomic secrets to the Russians. And he was a very working class, tough old bloke, Bevin, and he was furious to get this dressing down the American ambassador. And he came back to Downing Street where there was a pre-arranged meeting with Atlee, who had a number of civil servants, and they were all planning how not to develop nuclear weapons. Oh yeah. And in comes Bevin and hits the table and says "I don't care what they cost. I want them over here with a bloody great Union Jack on top." And that, to me, that set the whole scene from then on. Of course, they wouldn't stand up to that, can't be non-patriotic, so Bevin won the day. I think Atlee's letters, they were written in August 1945 were extraordinary, perceptive about the uselessness of nuclear weapons and the need to get rid of them all and so on. We have to have a new paradigm of thinking internationally; nuclear weapons have changed that old nature of international conflict; very thoughtful bloke. Three weeks of the bomb being dropped, Atlee was writing an intelligent, a very intelligent... but then he gave way to Bevin. Bevin was playing the nationalist drum which it what's been played ever since. Anybody was, it's been in that debate, you must have seen it then, all the Tories have been beating... [incomprehensible] It's ridiculous! We're going to blow up the street to make sure we don't have any burglars! Oh, very good idea isn't it? And that's really what it comes down to.

SW: And is that partly about us not being able to admit that we're not a great power? We're just a little country... and that shift that we don't want to make?

BK: Well, we got it when we thought we were a big country and we'd been insulted by the Americans and that's why we got it. I think, now, that's why I think the Corbyn thing is so interesting. Uh, there are millions of people out there waiting to vote for Corbyn come a general election 'cos they know we're not a big power. And anyway, that's not to say that big powers are entitled to them, they're not! Nobody's entitled to them; they don't bring security to anybody. But, uh, I think that Corbyn has touched a note with... has not yet come out of the ballot box, 'cos hasn't had a chance, but it will, they can do, if he can hold on, if he doesn't... he did something, and this is not for you to publish, but he did something quite stupid the other day, he got up... I saw him on News Night and he said "well perhaps you should make the submarines and not put the missiles on them". And I thought "Jeremy", I wrote to him and I said "Please, this is completely stupid and they'll pull you to pieces for this. Stick to hospital ships or wind farms, or something useful but not this." I don't know, I think he just had a blip, caught off guard, we all get caught off guard... that he just said that.

SW: I know, that is bizarre.

BK: It was bizarre.

SW: So, if you want to, sort of, look ahead what would you hope might happen next? What do you think is possible? That, you know, that we could achieve.

BK: I think it's possible, let's dream, I mean I think it's possible that Britain will say "we're not going to continue with nuclear weapons" – I think that's quite possible. I think that'll be a majority opinion of the young people who have not had a chance but I think then that someone like Jeremy could well get together with the Pope and say "let's have an international conference about eliminating all nuclear weapons" and start an, I think it would be extraordinary. Or we'll get Oxfam to say "this is a waste of money" you know, once the

door moves a bit. And after all, Britain is on the Security Council, for reasons it shouldn't be, but it is on the Security Council – it can raise the debate anywhere if it wants to but I think all possibilities are on the table really. I don't know. I don't know, how it'll go. We've changed some policies, this country, quite dramatically and quite quickly about different issues, so, I mean the medical professional was quite opposed to the National Health Service... The Royal College of whatever they were, BMA, they wanted private medicine. I grew up in private medicine, my father would say "Doctor Scott would you mind coming round? Bruce isn't very well." He'd turn up, you know, half an hour later. God knows what happened to the poor, I have no idea. I didn't know what happened to the poor, I never thought about the poor in those terms. So all I'm saying is that the National Health Service was a leap into the dark an adventure which the Left Wing pushed and got it and now it's the pride of the country, I think. Pride of the country, isn't it?

SW: It's interesting that idea of the leap into the dark because, we don't, we're not great with change are we? We tend to sort of stick with the mindsets that we have... but, you know, do you think we're at the point where we need a bit of a leap into the dark?

BK: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's what I'm about. I think I've said everything I could possibly say. **(51:37)**