

After Hiroshima

Interviewee: Carol Turner (CT)

Interviewers: Ilias Pantazis (IP) and Ruth Dewa (RD)

[Previously a research interview – changes to oral history from this point onwards]

RD: Do you mind if I ask you a few questions? (1:15:50)

CT: No no. Not at all.

RD: About... Um. I wanted to go back to your, kind of, you know, um...

CT: I just feel sorry for whoever has to transcribe this.

RD: No. I, I find it so interesting, especially your own kind of experience of it. So you said that there was, um, yourself and one other in your class that, um, supported Labour.

CT: Yes.

RD: Um. So was it you, was it you two together that got involved with the CND as well?

CT: We... Yes. We both joined the local CND group. Um. The, the girl I'm talking about – Cherry her name was – I lost touch with her when I left school, I don't know her any more. Her mum, and I think her dad as well, were act... were active members of the Labour Party. They lived in the next town along and I used to go and visit them and it was fascinating. My parents weren't political at all. You know, they didn't... they voted and that was it. In fact my dad was a Tory voter, though working class my dad, um, was unskilled labourer, he'd had a long period of unemployment before I was born, uh, but he still... a lot of working class people in Britain vote Tory because they sort of think they know how to run the country. The Tory's are born to run the country sort of notion. My mum voted Labour – never told my dad. Sh... after my dad died she told me this story. She said, 'oh, he always used to, he always used to say to me: 'are you gonna vote Tory Sissy?'' And she said, [whispers] 'and I never told I always voted Labour. I never told him.' [laughs] Um. The... So... Going to the girl's house and talking to her parents was really exciting. I was obviously quite political at that age, but in a very unformed way. That was really exciting.

Then we joined the CND group and there were lots of debates going on, and there were boys, and then I came to London on the first Aldermaston March and they had a system. If you came on the march from out of London, you, on this particular occasion – sometimes you marched from London to Aldermaston, sometimes you marched from Aldermaston to London. It was a three day march. So the people that were organising the march, CND primarily, were very organized and, um, you came from outer London, out of London and you registered with the organisers that, you know, this group from Prescott and Highton is coming and we're bringing five people and blah blah blah whatever it was. And when you arrived you sort of signed in and they allocated you somewhere to sleep. So you started at Aldermaston, you'd march for a day to Reading, or somewhere like that, and then you'd stay in a school hall or

similar overnight – a community centre overnight in sleeping bags – and eventually you'd get to London. But you get to London, if you lived in the north as we did, you get to London too late in the day, really, to go home, they'd allocate you somewhere to stay in London and we went to, we, we, stayed with this man and woman in Clapham Junction and it was so exciting! The woman was a press photographer. They were both active in the Labour Party. The woman was a press photographer. She was a photographer for the Daily Mail and she was Harold Wilson's personal photographer! Imagine what this is like for a fourteen year old, you know, you're suddenly, you feel that you're catapulted to the centre of history, as it were, as it's happening. So... and, uh, Frank, her husband worked, he worked for a journal called Plebs and it's uh... it's not known any more. Anyway. So we stayed with them and it was fascinating. These people were so sophisticated to my way of thinking. I was, I hadn't come across anyone like this where I lived. And they said, presumably the way they said to everyone as a casual comment, 'oh, if you want to come to London and visit us, do so!' So a fortnight later I turned up on the doorstep, 'hello, I've come to visit!' And I kept, I kept, um, when I moved to – I moved to London when I was eighteen – and when I moved to London I stayed with them in fact. But that was the sort of way into politics, and it was absolutely wonderful, and I thought of myself as a Socialist and these people claimed to be Marxists. I say claimed, because I discovered later that, that there were, there were political differences, big political differences with them, but anyway. So, we talk about, all sorts of things. Should everyone be paid the same amount of money? Was it right that wages were... there were differential payments in wages? Oh! All sorts. Which, of course, a really crude, and very sort of juvenile way into politics, but for a fifteen and sixteen year old they're the most exciting thing that's happening. If you come from a small town and you don't come from a family which is interested in current affairs, or engaged in any way, to sort of find yourself precipitated into this environment is just so exciting. And that's, you know, that's, that's how I sort of got into politics. That's my personal history of it.

(1:21:24)

But of course, I had all sorts of views. I thought that everyone should be paid the same amount of money – that's what Socialism was. And, um, no-one, uh, no-one should have more privilege or more access, uh, to resources than anyone else, but it was, but of course it gets interpreted in a very sort of blunt and, sort of way. Um. In the seventies there were debates – I joined the Labour Party at this stage – there are debates about the Callaghan deal with the IMF. Um... Britain short of money, that's nothing to do with CND, that's a different story. But, uh, Callaghan was a right-wing Labour Prime Minister after Wilson and, uh, Britain – Wilson, actually, not to sidetrack, but looking back on it historically I thought Wilson was terrible right-winger at the time, but actually he was very progressive compared to some of this lot nowadays. But, um, when Callaghan took over, Britain, uh, the British economy was in a terrible state. Wilson devalued the pound and Callaghan – which is quite a progressive economic policy in my view, not to sidetrack into that debate. But, Callaghan had a different approach and he went to the IMF for a loan and there were conditions, which of course were the wages were cut and profits were accelerated sort of thing. And there were, and I joined the Labour Party and there were these debates going on and your horizon grows and you go from, uh, thinking all people are equal and it doesn't matter what sex you are and what the colour of your skin is and you shouldn't be bombed by horrible devices that irradiate the world and that everyone

should have the same opportunity in life and should have the same amount of money, to a much more sophisticated – not necessarily better it must be said – but a more sophisticated view of how the world works. And that’s how I got to it. It was via that first CND march that I sort of met political society in Britain. Labour Party in Britain.

RD: Um. Was it by chance that these two were Labour supporters? (1:23:51)

CT: Yep. Yep. Absolutely accidental. You just see CND had to cater for tens of thousand of people being on the march, which meant feeding, watering, first aid, you know all the sort of standard, people got blisters, you’d walked a long way. Um. And then they had a lesser number, but some several thousand people, who would stay in London overnight. So, before the march took place, CND would write to all their members saying, ‘can you offer a, you know, can people sleep on your floor, do you have any spare beds?’ and so on, and people would write in and say ‘we’ve got two spare beds’ or whatever, and they’d have a list of what was available and a list of people and you’d just be, and it was entirely accidental how you got allocated. In our case, this, these people I’m talking about, had a large house and therefore they took the five of us. I think I’m right in recalling there were five in our party and we wanted to stay together so we ended up with them, and they said ‘if you ever want to come again...’ and so every month or so I’d go to London, and when I moved to London I went to live with them. I had a bedsit in their house so I stayed friends with them for quite a while.

RD: And as your first excursion to London as part of this Aldermaston March, did, at any point did you feel threatened or overwhelmed, or was it not that kind of atmosphere? (1:25:25)

CT: No. No. It was really happy. When you see some of the – it was festival-like. Um. Lenin has a phrase that’s a bit overblown for the circumstances, but Lenin talks about the Russian Revolution as a ‘carnival of the oppressed,’ and people who’ve not had much in life and who’s life has been prescribed by the need to work and authorities, you know, deciding what happens to you, in a revolutionary situation, in a situation where there’s turmoil and society’s changing very dramatically, they feel free to – you can see it in the French Revolutions – and the atmosphere – I’m not suggesting that Aldermaston was a revolution – but there was that carnival atmosphere. The sense that, for, for me for the first time in my life, and presumably for a lot of other people, I was sort of doing something that would affect society. So when you see some of the films where everyone’s marching along and singing songs, and I can still remember the songs we sang. I know that people’s association with music is strongest as a teens, in your teens and twenties of course, but s... the... s... I can remember the CND songs, I can remember the words of the CND songs more than I can remember some of the sort of pop songs of the period. You know, that’s how strong an impression it was.

RD: And could you give us a couple of examples of the... (1:27:07)

CT: Well I’m not going to sing for you! [laughs] Particularly on tape. Um. They were all the standard ones that Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, a bit later on Bob Dylan. Um. We Shall Overcome – that was THE anthem of the march. Uhm. [sighs] I can’t really...

IP: Do you remember the lyrics? You, you don't have to sing, but do you remember just...

CT: We shall overcome, we shall overcome one day. And that was used in the, um, civil rights marches in America and just incorporated by us. Um. There was, um, things like, [sighs] a Pete Seeger song, [half sings] 'little houses, little houses and they're all made out of ticky-tacky and they're all... something in boxes and they all look just the same. There are red ones and blue ones and green ones and yellow ones and they're all in little boxes and they all come out the same.' Now this is, the reason I chose this is, it's very interesting is it's not a C... it's not about nuclear weapons – it's about changing society. And I think it's a sort of an illustration of what I'm saying because, I don't know exactly the antecedence of that song, but what it meant to us at that time was that society was very sort of grey and uniform, you know, everyone did the same thing. Everyone wanted their nice little house in suburbia was the sort of implication and that we were doing something that would make society different. That's the extent of my singing.

RD: Brilliant. Um. Just so I can kind of get this clear in my head... So, when you joined the CND at home and you'd kind of go to these mee... meetings would you call them? Could you just kind of explain to me just the logistics behind it? Like, how often you would meet, what would happen and...? (1:29:12)

CT: Um. I can't remember ac... I can't remember accurately. There were points where we would meet frequently. We would probably meet maybe every couple of weeks sort of timescale, and we would do two things – we would discuss what the political issues were, there would be something in the newspapers. There'd be some current affairs issue that we would talk about. Some new information about nuclear weapons would come to light, there'd be that sort of discussion. We would also discuss very practical things, like who was going to the Aldermaston March and where would we get a van from, who could drive it, how much money we needed – all the sort of practical things if you go on a trip. Um. And we would plan local events like the one I described where there's a cenotaph, you know, you know what I mean don't you? Monuments in the middle of the town. And the one I'm describing, it must have been Poppy Day. I can remember, I can sort of see, I can just... visualise the... the... what we were doing. And they'd laid a wreath of red poppies and so on and the soldiers, you know, presented arms and marched around and did all the things that soldiers do on those circumstances. And we turned up, um - not when they were doing that - but afterwards, to give out leaflets saying 'Ban the Bomb.' And we stood. We took it in turns to stand on the four corners of the cenotaph and what I can remember is the soldiers sort of marching round and one of those soldiers deliberate, you know, present arms and they sort of do this move [noise of movement], and one of them deliberately stamping on my foot. [laughs] Sort, sort of, those are the things that sort of stick in your mind aren't they? Little details of it. So... s... At that point, I guess I was active in that CND group for maybe two years on and off. I don't know how regular an attender I was, but there were certain points in time where I was going very regularly, like planning to go on the demonstration to Aldermaston and we were discussing the details of how we were going to get there. We were discussing what to do locally to make people aware of the issue, you know 'Ban the Bomb.' We would be encouraging people to come to the meetings and giving out leaflets – I don't really remember what they said any more – and we were discussing what was in the media

and about what new information was coming about nuclear weapons. And I was, that was sort of, fourteen to seventeen, that sort of age group.

RD: And did you come across much, um... neg-negativity like this aggressive soldier? (1:32:21)

CT: No, no, actually I didn't. Um... But I'm not sure I would have been that aware of... I'm not sure I would have been attuned to the nuances. I think if people see school pupils protesting, they're not, if it's a peaceful protest in a place like Britain, they're not going to come up and attack you or shout at you. That's rare. So there would have been opposition and I would have been unaware of it.

I am aware that we attracted attention. So that I gave out leaflets and people took them. [tut]

IP: So the people were positive? Or, the people that didn't attend they were just positive, or...

CT: Yes.

IP: ...neutral I mean...? (1:33:14)

CT: Yes. Yes I think positive.

IP: Yeah.

CT: I think, not even necessarily that they would have agreed with us, but they, people would think, 'oh, this is, you know, this is school pupils behaving, taking up their civic duty,' if you see what I mean. They, they would have seen it as positive. Except for a section of people who were pro-nuclear weapons and so on who thought it was an insult to soldiers for us to protest and so on, but that wasn't the majority at all.

RD: And, uh, what other kind of places did you target to recruit people?

CT: School. And we held activities. I can remember at least one public meeting. I can remember being in the hall. There was a guy who ran our local group - who is actually now quite a well know journalist living in America - uh, he must, he would have been... he would have been doing his A-Levels, or even in his first year of university. He must have been three or four years older than me, um, and he and others in the group organised the public meetings. I was a sort of footsoldier, I was too young to do very much apart from hand out leaflets in the street and get my toe trodden on by soldiers!

We used to, um, connect up with people in Liverpool, there were other local groups. Um. The place I'm talking about was ten miles outside of Liverpool, so we would go into Liverpool, which was the main city locality, and join in other, other groups' activities. Protests, giving out leaflets, going to meetings, that sort of thing.

RD: And so this group of five who travelled down to the Aldermaston, was it a, a varied age group then? (1:35:24)

CT: It was all young. They were, the oldest... I don't, I don't recall. I don't, my memory isn't clear enough to give you an accurate description. But, they... I would have been one of the youngest. And the eldest might have been twenty-one, twenty-two.

RD: Ok, so really kind of on the young end then.

CT: Yep.

RD: Yeah. Do you have any, kind of, particular memories or kind of flashbulb memories from that march?

CT: Oh yes. I can... My strongest memory of all is not the issue of nuclear weapons, but is waking up in the morning – we all slept in this sort of campervan – is waking up in the morning, very early, it must have been sort of four thirty or five - you don't really sleep well in those circumstances – and seeing the sun rise. I'd never in my life seen the sun rise. That's my strongest memory of all. My strongest pictorial memory.

RD: Lovely. I, I love these kind of bits that make it three-dimensional, you know, the kind of, you know, people's memories. (1:36:35)

CT: Yeah. Yes. Yeah. I know. Yes. And the sort of excitement of, um, just being with boys for the weekend. I mean, there's no, as far as I can remember, there was no sexual activity. There couldn't have been. We were in such a confined space everyone would have known about it. It was entirely sort of comradely, but for someone like me who spent all their time in a girls' school – and I didn't, I'm an only child so I didn't have any brothers – the idea of being with boys was really, you know, very exciting indeed.

RD: And did it live up to your expectation? Because girls that I know that have gone to an all boys school, when they finally spend time with boys, they've built them up in their head and they turn out to be, quite, you know, smelly and rude.

CT: Well that was certainly the case in general, but not on this particular march. 'Cos we were focused, you know. There was an activity that we were all engaged around, which was nuclear weapons. I think my memory... of... my memory of the young man I described who ran the group, his name was Ian. He was a sort of... He was an intellectual. He was several stages above me, that's how I perceived it if you understand. It's a bit like someone doing their O-Levels meets, um, a university student. There was that sort of intellectual and time difference. Um. Therefore there wouldn't have been much in the way of intimacy, personal intimacy. I can't remember ever having a sort of casual conversation. I guess we must have talked about music and records and that sort of thing that teenagers talk about, but non of that can I remember. It was... The, the memory is focused on the activity, around nuclear disarmament. And then the personal, the personal excitement of exploring bits of the world I'd not seen before.

RD: And can you remember what the reception was when you entered the different towns along the journey? (1:38:44)

CT: Oh yes! It was wonderful. Yes, people sort of... It was like, you know you see pictures of the Queen and all the kids are on the streets waving Union Jacks? There was the equivalent. Um. And there must have been people who, uh... harangued us I guess, but I don't remember that at all. It was people, supporters in the local town, coming onto the pavements, in the way if you have a strike people drive by and they beep their horn and they wave. That sort of stuff. And I can remember staying in school halls, you know, being allocated to go and sleep in this or that place, and people would, um... mums really who would just, they'd be there making sandwiches and cups of tea and so on and sort of very, none of it was, none of it was personal or intimate, but everything... It was intimate in a different way. It was comradely. Everyone was engaged on the same ... activity and therefore there was a certain unspoken moral support, sympathy. But I can't remember, I don't recall any personal conversation or anything of that sort.

RD: So, for want of a better word, would you say it was quite, not businesslike, but, kind of focused on the, you know, on the agenda? (1:40:07)

CT: Yes, but it... [sigh] It's a bit... It's a bit like its opposite, I'm sure. I've never been in the armed forces and I've never participated in a war, but I'm sure if you're engaged in, if you're a soldier in a war situation, there's that same feeling of comradeship. It doesn't mean you exchange... you don't talk to people. 'Oh I come from, you know, and this is what I do and I'm doing my O-Levels and I'm this and that.' There's just a shared sense that you all know that you're in the room for the same purpose and therefore you have a sense of solidarity. It's social solidarity... It's social solidarity which I think is probably the strongest, not necessarily given voice to. And it doesn't... uh... in, you know, in that you're meeting people, it's very transitory, meeting people in the, on a march. You might spend an hour with them or something like that. So you don't have time to build up any form of personal relationship or intimacy, but there's that sort of comfort, that you know, that all these people agree with you. You feel strong. It's like being engaged in a strike or, presumably, you know, if you're canvassing in a general election or anything of that sort, you've got a community. And that's... that's the... that for me is the emotion when I talk about Aldermaston. That's the emotion that I can recall.

RD: Brilliant. Thank you.

IP: One last question. Uh. Do you, do you miss it?

CT: [sighs]

IP: [laughs] This feeling, and this... (1:41:51)

CT: [long pause] No. I think I still feel it. Not quite in a teenage way...

IP: Yeah.

CT: But, um... If you're in... The thing about the working class, because it doesn't have resources, because individuals don't have money, and the institutions don't have vast amounts of funding, the working class is always reliant on its organisation and its resources, and therefore solidarity is an important part of any activity you engage in. Um. I've been engaged in a whole series of things around anti-war activity. Organising demonstrations from an office that's no bigger than the room we're sitting in, running a national campaign like Stop the War with three or four volunteers and a couple of paid people, you get that same sense of solidarity. Because if we were, the, I don't know, the Tory Party, promoting... I can't think, you know, promoting something else... promoting a private health service, we'd be sitting in a luxurious office, various drug companies would be giving us thousands and it would be very smooth, and it would be funded, and you would get a different sense out of that, more like employment. But when you do campaigns of the sort I'm engaged in you get that same sense of community and solidarity, because the campaigns I'm involved with all rely on human resources, because there aren't, there isn't the sort of money around to do it any other way. So in a sense, yes I do, not in the same, you know, I'm not... I'm a bit more cynical I guess. A bit more used to it. But it's still there.

RD: You gave this ex... um..., not example but, you know, uh... uh... my mind's gone blank, I can't think of the word. Um. Where you said that you, you yourself as an O-Level student, uh, looking up to someone with a degree, you know, that example. Um... Was that prevalent, or would you say that that was a no-judgement zone? You were looking up but were, would people look down? Or was it, um... a no-judgement zone? (1:44:29)

CT: I don't... No... I don't... Looking up is... I don't think anyone looked down in that sense, but cast your minds back to being a teenager, because for teenagers there's a very strong hierarchy associated with age. I'm of an age now where I can't tell the difference, you know, by looking at someone by their clothes and so on. I can't tell the difference between an eighteen year old and a twenty-three year old. But an eighteen year old and a twenty-three year old see a difference between themselves, don't they? And that's, that's what I'm talking about. It, it's... It, it's, it's not an intellectual snobbery, it's something which is very strong in young people to with age being... an awareness of someone being older and more experienced.

RD: Yeah. Ok. Brilliant.

IP: Thank you very much.

RD: Thank you so much.

CT: Ok. You're welcome.

RD: It was very interesting.

CT: It's sort of quite, yes it's quite interesting to reminisce I guess.