

Interview no. 4

**Bill Stephens Interview
26/04/15
After Hiroshima Project**

Interviewee: Bill Stephens (born 07/06/1926)

Interviewer: Ruth Dewa

(00:00) Ruth: -ight, If I just get the housekeeping bits out the way, do you mind repeating your name again?

Bill: mm?

Ruth: Do you mind repeating your name again, just cause I'm, I'm recording now

Bill: uh Bill Stephens yeah uh

Ruth: And is that S T E P H

Bill: P H, yeah

Ruth: E N S, yeah, and do you mind telling me your date of birth?

Bill: Seven six twenty-six

Ruth: Okay, perfect, thank you very much

Bill: so'at makes me eighty nine

Ruth: Brilliant

Bill: oah, eighty nine in June

Ruth: mkay

Bill: eighty nine in June... ninety next year

Ruth: Big one

Bill: mmeah

Ruth: Just turning my phone off so we don't get any interference... and this is Ruth Dewa recording on the twenty seventh of April... em... so... you said you didn't know where to start, uh, ge- a generally a good starting point to get a bit of context for me is to ask you where, where you were and what you were doing towards the end of the war

Bill: Well, I was in the forces yeend th' war.

(1:00) I remember the atom bomb being... dropped hrem Hiroshima hrr, uh pick- picking up a paper and reading about it 'fore I heard about it on the radio and I remember being, I remember being frightened, actually, and rather shocked.. cause uh, we were at the end of a war we thought had gonna bring us all peace and a lot of us realized that that was... had opened up a, a can of worms, really, and 'specially when they dropped the next one on Nagasaki. I suppose there was always an argument o- about Hiroshima about whether it saved mo- more lives in the end, because if we we- uh we had in-invah invaded ah- oh all the islands yeh kno-eh millions on both sides might, might have got killed, ye- ye- you know, eh I-I-I-I think it's unforgivable they dropped the second one cause

there was no need for it cause Japan was already, trying to come to terms with different people in Europe

(2:00) And ma- making thi- and starting negotiations, uh, so I-I-uh-wa thought that was a crime, dropping the second one.

Ruth: And which forces were you in?

Bill: I was'in the air force erh

Ruth: And was, was your opinion shared by um the other, the other people that you were working with?

Bill: huhmm, I think uh-of-a-uhmm a lot of people at the time were disturbed by, you know, hm-ah-um-houghh before we re-oh really realized the implications of it, oh-ah before we'd really seen the pictures from Hiroshima, or-an-ohm or anything like that, but as time went on, I think more and more people got disturbed by the whole thing.

Ruth: an-

Bill: ah- and then when, I'm just trying to remember the dates of it all now, it um, I-uh-oh-ah I haven't had time to look it up, the actual dates, when we did it all. But, uh, it act-uh-oh-uh **(3:00)** the spread of nuclear weapons were, just-a-hmm-yuh-'Merica had it, we had it and the Russians got it. And I can't remember if Thailand got it by that time, nuh, I think they had... were on the way for it, anyway. And it be, uh, it just seemed we were going down the-uh-e road to disaster, so uh well I still thin- still think that, I mean I don- I haven't changed my mind about the down (team?). Um, I don't know, I, um, there was more and more debate about it, and it split the labor party. As you probably know, and uh... and-uh, the peace groups got together and uh-nger I don't know how it all happened, um, but I know it **(4:00)** it led to the first, it was a big meeting in Central Hall... and uh, no-nothing ha'bin er, nothing had actually been (full?), it was just a huge big meeting oh-ah-er ah-ah-an anti-nuclear meeting. And at that meeting it was decided to form an organization, which became CND, yeh know. I remember we marched from, everybody got so stirred up at that meeting, that uh, we occupied Downing Street and White Hall, and eh, there was a big battle with the police there, and eh, eh-uh, I got injured up in hospital, and a smack on ma head, and they dragged me down Downing Street by ma heels, bumping ma head over ma hegh hegh heh, um. I remember that there was Michael (Foot?) and Kevin Colin and **(5:00)** I can't remember the name, I'm bad at names, I can't remember the names of the Methodist priest who was a very famous, uh, Metho-, a priest at that time. I can fill, I better ah-uh-mm, fill in some details for you, if I keep in touch, but um, I know you're eh uh from that uh, decided to.. march on order march and uh we uh er ah, we fo- formed our own group in Greenwich... and we all linked up and pf- marched on, all marched oh- oh- over a holiday period, I think it was. Four days.. I know ah-, know I took my own boys. You kn-, you know, Rosie?

Ruth: Yeah, she was put in touch with me by um, someone else that's helping out on this project.

Bill: I see-

Ruth: So, only on Friday we started talking, and I just happened to be here on Monday, **(6:00)** Which is why it all happened very quickly.

Bill: Right- You don't know Peter then, her husband?

Ruth: No, but I think I will do once I get back to London.

Bill: Right-only, I've got a picture, I uh, I couldn't find it yesterday, I brought a picture here somewhere that was taken with me and him, and that picture was on the front of the newspapers, cause I got, cause I got, crowned over the head. My MP took it up in the House of Commons, and the local paper come along and interviewed us- uh, they took a photograph of me, with the, ma two kids, and you'll see Peter as a little boy, even now he's, he's uh retired and I-, shows how long ago it is... uh. Think it was in the, uh late fifties, about fifty-eight, nineteen fifty-eight, so no fifty-seven, fifty-eight. I mean it jus, I remember how big, several big demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, em uh after that. **(7:00)** But, uh, well Kevin Collins, I remember him and uh Russell, Bertrand Russell the (firestorm?) you know... I sa- I sat down next to him, oh that was a different thing, that was apartheid, ah cause I mixed up with uh the uh apartheid business as well, anti-apartheid. And I sat, I went to sit down on the steps of, uh, South Africa house, and sat down next to this old man, and didn't realize at the time, eh, 'til I got talking to him, who it was, it was heh Russell heh Brown hegh, but that's how it was in those days, if you belonged to a left wi-, any of these acti- active groups, you'd come across all sorts of, eh actors and actresses and... writers and, uh, I was uh I know one of the writers in the Greenwich group was uh, Dorothy, um... oh I'm bad at names, she, she wrote a lot of books about South Africa. Um, I think she's still alive, **(8:00)** but she's an old lady now, like me... oh no, well, I'm not an old lady muh-meh-nah hegh heh um... oh, I can't remember her name, you'd know the names they're very very famous, as oh we- you came across all sorts of people like that, yeh know ah eh oh you wouldn't have met ah eh oh we- oh we- what it was like, but uh, what else do you want to know... I, I mean, on the, on the, on the march itself, itallthemasters, we stayed in places... each night, that people'd open up their... city um, you know, church halls and... all sorts of clubs that um hum we, we laid on blankets and eh-h all sorts of things every night, **(9:00)** and we had bands ye- so, we we had bands play skiffle music, skiffle music was very po-, famous at that time...

Ruth: And what does that mean, skiffle music?

Bill: Oh, we-, oh dear, I-we, Lonny Donnigan, have you ever heard of Lonny Donnigan? We- yeah, we- it was uh, it was uh, we uh, sort of the music that wrote, led into rock and roll, you know it was that pre- rock and roll music uh, people played s- wash boards and o- anything you (wrote holes off?) to make the music. I think it was very, very famous at the time, very good, be- very good. When you, e-, the Beatles, I've said that uh he had a great influence on their music. And then we played a lot of his stuff on the...um...

Ruth: Can I take you right back to the beginning, this, this first meeting you were talking about, do you remember where you found out that was going on and why you decided to go along?

Bill: Um... well, it was all **(10:00)** published in the papers about it, and I was active in the labour party, and we, we we we- we were told about, you know, one or two of the people in the peace group there came, or believe was sent to the, the meetings, so we all decided to go, look, let me- people on the left of the party you know, wer- uh, my, whe- uh, ah, um, (mumbles) one of our monthly meetings we all decided to go... and uh, it was at Central Hall in London. Big hall, I mea- the meeting, oh, hundreds of people, it was packed, 'er was people queuing outside to get in... 'er was, uh, Michael Foot, Kevin Collins... oh what wasername, Do-. I wish I hadn't er, I-I-I- wish I had time to look through my stuff, you know, to..

Ruth: I might be able to, um **(11:00)** we're also interviewing someone called, um... who I think... who is, is a priest of some sort, um, Dr. Osteriche... Osteriche, who's-

Bill: I know the name, yes, yeah-

Ruth: is-

Bill: I don't know if he's as old as I am, I, I, I think he's probably younger than me, isn't he...

Ruth: Yeah, I think so

Bill: Yeah, he would be. Um...

Ruth: Um, with the turn out for this first meeting, were you surprised by it, or...

Bill: Well by the size of what I saw it, yeah... I didn't expect to see that crowd that was there, uh ah afterwards, it was packed. I mean, the meeting didn't finish 'til about half past ten, and en we all went in to White Hall and... sat down to Downing Street, you know... and we, we were sitting, sitting, actually all si- sitting there, we were standing right the- oh, and when the police come we refused to go out, so they were dragging us out one by one and pushing us out, you know, heh heh heh...

Ruth: And how did that... assault feel? **(12:00)** How did you react to it?

Bill: Well, I was very angry. You know, very angry, because, uh, I was doing my civic rights, what I thought was my civic right, just demonstrating, and I wasn't doing any harm, but I-ha-was sitting hegh heh on the floor, on the, in the street... but of course, the government was very, very... antsy and, you know, uh uh er so, what what, well, I wasn't quite worried about the anti-nuclear movement at that time. They be dropped the bomb... and uh it was a right wing government in power at that time.

Ruth: When the news started to filter through about the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, um, were you satisfied with what was being reported in the newspaper? Wha-

Bill: No, errgh. I dunno, well, er I, um er... papers like the News Chronicle and the, the Daily Mirror were fairly sympathetic, **(13:00)** you know... they didn't actually come out against the bomb, but they were very sympathetic to the movement, and well ma- and raised questions which were, for the right wing press, were right against it, you know... caused a lot of loonies, you know. But I mean, a lot of my generation felt very strongly at that time because... we just fought the war of, um really, we did think at that time, we were, I mean, we'd sing of disappointment, uh my, my father's generation... I mean, I grew up just after the first world war and saw, and went through the slump at that time a- as a young lad... and they'd be-, my gen-, that generation'd been promised the war to end all wars, which was broken almost immediately, and I suppose we had more hope, we had more hope of a better world, you see... and I think we realized that the... **(14:00)** The mano- the bomb was a threat to civilization, that's how we saw it. As I, I still see it like that, you know it was... nonsense about sixty, more than, millions and billions of money we're paying to keep a trident of something that can never be used... only if you want to commit suicide, you know it's crazy. But, there you are. And people don't seem to be... vu-, well, wha- the- worried about it in their own homes or, I don't know, there doesn't seem much outcry about having the damn thing.

Ruth: And was that the same back then? A-, were there quite a few apathetic people?

Bill: Oh yes, I mean... I, I think most, probably most, most of the people at the time, I suppose, ah uh I mean, nu- nuclear, ah I think the people who were, supported nuclear disarmament were always, um, **(15:00)** a, a, a minority, ah- being a, being a, being a minority, then, you know, is quite a, a few million people... ah, ah in this country were ah ah anti-... anti-nuclear weapons. I don't really know what... why people were so apathetic over everything, now you know, I, I'm just I, I'm almost in despair... I think they can't see through this crowd we've got in government now, an- an- all the other things they're doing a- an- a lot like nuclear bombs, but a... well, I'm nearly at the end of my time, so.. well, I just hope my.. so-, you know, son's ge- ne- ra- gene- ration, my grandchildren, great-grandchildren, that em, the world comes to its senses **(16:00)** in some way, but when I look 'round, everybody, everybody's bee- killing each other all over, all over the world, and it's uh.. in a worse state now than any time since uh, th- the end of the second world war, it seems to me. And I

think the government's (doing the best loo-?) to answer for, you know... the fact they've allowed Is- Israel to do the things they're doing to Gaza. I mean, that a, that's a crime in my, mind you, I'm not anti-Jewish. I mean, Moses, as you know, is Jewish. And uh, I've got a lot of Jewish friends, and I, I supp- supported Israel, o-o- originally, in the creation of Israel. So, the Jewish had their own, but they've beco-, they've moved more and more to the right, and they seem to be doing the things that Germany, Germany did... themselves, it's almost (the end of an era...?), not gas chambers **(17:00)** and things like that, but... it makes you wonder how far this present Israeli government would g- go to stop the, the two nation, you know, c- creation of another state. So... uh, the- there's a lot to worry about.

Ruth: Just taking you back right to this, kind of, inception point again, ooh, do you remember what you were doing on VJ day and how that differed, or was the same, to VE day celebrations?

Bill: Uh, VJ day wasn't, eh, quite as hectic like VE day, no, em. I don't think... I mean VE day was tremendous, and all that week was tremendous, the end of the war in Europe. I think people to-, took their eye off the ball.. uh, I think we knew we were going to win... eh uh the war in the end anyway, but um the fourteenth army, before the battles in the far East **(18:00)** were, well, called the forgotten army, they were always forgotten about, you know. I mean, VE VE J day were, was celebrated, but n- not, not quite in quite the same extent... as VE day. And that was such a relief... because London was still being bombed by V rockets right up to six weeks before the end of the war... so it was that close, you know, to home really, to Europe, but um, eh uh the fourteenth army, I always felt very sorry for the people who fought fourteenth, because they had been overlooked... quite a bit, I think, oh ah-a battle called (Kagima?)i- in... Burma whe- where... we defeated the, oh ah ah as the more In-, there were more I-, more members of the Indian army that um... **(19:00)** uh, fought with the British, you know. And that um... and that battle decided the wa- war in the fea- far East. It started their big retreat from the Japanese... army, and we were able to liberate, if you want to call it that word, Burma, and uh, all the other places... in the far East, absent of the Americans. I rememb-, I know there is um, a big monument in (Kohima?) who says um 'when you go home, tell them we- w- we- know where today is, for your tomorrow' heh mpff. And I just think, is what you, and I just look back now, and I think wha-... hah **(20:00)** of all the people who died, you know all of my generation, I think... my friends... anduh, it just makes me angry that we haven't done a better job... at making the world a better place, you know what I mean? Huh... hehh... mffph

Ruth: Would you like me to pop the kettle on, n-

Bill: Mm

Ruth: ...have a cuppa tea? I'll just pause this. Yeah, I think that's working. So, I just wanted to go back to this first meeting again and... could you just tell me what it consisted of, at- when you walk in the door, what, what happened over the next few hours?

Bill: Which meeting do you mean?

Ruth: The first meeting in Central Hall, sorry.

Bill: Well, well, it was, -rive, I mean it's huge place, Central Hall, where everyone just **(21:00)** ...pools in London. Uh, i- it's the headquarters of the s- Methodists... did you not heard of the Methodists yet, ri-? Uh, and you know, we're all, we- we- (like the ???) like you would in a cinemaortheatre, you, you sat down on your seats (or olley?) and then on the big stage, and then it was all the lea..., well people who were gonna try and... do something. And I will, I'll dig out the list of names... for you sometime. I'll get it all, Iginnit, I know there's Michael (Foot?), uh... Callum Collins uhh... I wish I could remember the name of the message carrier, cause he was very well known and... (I'm?) terrible at names, uhh, I can't reme- I nearly got it but it won't come...but the whole crowd, of course, Bertrand Russell.. **(22:00)** um... I can't remember if Shirley (Winrose?) was there, she

might've been... you know, I will get all the names for you, who were on the platform, uhh, not sure about Norman (Bevan?)... caough... I found (a bock away?) , probably never even heard of him, but he was... he was very much involved in (mumble b), very much involved in left-wing politics, he found an organization called 'The Movement for Colonial Freedom' which I was a member of as well, I joined all these left-wing groups... um, and I made the speeches about... what was wrong with having nuclear weapons, you know, and uh, 'course that, **(23:00)** we had, uh, pictures of Hiroshima... and Nagasaki... and there was somebody from Japan who spoke... and there was a British prisoner of war who was only, you know, prison-, working in a factory just outside of Hiro- Hirosha- Hiro- Hiroshima, and he, he was in a tunnel, working in a tunnel, when the bomb was dropped... and actually, he was, it was about ten or twenty miles outside of... but he had to go through to Hiroshima, to get back to camp he was in... and then he said he saw all these... and they co-, they, they could only go far to, so far cause uh they we- uh ah uh to skirt 'round the outskirts 'cause it,i- it they couldn't get across the city when it was in such a state... and burning... and uh, he suffered from... **(24:00)** uh he didn't die, it didn't kill him, but he suffered from terrible skin problem, ev- ever since.

Ruth: So even as a, as a prisoner of war, kind of suffering in Japan, he still thought that Hiroshima was inexcusable?

Bill: Oh, yes, 'cause he saw the horror of it. I mean, he couldn't... whoo.. I mean n-, w-... well I suppose I was brought up different, cause my mum's parents were... international socialists, so they they believed in one world, really... and uh, my mother, well, my father particularly kept rubbin' it in my head, he said 'look,' he said... and this is before I go- went in the forties, he s-, but it was obvious I was going to get called up or what, I volunteered in the end... I didn't wait 'til I was eighteen, I volunteered, but uh... **(25:00)** They said to me, excuse me... caough, they said to me, um... 'n- n- don't blame Jones for this war,' they said 'blame the Nazis, blame the fascists,' they said 'they're the people to blame,' they said 'because... we haven't got any choice in what we're doing, and the Germans haven't got any choice in what they're doing ' he says 'they're worse than we are because iftheyon't do what they're told, they get shot' hegh heh and there's a song which uh, I can remember when... when the news of the first thousand bomber raid on Cologne came over the wireless, my mother cried. She said 'all those poor people... and they were German' and it's, uh, in spite of us being bombed and losing thi-, so... I always was able to stand back from the war itself... without feeling hatred towards... **(26:00)**...but it's made me an-, uh, it's made me really anti-fascist, anything to do with, you know, fascism of any sort. And fascism prop-, fascism pops up all over the world eh even in our own country... people have got fascist attitudes and that's the thing that makes me cry as well... what people do to each other.

Ruth: Ah-, at the end of this meeting, when you decided to then march on Downing Street, how did that decision come about?

Bill: I don't know who, who took the decision, everybody just said 'let's go up Downing Street'... just like, just like, let's go, let's go up to White Hall, they said, let's go march up to White Hall, and we all poured out of um, the Central Hall... i- in the dark... and hugh marched up... and by the time, em we took everybody by surprise cause nobody was expecting us to do that sort of thing, so we **(27:00)** went right up to White Hall and sit down to Downing Street and... and we were there for hours before the police were over to clear us. Ma- made lots of arrests hmm hm.

Ruth: And is that because there was such passion and momentum in the meeting?

Bill: Oh, I think yes gu- e- uh, I mean not quite. And course you know em um.. well from the people from- to ke- go to that meeting, they were f- feeling strongly about the issue anyway u- and uh the book uh uh the book had come out (who show you?), called Hiroshima, tha'as a very famous book at

the time and ish- uh it told you all about what happened, it showed you photographs an... uh, and w-... we'd seen on the news as well.

Ruth: And why were the police so heavy-handed, **(28:00)** why was their response like that?

Bill: Well, they always are politically... I mean, that's it, that's what police forces do in every country... they're always on the side of the establishment. Mean it's not the only time I've gotten beaten up by the police on a demonstration, it's always, (Sewies?) is the same, I mean on the big S-, heard of (Sewies?)?, yes well, I walked in that-uh big demonstration, uh, with my father. Uhn... I got... beaten... uh, then again by the police... when I uh stopped a policeman, I stopped a policeman on a horseback an got his back cause I thought right he was gonna hit my Dad, so I pulled him off his horse

Ruth: And these disarmament demonstrations that you went to, and the meetings, would you go, um, by yourself, or with friends?

Bill: It was usually friends come, we used to go, cause the British labour party was quite **(29:00)** left-wing, an- a lot went then, we, we wo- ye- yeah o- organize ourselves 'o go march. We used to meet... (Bracking Station?), or (Chocking Station?) down to London... to the demonstrations and... uh, c- we can we- what became the (olden masten?), I helped organize the trip. And we marched... I, I marched on th- those two days, and then I came back to Greenwich... a-, befo- before the Monday march... a- and organized a- a umm a coach, big coach, to take all the people in Greenwich who wa-, the many people in Greenwich, who- ah, as wanted to go. Find more people who can get in the coach an- then hire cars or find cars and, but we had quite a big contingent from Greenwich at that time. **(30:00)**

Ruth: What was the publicity like for these marches?

Bill: Well, word of mouth and em-m uh-m the a-, you know, th- the the left wing labour parties were p- p- mi- ri- do posters and, and the- we took an advert out in the News Chronicle and one or two other left-wing papers like that, or, liberal papers, anyway... The Daily Mirror, that gave us support... in that time, um... anyways, we got quite a lot published, an we's got published... an it all shown on the television, you know, interviews. Funny enough the, for whatever reason, I think the, I mean what'idyou say? uh, a low profile, it woulda been **(31:00)** so much fuss with the way they treated us uh on the Central... uh, Hall business, that uh the police weren't too hard on the marches, they just marched.. acted, they made sure we got through the traffic and nobody interfered with us and... a'course we got across the march there was this great big barrier... and there was tr-, b- d-, troops there as well as, to stop us marching in to the... eng camp, we couldn't actually get in to the factory oh ey, the establishment en uh.

Ruth: So after this Central Hall business, you were talking about your MP um standing up for you, so the police were held accountable for that afterwards, were they?

Bill: No, not really... uh, no no no... no, no... (we told it?) 'specially in those days where... I suppose, ah in those days, uh, the um... oh, no, ee uh it's only just recently... that, the that that... since... **(32:00)** since umm, since I supposed the, um... social network you get now on the uh you know, the, the the Google and the thing that, y'know, how you call it, where people... oh, it's Twitter and things like that... people, people are getting together on there, you see, and making a fuss. And I think it's all to the way the police under the establishment were able to work, they can't cover things up anymore like they used to be able to do. Like me wearing the Liverpool, I don't know if you take any interest in that, but what happened in Liverpool, when you've got footballers (we whe- ah we- we- where) they've been cover- , covering it up for twenty-odd years. And I-, there's been other things like that, ooh, et uh, it uh mm it catches up with them in time, you see... but in those days it didn't, like in those days, you could get away with murder. En I'm always on the side of, yeh um en it, it's the same in other countries, the police are always on the side **(33:00)** of the establishment.

Ruth: Did you ever come across any policemen who were sympathetic to the cause?

Bill: Oh yes, there were, so- so- some of them were.... I know, when I was, went for the ambulance, I went to the ambulance, a big policeman guy went up to me, he said 'sorry, son' just like that and then walked away in case he got into trouble, you see, but... oh well they lie through their teeth...

Ruth: And you were talking about how social media has changed, um, people can't get away with things, but it's also changed the way that we protest, um, and where people gather, I mean it's so much done online now

Bill: Definitely, yeah, yeah

Ruth: And so, back... when you were talking about in the fifties, etcetera, I mean, what... what are the processes beh-, before you actually get to the demonstration, wha- what's kind of all the preparation and things? **(34:00)**

Bill: Um... I'm not quite sure what you mean, in, uh it it, there wasn't an awful lot of preparation, it just happened... word of mouth, w- a w- you know, or your meeting, you 'd have a party meeting, a trade union meetings, but it was always 'demonstration at so-and-so this week' being organized by the labour party or the IOP or the National New (Roman?), you know, or wa- wa- whatever, or or as it came about, let's say 'the CND has a big meeting this week' and so-and-so, but it was word of mouth... and one o- as I say, one of the few papers, like the News Chronicle or Daily Mirror, would make bigger things of it than the, the Daily Mirror than the Daily Telegraph would. A different, slant uh slant on the, you know, I mean the Daily Telegraph, Daily Mirror they were troublemakers, it seemed to me heh heh... oh, and it... oh they, they they would say that we **(35:00)** weren't, w weren't pat- patriots... you know, unpatriotic people, you know, that sort of thing. It was quite the reverse, we were probably more patriotic than... we were worried about what would happen, the, you know... I still, I still am actually, 'specially wi- wi- the, the, you know, this proliferation of nuclear weapons and it gets into uh... I can see there's something in the argument, I can't imagine, not even Putin would start a war, America wouldn't start a way with anybody, but supposing somebody like, you know... see, I don't trust Israel, they've got the damn thing, but I wouldn't trust them not to drop the bomb on Gaza or something if they wanted to... they seem to be able to do what they like. Uh, and eh, well some of the other nutcases in the world... who, I get hold of them, you know... **(36:00)** then we'd get involved, and that's when the, the danger would be, well we'd think oh, we-we gotta drop one, just to show how big we are... and there's all this about w-, w-, we still believe tha- that we've we've what I call, the empire mentality... we still think we're big noise in the world, and uh, w- you know, p- people say to me 'we-, I wish the British ar- empire was back again,' and we just can't get out of this... eh, we are little England now, le- let's face it, we're not the great... we're not America or China or Russia, any-, you know, like that, there well we'd like to be... i- j- I m- why we just can't accept that we're not the country we were... like Holland except in the, in the break up of thier emp, I mean, way way way they behaved at the end of the the the, of the second world war, was great, I think, they realized they weren't, they didn't have an empire anymore **(37:00)** so they had fairly good relations with people like Indonesia and, and countries like that, 'cause of that, um

Ruth: And was nuclear warfare prevalent for you back then in this cold war period?

Bill: Oh yes, I mean, it it um... r- r- right up until the um... end of the seventies, we were really active, right up until the end of the, Berlin Wall came down, and they, you know... I don't there is a CND in the Hastings, I'm gonna find out, I just don't hear so much about them now, as an organization, y'know. Wh- wha- wha- some, what happened to make it more **(38:00)** relevant to peo-, to to-ordinary people, I don't know, but I mean, it was a big argument. Mean, nineteen... just trying to think what year it was, y- wh- one of the Thatchers... I don't know, I think it was probably the second term when she did her, ran in the election, it came a big thing then and Michael Hastings

organized a, the, na- national press, really, but propaganda out, and he fought the, uh you know, he fought the big battle between him and CND, really... and it was it, it tha- that, made it big... uh, newspaper thing, and on the television, the big argument then between, basically him and an- ... he still boasts about **(39:00)** that now, half the time. A-, it did impact, it did have a, I thi-, it wasn't a major thing about the election, but it was one of the things that, uh, people voted Tory for... cause they think we all need, must defend ourselves, we're, you know, absolute nonsense, people are, how do you defend yourself against a- a- an atom bomb, and uh, and it was stupid because, I uh during the um... uh, Cuba crisis, you heard about that I mean ch-, during the cri- Cuba crisis, they'd send out tr- every, everybody asking you to join civil defence... and I wa-, because I'd been in civil defence in the second world war, I better find out wha- what they're talking about, what they're gonna do, and... I came home an, half of me was laughing and the other half felt like crying because it was so ridiculous... **(40:00)** they were still saying, 'look', um, 'if a bomb's gonna be dropped, put sticking plaster on your windows... and get underneath the table and put a blanket over it', you know... and I thought, well, where's, the reality of this, I mean, uh you know, you seen what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki... and they're still talki-, uh talking about, well we're talking about the second world war again, as if we-, w-, you could do... it was... you see what I mean, it was crazy, I came out and I said, I don't want anything to do with this, it's absolutely ridiculous.

Ruth: Was anyone satisfied with this advice?

Bill: No, not really, people saw through it. People saw through it, it was ridiculous. And instead they mur- a- did, ma- uh ra- ma- ma. I'd like to uh, make a... people's reality, I mean, you know, seeing how... silly it was, but it was, **(41:00)** it was completely crazy, things they said could come and charge us... mak.. caough caough.. make it alright, well cause it was a very frightening period for about a fortnight, it really was... uh, really, well you know, I remember watching the television as much as I could, to see... uh, th- the Russian and American navies getting nearer and nearer each other... u-, who's gonna blink first, I thought, you know... and if nobody blinks, what happens? They are pretty crazy, are pretty crazy

Ruth: Just going back to your experience with the Aldenmaster marches, um, were you ever involved in any banner making?

Bill: Uh... no, not banner making, um... I did a lot of **(42:00)** writing. Writing, of uh leaflets.. of uh, some leaflets and had them printed, you know, there was a group of us, w'used to meet and take on different roles... um... I did a lot of organizing and, you know, and uh... we- uh,so leaflets and uh writing in newspapers and... phoning up the BBC and... eh, all sorts of things like that

Ruth: Who was your target audience for these leaflets?

Bill: Well, the p- population that we, you know, we went round the, push- pushi- through the streets... or I'd rather like, I do think... I mean I can only speak for Greenwich, or the southeast London, l- l- l- l- but I think it happened in every city **(43:00)** m- because it was a- a- an- ad hoc thing, people organized it differently, one town to another, an- exactly... there was no blanket, nobody giving you orders, saying 'do this,' but people made suggestions... ah- um- the central committee in London organized a big demonstration, you see, and there was a lot of musi-, a lot of fun with it actually, we- we're really lively people, or, I meanuh it was mainly uh, I should say mainly people under forty, uh for me I was upwards, the, the older generation were more conservative as they are now, you know... um, but then, you re- em- er- a- that's... not to say there weren't a lot of older people, we- old... I mean, my ma-, my mu-, my fa-, my mum, we- he was dead before... it all happened, but u my father **(44:00)** got, uh, as an old man he went out ... and... and we contacted the unions, got a lot of support from the trade unions, but a lot of it was ad hoc, you know... because we didn't have any central funds, we hadn't had any money that we didn't raise ourselves... we didn't

have a big organization behind us, and us uh we didn't have a newspaper behind us, and so... 'scuse me, I'm sorry I'm like this...

Ruth: Not at all

Bill: Don't b-, it's the s-, it's the same, um... this is a pollen

Ruth: Mm

Bill: It causes hay- hayfever, it causes something-itis as well, an and I, I need about another month before it eases off... o- every time, **(45:00)** at this time of year, I, I've only got it since I've been older... you get all sorts of funny things when you get older, yeah, it was a good time, actually.

Ruth: And what was the spirit like, at the Aldermaston march?

Bill: Oh great, it was really wonderful... you know, people had a cause... uh um... yeah, I mean, that-the... there were a lot of intelligentsia there as well, aca- aca- a lot of academics as well.. it was 'wasa really thoughtful organization, but it did have a lot of support from left wing or-, working class organizations as well, people a work-w- w- peop- the classes mixed quite a bit there, a- and, uh w-, it was funny, you know **(46:00)** we had these funny bands, some of them, m- mind you, some of the-, some of the miner's bands, c- you know, your- undid... when the Kent miners came up with their band, with t- with their band, to one of the meetings, and that was a very good band, that was, and a choir... but uh...

Ruth: And was there a particular song that stands out for that march, for you?

Bill: Oh... y- I'd have to think about that cause I can, I c-, ca- can get these things mixed up, I-... I think 'We Were Overcome' was one of them, I think... oh... an- uh- Donny Donnigans songs, but I can't remember what they were now, but um... that was very popular, because he, you know, he only needed **(47:00)** to get... make your own drum, and uh... somebody brought... a, uh, a fiddle, if you could play a- uh uh r- a- you know a little pipe. And a most of all, and you know these, a I'm uh, in a minute. But uh... yeah, uh there were a love of love songs that uh...

Ruth: And did that distract you from what hard work it was to march all those miles?

Bill: Yes, but, you see... that generation, walking wasn't such a hard time... everybody walked. Uh, it was before the car boom. So, people marched quite a lot, you know. **(48:00)** I mean, wha-, eve- ever- every year during the thirties, about four, five years running, uh, the unemployed would march caough caough er- ah- every year they marched to Brighton, from London to Brighton... and o'course there was the famous Jarro march, when all the unemployed from Jarro, have you heard of that, well... Adam Wilkinson um... an- one of the porch leads... I can't remember it, I will remember it... that's the kind of thing you wanna know, I will remember next time you come uh caough... Jarro, that was the name of the town, Jarro... and there was... eighty percent unemployed in that town.. in apparently the whole town, shipbuilding collapsed in Jarro... and there was this marvellous woman called Ellen Jilkinson, she was only a small redheaded woman... but she'a wonderful speaker, real **(49:00)** fire brand... and she organized this march, of the unemployed, and they marched from Jarro... right up in the north of England, all the, all the way to London... and they became famous doing that. I remember my mum took me up to... uh... London, to ma- see them come in, and I went... and she cried when they all marched past... cause they're in rags and tatters and they looked tired in uh, but they looked proud as well, so there's... a wonderful times, actually... um, we don', it's all gone, where's it all, where's all that sprirt gone, that's g... huhooo, I do-, I can't, I do-... whether it's the television, or c-...w- people are so in now in their computers, in th... their phones, the television **(50:00)** sucks, I wa- I wonder if all this, m- media stuff is taking the place of what was it, um... uh... the opium of uh uh uh the people, and Marx, Karl Marx, religion is the opium of the

people, now we- w-, it's all this, this is the opium of the people. If I watch something on Coronation Street, than I watch what's happening in the Middle East... or... uh, uh, whatever, and I know that from the silly... um.... that, three or four of us are so in this place... and the rest of them are, are, uh.... yeah, they're not all middle class people here, I mean- oh or not all working class people, there is a mixture... but they're stuck—they're all in their seventies and eighties—and they're stuck in a time warp... they look back on the time, all they can do is look back **(51:00)** and say how wonderful it was then, and isn't it awful nowadays... you know, all these young people, they don't like young people very much, don't like immigrants, don't like foreigners... they don't like the benefit scroungers... and that, that, that's how they see the world. So, I don't get involved with politics ver- no- cause it's a waste of my time, a cause uh they'll never break through it, they're stuck in that... an- I try, I tend uh, most of my friends are younger than me, And uh... and the, the meetings I go to now i- i- is young people, an at lease I get some sense out of them.

Ruth: When you were saying that your mother brought you into town, to kind of, gi- to support the marches from Jarro... did you have the same support on the Aldenmaster marches?

Bill: Oh yes, a lot of people turned out, a lot of people turned out and cheered us along, **(52:00)** yeah... yeah... I wa- it was t-- i- i- i- i-... it's changed, since Thatcher... uh uh the, this country's turned on itself, with greed... and... and uh... competition, you know, everybody wants the next ch-, you know... 'come on here you' buy a, buy a, 'buy a new television' or 'buy a new computer;' bang! Bang! I must have it! I must have it!... and by the time everyone bought it, it's out of date... you see what I mean, this, this consumption of goods... although, uh that started with Thatcher. And cause see, one of the best times I've had in... fighting the system, was with the miner strikes... and uh, I uh I, I, was chairman of the Greenwich **(53:00)** Labour party in the... seventy-four, uh um... well, seventy-two, seventy- uh, seventy-two to seventy-four, I was chairman of the Greenwich labour party... and, through the, through the mine union, we had links with the Kent miners... and they rang me up, and said they, w-, Bill, 'we got three power stations in your constituency, um, and we'd like to send a contingent of jo- miners up, out to picket'... and he said, 'would you take on the job of organizing 'em, finding 'em places to sleep, and um r-,' so I sa-, so I, so I went down to Dio and I had a meeting with them, and I said 'right,' I said, um... 'as far as I, as far as I', I said 'I don't want to interfere too, with, too, a- a-, with your, your, your what you do, what you're going to say, what you-,' but I said, **(54:00)** 'what I do, I sai- I want this to be a non-violent thing' I said, 'I don't want any violence'. He said, 'right, they said what you say goes, right'. I said 'what I want,' I sai- 'I want four men on a picket, no more than that'... and I never had any trouble, I had a hundred and twenty miners came up, and everybody in Greenwich wanted a miner heh heh, all heh heh everybody who's associated with me phoning me up saying 'can I, can I have a miner, Bill?' and I got them all billeted within three days... and... a- a- as, as each power station closed and the lights went out, everybody cheered. Even me own next door neighbour—w ho was fairly right wing—she knocked on the door and she said, 'innit great', she said, 'the miners are winning.' Heh I said, 'who's that?' That spirit, well, i- it's gone, it's gone.

Ruth: Did you feel a sense of accomplishment um just kind of going back to the disarmament issue with the signing of **(55:00)** the test ban treaty in '63?

Bill: Er, well I was pleased it was signed, I didn't have a, I still haven't got all that much hope with it, bloody things still exist don't they and other countries are still getting them. I don't know what, I don't know what the answer to it is. Unless, unless somebody has a disaster, a big disaster, with one of them or.. it might shift people's opinions, I don't know. Hope that never happens, but.. Otherwise people are sleep walking, really, as they sleep walk into a lot of other things. I mean all the time, all the time the establishment are in control of this, and the newspapers, **(56:00)** and all the other propaganda things. I don't know how we're going to break into it, you know. I mean you'd think now after all that's happened in the last, erm, five years, and under Blair as well, and Thatcher. I mean it

all started with Thatcher and it's gradually got worse right through the Blair years, and it, and. And, um, you'd think that, you know, that Labour would be winning by a landslide, but they're not, you know. I don't, we, we, well....it's...well it is this individualism that, for, for year's now we've had, you know, look after yourself, that's what you got to do in life, never mind about anything-else, you look after your own family. The hard working people **(57:00)** who are going to do the right thing. What does it all mean all these bloody cash places that they've got, what does it mean? Most people want to do the right thing. All depends on what you mean by the right thing, doesn't it? A lot of nonsense. And people are taken in by it. People are taken it by it. I show you...something.

Ruth: there we go. So, you, you were telling me about taking Pete to a march, which one was that?

Bill: Aldermaston. He, he, my little two little lads marched....on the fourth day.

Ruth: So how old were they?

Bill: Well you'll see on the photograph, they were very young. Well, see what, say it as '57. **(58:00)** They'd be about, er....Paul would be seven and Matthew would be eight. No beg your pardon, Peter and Paul my first two. Peter would be eight or nine, and Jamie would be Paul, er, Paul would be. Tt, I do get into trouble. I got four sons I get their names mixed up. Ah...yeah they were about that age. But they could walk. They were brought up to. I was a great walker and so was my wife. So all my kids can walk miles without thinking anything of it.

Ruth: So it was a family environment then these, this march?

Bill: Oh lots of them were families, yeah, lots of them were families. Especially the last day cause families couldn't do the, all four days, because of sleeping in, you know, so there's a big, lot of, **(59:00)** I'd say the first three days there was a lot, there was very young contingent, er, people up to thirties, yeah, sort, sort of thing. Anything from twelve to thirty. Erm... and then on the... we had a big meeting place about eight mile outside of Aldermaston. Probably a bit longer than that. Er... er, and coaches from all over the country came and met there, and joined up. In fact there were several joining up places on that route... so there was coaches from everywhere. And it, it doubled in size on that, on that fourth day. Which was tremendous. Which meant that most of those that were families brought the kids. That's why I suppose the erm, a lot of the music, on the fourth day particularly, a lot of the music was the pop stuff **(1:00:00)** of the, of the time, time.

Ruth: So, you mean, live, songs, pop songs?

Bill: Well, they, they were the songs that were on the radio, yes, but, the bands were playing them, you know, and people, and there'd be people with banjos, a lot of individuals had, had accordions, had little hand accordions, they played banjos, even, even a couple of ??? of ??? you know, it was real...festive. It was a festive atmosphere really. Well they was a similar people. Nice people basically. Just want to live in a peaceful world.

Ruth: And what was it like sleeping overnight in these church halls and things?

Bill: Oh, it was great that was. Oh, yeah, it was, er, you know... local people turned out and erm...fed you and...even gave you money. We, we, we probably had money boxes, and we put money in, we put money. **(1:01:00)** A lot of the churches mucked in, especially, espec...not so much the Church of England, but...and the Catholic Church, but Methodists and Calvinist...you know the Presbyterians, people like that, open their church halls to us. And a lot of schools did as well, that sort of school halls were open.

Ruth: And was that because they were sympathetic to the cause?

Bill: Yeah, oh yes. Yeah, they saw us as, as, as peace-makers and... um... they were great really. But it's...I don't know. Where's it all gone.

Ruth: Did you make friends, erm, through, through this march?

Bill: Oh, yes. Yeah. Trouble is you, you live to my age lovey, and you've, gradually your friends drop off the **(01:02:00)** tree, I'm afraid. I've got very, very few people left now. Got no relatives, got, well I have got my sons, but my older family, I'm the only one left. All my Aunts, Uncles, cousins are gone. I was the youngest cousin in the, in the whole family group. So. I, I feel lost without all that. And lots of friends I met. That's why I don't go to reunions of my British Union things. I don't go there so much because I don't know any of the people who are there at the time. I support the British Legion obviously, but, er, I've been going to look after the kids who've been damaged by all these blasted wars we're having in the Middle East. I shall never **(01:03:00)** forgive Blair. It's the only, only election I've never voted labour...during his period. I shall vote. I did vote Labour last time, cause we had a very good MP here, out there. He retired, no, he got beaten in the last election by about two thirds of the votes. We're hoping to win it back this time. But, er..... I don't know, it's...It's hard to, er, to, um, renew that spirit, to...people who, people who haven't lived through that period, it's hard to imagine what it was like to be members of large organisations that were, that were, **(01:04:00)** were trying to change society for the better, you know.

Ruth: I've got a question, actually, which I forgot to ask you earlier (laughs) and that's about, erm, the role of women in this, kind of, early peace movement?

Bill: Oh, well, tremendous. Oh, tremendous, in all of them. Um, you know, as many, as many women on the Aldermaston march, and the Central Hall as there were men and as I say they even, they even brought their kids on the, to Aldermaston. And...it was the same on the miner's strike, look at how hard the miner's wives worked. It was wonderful. When I went down to the, to, to the coalfields, during, half way through the strike, to talk to the miner's there...and talk, talk things over with them I met all the women with them, amazing, amazing. **(01:05:00)** Oh yes. There always, there always have been women in these struggles, going back to the match-girls. You know about the match-girls, don't you and things like that.

Ruth: So, would, whilst having a strong presence, would they, would they be involved in the decision-making?

Bill: Oh yes, yes. Oh, yes....um...particularly, ah...particularly after the war. You know, gradually as, as, when we got into the late fifties, particularly when we started to take over...um...Well, I was, I mean I was on the council, there were as many women councillors as there were men. And they were strong as well, you know, I wouldn't... **(01:05:00)** I wouldn't have liked to cross one or two of those women, wouldn't have liked to cross my Mother either. Oh, she was terrible. Of course you had to be, to, to be a women in those days. My Mother was the first woman in our... we lived in a working class block, if you like, with fours streets joining up in a block. And, er, she was the first woman to wear a pair of trousers, in, in, when...um...and she was the first woman to smoke, in our area. Course, she admired, admired the Bloomsbury set, you know, set of women, er, who were, avant, avant-garde in music and art, and, you now about them don't you, you know about them. Well, she was very interested in what they did, and, but she said if that's good enough for middle class women it's good enough for working class women (laughs) and so she started, **(01:07:00)** er, taking all these... but my God she was, but she had to be strong. You, you, you had to be, to stand out as a woman and fight the establishment in those days, even your local establishment, you had to be tough. They, they were tough women I grew up with, because my friend, all, all my Mother's friends were the same, er, ideas. And she was on all the marches, Mum was, all the marches. Unemployment marches, marches against...fascism, Spain. Man, Man, you know when the Japanese

went into Manchuria we had a big march about that. I, so many marches in those, we had in those days.

Ruth: I've heard you use the, the phrase working class a lot in this conversation. Was it mainly a working class contingency on this, this kind of, Aldermaston march or was it a mix?

Bill: Oh no, it was very mixed, very, very mixed. No.. **(01:08:00)** That's what I say I met several well-known authors on the march. Well that, as I, what was her name, she was a...(sigh)...when you've gone it will come to me. I'll, you give me your phone number and when I remember things I'll ring you up. But, she...she wrote so many best-sellers. All with a left-wing angle. She was South Africa, South African woman. And I think...I've, got a feeling she died last year, I'm not so sure. No, I'm sure she died last year. Er, but there were a lot of people like that, um. Cecil Day-Lewis was one, was on our committee. Do you remember... Do you know the actor, now, Day-Lewis? Do you know the actor?

Ruth: I've heard the name.

Bill: Yeah, well, I think, his grandfather was Cecil Day-Lewis, **(01:09:00)** poet-laureate. Well he was on our CD committee, so it was a, a great mixture like, you see. And it was a, it was...most of us at some point or other used to go to the workers educational, er, establish...er, college, you know and it was called the WEA. And you got taught, you, you know, you had sessions about politics, and er...social affairs generally. If, we, owned a big house in Dorking, where we had this, go there for weekend, um, sessions, you know. That's where I met George Orwell. If you belonged to, um, if you were on the left and you joined the left wing book things like the Aldermaston or South Africa you did meet a lot of them. **(01:10:00)** Cause they were part of it. And helped run it really. I mean, I remember, when I, when I first joined the labour party after I came out of the forces, er, it was, there big meetings, we used to meet, um. Believe it or not every Monday and every Wednesday night, we had a, a, branch meeting. Each, each, er, er, department, you know, you have a, have a ward, they were called wards, you know. And, er, there would be, every Wednesday there'd be thirty, forty, fifty people at that meeting, of...and mainly working class people where I lived. But there would be one or two quite wealthy people come, come as well, you know, and there was one woman there who was, was a really great speaker. And when, and her name was, erm, Gwen...Gwendymore (?), she had French name, anyway she was very, very well spoken. And of course they, they use to say to her 'will you become chairman?' and she'd say 'oh no, no, I don't want to..', she used, she use to say any...She saw her role as to give, um, encouragement and confidence to working class people to do there own thing. And there were a lot of middle class people like that. They didn't come into the, into the party, to be an MP or anything, like they do nowadays. They came there, and they, and they saw, all... they believed in, all you got to do is give the working class people the confidence and the encouragement to do it for themselves. So that's how people like me became chairmen of the Labour party. But, I was lucky because my Father...Am I, I'm not really talking about what you want me to at the moment.

Ruth: No, I, go ahead.

Bill: My Mum and Dad were, were, working class, in that sense, that they didn't earn very much money, **(01:12:00)** remember he worked on the worked on the railway, but he didn't drink, he didn't smoke, so he never wasted any of his money. And he loved me....I...they, they met in Bexhill, funnily enough, er, met in Hastings on the promenade, listening to the band, before the first world war, they met and got married. Er... and they became, they lived, had a love of classic music...and he loved, he loved literature, my great, my Grandfather loved literature. And when he died he left out all these books and things, so....but what, he, he had masses of books, masses of books...and taught himself, taught himself. So he could quote Shakespeare and he could quote Marx, he could quote, you know, he, and, and, and poetry, and I was brought up with it, you see, so, I was brought up with

it. **(01:13:00)** My Mum taught me to read and write before I ever went to school. But the problem was with that, that when I went to school I could read and write and the teachers didn't like it. Particularly the headmistress there, was a real old Tory, and she thought I was uppity and above my station because I could read and write already, you see. And, er, I remember one occasion they said 'who can sing some songs'. So they go through the people and she said 'how about you, you Billy Stephens do you know any songs?'. And I said 'yes'. She said 'well sing one then' so I said (*sings*) 'we'll raise the scarlet banner triumphantly, we'll raise the scarlet banner triumphantly, we'll raise the scarlet banner triumphantly, for socialism and for.. **(01:14:00)** ...liberty'. Oh, she went mad, this bloody headmistress went mad. She said 'I don't want you singing like that. You can't come in here singing those unpatriotic songs like that'. I was marked down for the rest of my time, my school whole life was marked down that like. Oh I could tell you so many stories about Mum and what she did, the things she did. I'm trying to write it all down actually. Am I boring, you tell me when you've had enough of this then.

Ruth: Well, I was just going to say, can we...I just wanted to finish, erm, the recorded bit...

[Intermingled]

Bill: Go on, you carry on love.

Ruth:...by, by asking you, erm, is there anything that you think we should have spoken in that period from the fifties to the sixties, is there anything that I've, I've kind of missed out.

Bill: Ah, probably there is and I'll give a thought, I think, er, now I've got some idea of what you want, you know. Er, erm. **(01:15:00)** Well it, it was this, erm...mass spirit, you know, when political meetings were, were political meetings, er, and they were regular, I mean well attended. And during election times, for instance, in that period, er, it's not like it is now where they can't just knock on your door if you're lucky and we watch it on the television. And about once a week they're in the, in the street, down, down the...if you're lucky again. But, wh... they would hire a school hall or a big church hall and have a public meeting and they didn't say only Labour party, it, it was a public meeting. People marched in there, and, when **(01:16:00)** Harold Wilson came to Eltham he hel... he held, he held the meeting in a big Comprehensive school and it was packed with people, people just packed with people. And that was what it was like in those days, and it, when you went to, I mean when, when ...the first elections I had after the war was eighty percent of people voted, you know, eighty percent. And you queued up for hours at the polling station. That's the thing that's gone, you know. They, politicians have lost touch with people in that way, because, you know, you could actually talk to them, they would talk to you, individually, face to face. They weren't, and they didn't have bodyguards walking around with them like now, they did now. Er, I remember when Harold Wilson got out of his car he had two Policemen with him that was all, to guard him. But he still, he still stopped and chatted to **(01:17:00)** people in the crowd. And he did, they did their own thing you see, they, they, not like now when it's all written down and prepared. He, he would make an ad lib speech. And when people hackled, heckled him he would use their heckle to bounce back. I remember him, him, saying, um, in one occasion, you, er...he, he started his speech and in the middle of it this chap, a Tory, got up and said 'Rubbish! Rubbish!' and of course people started to boo him and get him out of there and he said, 'No, leave him alone he's obviously an expert on rubbish....he said, let's hear what he's got to say'. You know, he, he was so quick like that. And that's what, it was thrilling to be in a place like that at that time. And the elections were exciting, in a, in a way they're not now. They're so bloody boring. You know what they're going to say. They're never going to answer a question. Never answer a question. And it's the same old hardworking **(01:18:00)**

people. What do they mean, we're all heard...most people are hardworking people. And people doing the right thing, what does that mean? It's a load of clichés that don't mean a damn thing, so it doesn't catch on with people, it doesn't and... you know. Whereas, you know, Benar (?) and Bevin, and Michael Foot, and people like Harold Macmillan, who was a, who was a Tory, you know. They would, they could catch imagination and, and take you along with them, with, with their speeches, you know. You don't hear those speeches now, no, nobody, seems they've been lost. The art of, of... oratory seems to have been lost somehow or another.

Ruth: And what, what is the distinction, if there is any between...I'm just trying to understand this, this whole nuclear disarmament issue, because there was, there was a political strand to it, but also the CND itself, is, is a separate **(01:19:00)** entity, isn't it?

Bill: Oh, yes, and I mean it had Tory's belong to it, you know, and there were people who were socialist who, who would join a thing like that anyway because it would be part of their socialism since the beginning of the war. But there were a lot of liberals, there were a lot of non-political people. As I say I know a few Tory's who joined it. It was a mixture of people who were frightened, to be frank, of this bloody bomb. And they, they wanted to get rid of it. They wanted it out, out of there...because it did, I mean it was...and during the Cuban, Cuban crisis I remember being, people were terrified. Even my wife talk, talk, as I say she's younger than me, but Dee, I was talking to her the other week about it, you know, she says, 'do you know, when I..' she says, um, 'I can remember..' she says 'I was in the, in Uni, University at the time' and she says 'I can remember being really frightened **(01:20:00)** that this thing was going to drop'. We were forty-eight hours a, forty-eight hours to zero at one time, you know. The clock was ticking.

Ruth: Did people pay more attention to this, erm, issue of nuclear, when it wasn't the news of it happening in Japan, but when it was, it was a threat over here. Did people kind of pay, pay more attention then?

Bill: Well they were aware of what happened at Hiro, Hiroshima, you couldn't be a, you know, you'd be a fool not to be. But then in, when America got the bomb, then Russia got the bomb and we got the bomb, then all, all, you know. Because they knew that if a war started, then, that they would use them, and that's what terrified people. The idea **(01:21:00)** the idea of what happened in Hiroshima, would happen to London, or happen to Paris, or, or wherever you lived you see.

Ruth: I've read some newspaper headlines and a few articles from that time and there was, erm, er, er, quite a big celebration of this new, kind of, technology, this nuclear power. Did you find that, erm, in, in, kind of in contrast, with, with the weapons?

Bill: Well, well, ordinary, ordinary nuclear, you mean, or..? Ah, yes, ah, yes, people, um. Although there were people still warning against nu, nuclear at the time, you know, it wasn't popular with everybody, they could see the dangers... I mean scientists who weren't political at all were, were worried about the waste it creates, and, you know, how the waste's going to there for thousands of years before... There was an argument over that, yes, for certain. But most people were quite, quite content to have their heating made by **(01:22:00)** you know, nuclear power stations. But they really came after that, you know, they were, that sort of thing was in its infancy when, when the Cuban crisis was on, and, er.. No, people had this vision of, of the cloud, you know, and were, and were terrified of it, you know...talked about it at work. I know I went home one Friday, from work, and, er, and said 'well, hope, hope to see you on Monday God, you know, as long as...the bomb doesn't come'. We got to that stage of thinking, you know, so it was great relief when, when the boats turned away from each, the battleships turned away from each and the convoys turned away **(01:23:00)** but, er...you think, you, you.. It's a very complicated thing, because you can't get away from, er, when people say, erm, 'well, or, well this country mustn't have it, and that country, but it's alright for us to have it'. You see that, you can't, that's my logical argument. Er, if it's wrong for, if it's

wrong for Russian to have, or if it's wrong for the Koreans to want to have it, or, er, or, that's, you know, er, Iran. How can you say 'No, you can't have it, when we've got it'? The only way out of this is, er, you know, the w, the world, to come to its senses and everybody gets rid of it.

Ruth: Do you believe it's, erm, important to commemorate the, er, Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings?

Bill: Oh, yes, it should never be forgotten, should never be forgotten **(01:24:00)** I mean there can't be many left now but, you know, a whole generation of people suffered illness all their lives through that bomb, and people, and thousands of people died, after, after, two or three years after people were still dying. No, it was just horrible. I mean, there were two, two, two times of the, when it, it was a bit frightening, when the, erm, the Korean War's on, erm. I forget the General... Patton was it, no, no it wasn't Patton.. Well the American General who was in charge of American forces in Korea wanted to use the bomb against the Chinese and to, to erm, to his credit Truman brought him back to America and gave him the sack. **(01:25:00)** It was.. that was touch and go. Oh, can't remember his, I'm terrible at names. I'll have to, I'll, I'll get them all for you, don't worry. But, I remember that, he, he, erm. Oh, he, he... he was a great hero, because he was, he, he fought the Japan... he was in charge of the, of the American armies and the navy, he was Commander in Chief of the American forces during the war, for the, undefeated, the Japanese. But then he had such an arrogance that he thought, you know, that he knew more than the politicians, and he was the only one who could save the world, sort of thing, and he thought he had the right to drop bombs, and he hadn't. Despite of the fact that China didn't have the bomb at that time but Russia backed them up, you see. Russia said 'if you drop bombs on the Chinese we'll drop our bombs', you know, 'we'll reciprocate' so that was a worrying time as well. **(01:26:00)** But Truman said 'no, come home, you are, you're finished'.

Ruth: Well, thank you very much, I'm going to pop, stop here now.

Bill: Are, are you sure there's nothing-else..... **(01:26:14)**