After Hiroshima
Interview transcript

Interviewee: Ernest Rodker (ER) born May 1937
Interviewer: Felicity Winkley (FW) and Ruth Dewa (RD)
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(0:00) ER: Uhh… I suppose compared to… I come from a family of of people who'd been involved in objection to, uh, particularly, war and… and battle. I mean, my father was German and not that I knew that much about him when I, when I was getting into the age when this was important to me but my, but I subsequently found that if these things had come through DNA then, then I've got a lot of it in my body 'cause my, my dad is German and he was very involved in the anti-fascist movement in Germany. And um, although he didn't talk much about it, I did get some stories from him but he was arrested and tortured and, and uh, uh, the person he was arrested with was beaten to death so he had a, a real experience of what being a protestor and being sort of against, um, the dominating force at the time in his country meant to him. He eventually got to this country and um, um, um, settled here. Uh, and my mother was very involved in the Communist Party and the Peace Movement, umm, in, in the years before I was born in, in the 40s. Oh sorry, um oh yes, yes after I was born but mostly in the 30s and 40s. My grandfather was a conscientious objector, um, into being called up in the First World War, which I knew nothing about really, so, um, I… was in the household d… didn't really impress upon me the whole question of demonstrating, it was possibly a good move on my mother's not to do that. Um but um in 1957 when I was in the last period of call-up, national call-up, I decided that I was against um, um call-up, against the army, against the use, the possible use of nuclear weapons and armaments uhh in solving uh situations in international disputes and stuff whatever, and I became a conscient subjector. Uh but it was mainly on nuclear grounds, not on pacifist, entirely pacifist grounds, but nuclear grounds. And I found that it coming to that on my own, sort of reading an arguments that I was possibly the third person who took that line in this country. Uh, and I met the other two people who had objected on nuclear grounds, against the use of nuclear weapons and the dependents of our national uh… forces on nuclear weapons. And uh, uh, one is an architect who is still a great friend of mine, and the other, Ruddy Barry, um, uh objected and he said that the only alternative service which you have the, the, the possibility of doing was to go down the mines, and uh, because he wanted to show his working-class similarity, he went down the mines, he was involved in a pit accident and was in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Wasn't that long in fact, which was a real, that was a real, really sad story for him and, but they both, I met both of them before, uh, at the time of my tribunal and they were very helpful to me about working out my arguments and my position. So that was 1957.

(3:16)

FW: And how old would you have been then?

ER: I would have been twenty.

FW: Okay.

ER: Uhmm (cuts off)

FW: So you were born in 19…

ER: 1937. I was born in Russia, in Ukraine, where my parents met, in fact. **(3:27)** My father had escaped there from Germany; he was escaping from being arrested for the second time. And my mother was there (short pause) at a lost to know what to do really uhh with a family that didn't really (short pause) support her too well and she'd gone there with some, some ideological beliefs and got involved with a travelling theatre group, and uh, my parents met and so I was born in Odessa actually, in Ukraine. Uhm.

FW: And when did you first come to England?

ER: Well, um, we left the Ukraine when I was about 12 months old. Um and that was a pretty horrendous journey I understand I obviously don't remember it

FW: Yeah.

ER: Across Europe because of all the, of what was happening and uh, with uh, my mother on her own cause with my father being German, hadn't got papers and couldn't get out of the Ukraine but had to leave because they were arresting people and people were disappearing, and people in their theatrical group were disappearing. So it was a pretty horrendous time and must have been pretty awful for both of them. They had to separate. My mother came back through Europe um and so we got here in 1938 um, and um, uhh my father um was still travelling across Europe, was still trying to get here, he eventually did get here uh but in again in a very dramatic events um uh really the last minute getting off a boat and finding his way here with the support of uh, uh Helen (Ellen), the MP, what's her name um, Helen (Ellen) Wilkinson, who was a wonderful MP at that time. Pacifist Labour MP, who went to seat on behalf of many many people who were in in problems of getting papers and getting into-. So we were, we came here in 1938; that was when I first came to England.

FW: (acknowledges)

(5:26)

ER: My father got here shortly, did eventually get here and then he was arrested pretty quickly because they were arresting foreigners. So he disappeared having got back here, he disappeared almost immediately because they arrested him, gave him an hour to collect his – my parents set up house in Swiss Cottage and then they'd only been there short time, security turned up and my father turned up and arrested him and he disappeared and it was only some months later that my mother found out that he was in the Isle of Man and that they were shipping him to Canada, which is where they took a lot of um um aliens, or people who were considered to be a threat to Britain although he could say, you know, he was an anti-fascist and would have been arrested and tortured on his beliefs, that wasn't enough at that time because they didn't have evidence of that and um so he, being a foreigner from Germany, being a political activist who was considered a dangerous person.

(6:20)

FW: And did he (cuts off).

ER: If you're an activist, even if you're on the right side on your activism, you're still considered dangerous and we all know that. You know, and I know that from my Committee of 100, my political activities that uh it's the activism which is the danger, not how you know almost not what you're doing, just the fact that you're prepared to take a stand on something. So um, so as soon as he got here, he he sort of disappeared again um and eventually he he got back to this country it's all I don't know that you'd want to know this actually so maybe end it there but we eventually, they eventually met up again and we all got back to England eventually, and by that time their relationship had gone sort of um really become too difficult and um they never really lived together again.

FW: Mhmm.

(7:11)

ER: So um, so that was really when I came here in 1938 (trails off).

FW: Mhmm.

ER: And then, uh, because my father had been sent to Canada and my mother thought that on the basis of that, if she went to, she was told that if she went to America she could um make a plea on his behalf so we went to America umm but that didn't really work out and we never really went to Canada, which is where he was interned and life was so difficult for her that I think um that she was just uh you know, the battle for her was just earning enough money for us really, although she met many very helpful and friendly people. So my father then came back because of issues to do with the internment and the way that he was treated and the fact that they were housed with fascists in the camp they were in, and a group of them protested and they were brought back here, for a tribunal hearing, which actually never took place. Um, and and then they never sent him or the other people back to Canada so he actually was brought back on their expense (giggles). Um he's an actor uh and uh because he had a good German accent and he'd learnt English a bit, he was very much in demand in his early years here so he played in a lot of those films with his German accent and he was very good-looking and uh had a good start in that respect. But then that, he'd come back here before we did in fact.

FW: Right.

(8:46)

ER: So I we didn't come back for another 9, 8 year (sic) I mean I didn't get back here 'til I was 9 (cuts off).

FW: So you were in America for the end of the war.

ER: Yes, that's right.

FW: So do you have any memories about being in America for the end of the war?

ER: I… I don't

FW: Or the (cuts off)

(9:00)

ER: I don't have any memories about the end of the war in America, not really, I mean I have memories of that period of time.

FW: Mhmm.

ER: But not, not of the impact of the war really.

FW: Right.

ER: Not at all.

FW: So the actual… the bomb on Hiroshima had relatively little, if any, impact on your consciousness at that time.

ER: No, nah none.

FW: So when did you first become aware of the nuclear threat as it was?

(9:27)

ER: Well I think, I was I went to a progressive school. So um, a progressive Quaker school. So there was a lot of debate and argument and discussion within the school I mean that was acceptable um to have that. And um so there were debate, there were debating groups, current affairs and such like but I didn't really, I wasn't really too much involved in that. It was only when I'd left school and I was doing my own training and I was being threatened with call-up that I had to consider whether I was really wanting to go into the army. So that would have been 1957 really.

FW: Mhmm.

(10:07)
ER: And umm, ummm, so it was only when I was in the sense, forced to consider my position that I started realising that I had quite strong arguments, probably based on my experience with my family.

FW: Mhmm

ER: And uh the people I'd met, um, in in, at home um, that I mm sort of developed the arguments I did and from the reading and realised that I was taking a very strong position about war and um what it meant and being called up and agreeing to being called up as part of a consensus for amour men.

FW: Mhmm.

ER: For resolving issues like that. So that was in 1957 and I I was brought up before tribunal uh I wrote uh not the best argued argument in my position but I've got that if you wanted to see that because of what you're saying and what you're interested in. But I went to a tribunal and anyway much to my surprise because I'd never done anything like that before I I convinced them on this very original argument, because, as I say, I must have been one of the first to develop an argument against joining up on on the basis that the army was dependent on nuclear weapons. So um, that was my argument based on on Russell's statement, Bertrand Russell's statement, so um, yeah, so that became my position really and they accepted my argument.

FW: And can you talk us through, I mean, at a really basic level, even how you go about objecting, what that process was like? And can you remember the reactions?

(11:55)

ER: Well, um I I was um, I went to um what was then would have been called the NCCL I think, National Council for Civil Liberties

FW: Mhmm

ER: I think it must have been that. Before now what we have um um mm crikey what's it now um uhh big organisation.

FW: Citizens Advice, or something like that?

ER: No not Citizens Advice. No that was sort of domestic, this is the um, NCCL, well I mean it's a big, it sort of developed into sort of Amnesty and and I mean loads of sort of groups formed. I mean Amnesty didn't come out of that particularly. I'm trying to think what NCCL became um, civil liberties um. Anyway, it'll come back to me. What I did was I pursued the arguments with them; I got some books that sort of gave me what tribunals did and what was argued in tribunals. I think I may have even gone to a tribunal but if I remember correctly, it was no help to me because most of the objections were religious. They were Jehovah's witnesses or people um and I thought they were very bogus arguments in fact because most of them were on the basis that um some wars would be acceptable but some wars wouldn't be and um that you

know your argument had to be accepted on that basis and seemed to me that you know, if you're going to object to war on the basis of say, nuclear weapons, and you had to object to all wars. And uh, colonial wars are smaller wars weren't going to be acceptable because of what they could lead to and what that meant in terms of force, use of force. So I did some reading, um I didn't really see anyone particularly apart from the fact that through contacts, I did go and see this person called Ruddy Barry um whose um Dora Russell actually, she was Bertrand Russell's um second wife, I think she was, Dora – Ruddy's mother. Became very friendly with him and a colleague of his, who he'd been to university with at Polytechnic um, **Max Noifort (?) (14:10)**, an architect whose still alive, I still see and I I went and spoke to both of them about that experience so I had some idea of what was going to happen and really the whole thing is in a way a game, because um um you will laugh because the the stereotypical question (stammers) what would you do if you're walking a long the street with your mother and some thugs came along and started beating up your mother, how would you defend her? I mean, there were questions like that and uh which is what the books say you're going to be asked. I couldn't believe it really that they'd be of that nature but they were along those lines really. Um, and um, they were I think a tribunal of 5 people, something like that, very stuffy men as I remember it at Fulham Town Hall in fact. And um, I must have convinced them because um, they um accepted my arguments and I was given a two years period of alternative service. So that was my first, really, introduction to both arguing a case for pacifism but I wasn't a a a a pacifist really, because I accepted that I um I wasn't going to argue that force that no places were unacceptable. I didn't feel that at that time. But along the lines of the argument, I was accepted and I think that opened the door for many other Conscientious Objectors who subsequently took that line. I mean not just me but the others who I objected with. So um, um, I knew, at the time, um my mother being very involved in political activities; was very friendly with a whole number of of people on the left and particularly um Doris Lessing I think you may know her, the author

FW: Mhmm.

(16:12)

ER: She lived with us for a while when she first came to England. And through her, I met various people on the left who were active um I mean older than me, obviously, um and one of them was someone called Clancy Sigal, who was an American writer, writer and film critic. And he introduced me to um, the um, well (pause) at the say, at that time, there were a group of university students who had come to London who'd set up the new Left Review. Stuart Hall, Ralph Samuel um Janet Hayes umm there was a Canadian. Anyway, this group of people – New Left – had a magazine – New Left Review – and I, they were having sort of meetings and doing various activities in London and I thought that would be a really good place for me to um, get involved in. And really, through Clancy, um who was, who knew some of these people, I'd wrote a note and asked about getting involved and at that time, um uhh Ralph Samuel who was a sort of entrepreneurial socialist um they were trying to set up a coffeehouse called Partisan Coffee House in Soho. And um…Clancy, I'm a cabinet maker, I make furniture, design and make furniture. And uh Clancy offered my services to the work that was going on in the Partisan, so I got involved that way in actually doing work in the coffeehouse. And um, that was then 1957, which um, was um, I'm just trying to think now of the dates. So that was 1957…there was um the uh they were various activities going on, there was this whole movement of the New Left uh people at university, Oxford University students setting up debate in London. Um there were these um tour, um not tours, what would you call them, delegations going to youth festivals. It's something that was amazing at the time and was discontinued and maybe would be difficult now because of the set-up's change but there were delegations going to Eastern European countries. So, in 1957, the the place to go to was Moscow, was was going to be the first real tourist opportunity of going to Russia after all that happened. And um through the various contacts I made um um uh a request to be involved and I did, and that was an amazing experience going to Moscow in '57 and being welcomed by the Moscowlites and what happened there, so I, through that process I got very involved in the sort of left pacifist um groups, what was going on, Peace News, meeting those people and I must have met Mike at some point in this period of time. And um, and then, I had this, my own objection to military service in '57 so that was an eye-opener to me in terms of um, the pressures that might be put on young people to join military service and

and and what you had to do to argue your case against that. And then in ’58, the the Direct Action Committee which had been active during the 50s organising campaigns against nuclear basis, I got involved in that, and Mike says he remembers me going to a demonstration and that he was on um, um at um, one of the basis where someone called Will Warren made a big impact to have direct action person. Um, and um, he remembers me being carried off, being carried off at a particular site. I mean I wasn’t really that involved; I did get involved at that moment. And um that would have been ’57. ’57 then was the first big meeting organised by, by, now that would have been the Direct Action Committee. It would have been, it would have had a religious input because Canon Collins as involved in that, which was the first meeting setting up CND which was February 1957 **(21:19)** and there was a huge meeting at Central Hall which I went to. And um, I mean Central Hall was absolutely packed and there were uh other meetings being held in other halls around the area because of overflow meetings because so many people went. It was an amazing experience. So in a way, I was lucky, getting involved in the Peace Movement and in that, in those activities, because it was a moment when there was a huge sort of outpouring of of um, maybe anxiety, and I wished to do something about the international situation, to have some input, to have some uh say about what was happening. So a lot of this is by a process of osmosis, rather than intellectual development but at the, at the meeting in Central Hall, Canon Collins, I think much to his regret in maybe even in the days after that because he was always a bit, a bit fragile about direct action and civil disobedience in this country not elsewhere. I think he was always a bit um, um, um a bit um sort of not in the open about some of his arguments but anyway he, he sort of said oh the meeting, some people have suggested we might go along, there might might go along to Downing Street and make our presence felt. Now that time, Downing Street had no barrier across the end of it. You could just walk in to Downing Street. And um, I thought, well that sounds like an opportunity to carry on with this very big meeting. Of course because of the size and the enthusiasm, it was very innovating, it was very sort of… sort of producing a great deal of adrenaline. So I went to Downing Street and uh I suppose two or three hundred people were there um I saw 1 or 2 people being knocked about by the police, which I, in my ignorance and innocence, thought it was a bit much. And uh, tried to talk to a policeman, who was knocking someone about, I mean it was sort of, I think that person sat down or was in the way, wasn’t moving and they were pushing him, knocking him. And I sort of said, hey look, hold on, you know he’s not threatening, he’s not doing anything, and then there was someone sitting down who the police were treating rather roughly and I knocked a policeman’s helmet off. And that was in some ways the best political action I’ve ever done, in a way because what happened then, is I was set upon by a number of plain-clothes policemen. I mean I don’t know how many but I mean I was certainly set upon by 4 or 5 different men and um they were very rough and violent and they said “Kick him, get him down on the ground, knock him” you know and uh “Hold him down”. All I’d done was knock a helmet off; I hadn’t beaten anyone or knocked anyone. Anyway, I was knocked to the ground; I was stood on and had my arms twisted and whatever. And um, I was arrested. And um there were, I think, a few other people arrested. And uh, and that was my first sort of um political activity I suppose, really, my introduction to taking a stand and being political. And uh, I came up before court and uh, this uh, I was found guilty on two counts of of assault, uh and one of uh disobeying the Public Order Act I think. And I, I protested. Not being around innocent, I protested and said that it wasn’t me that was being violent, it was the police but of course the magistrates in those times took a very different view about um, taking that position. Um and the police came up and this policeman that’d been knocked by me and this policeman said his finger had been broken by me and said he gave me, they gave a picture of me as being a very violent person and the magistrate said “Young man,” I’d always remember this, he said “Young man, if this you have a propensity for violence” he said. Uh and um “If this wasn’t your first offence I would be sending you to prison.” And that was a real shock to me. I mean, that was a real shock. I thought Christ I mean prison I knew nothing about uh prison and what it was, what that would have meant to anything. And um, ah, at these occasions I always had quite good witnesses I mean, Doris was a witness for me on this occasion. Doris Lessing. At my tribunal hearing, I had Master Quaker. That wonderful man had come and spoken on my behalf so I had very good defence witnesses but they didn’t do much good so all of this was a huge learning process for me really, about the state, about its use of violence, its lying, its capacity to lie and not tell the truth and magistrates taking the word of the policemen over and above uhh well-established witnesses and myself, who I thought was innocent of anything really violent. So that was a very good introduction to me; I was fined not much, I mean those fines in those times were sort of five guineas a time or something so it wasn’t that wasn’t too

serious. It was the whole process really, which was a huge learning process. So um, that would have been '57 and um, and then there was '58 was um, I think that was the Direct Action organising the first order master march from Trafalgar Square to Aldermaston **(27:00)** which I got very involved in through the New Left Review, which I told you I was sort of trying to get involved with. And um, we'd had um, a meeting, in this um, I mean it's very dramatic in terms of if it was going to be filmed because we had a meeting in the basement of this building that was being converted into a coffeehouse, a left-wing coffeehouse with Ralph Samuel conducting the meeting and we sort of stood round in a circle; there were maybe twenty of us there and we volunteered for various activities. And um, I said that I would help with what was coming up, which was one of the first demonstrations that CND, which had been set up at this meeting in February was organising, which was a mass lobby in May at the Houses of Parliament. So I said I would help with that. And um, and uh, I would help with the forthcoming order master march, which was the next year so different people were volunteering for doing different things. Uh the mass lobby came along uh a leaflet was produced based on the *Isis*, have you come across that? *The Isis Magazine* article um, which was produced about nuclear weapons, I mean I can I can show you that

FW: I don't think so.

(28:24)

ER: It was sort of the first product to really sort of say what nuclear weapons could, what happened to a nuclear explosion and put a political emphasis on that and the young men who produced that in Oxford were arrested and charged with incitement or charged anyway with breaking the law in some respect. So all of this was quite dramatic at the time and

FW: Mm

(28:52)

ER: And for me, very um, had a huge impact because I was coming against the police, who were supposed to be keeping the peace. They were lying through their back teeth and being very violent. I mean, I had been quite badly bruised by their behaviour so it was a very good, all of this was a very good learning process from my point of view. So the mass lobby then came up in May that year and we gave out uh leaflets outside the House of Commons, and I did that with this Max Noiford(?), whom I mentioned and someone called Robin Fior who, I'll show you, he was a wonderful um, um, designer, he was a, a product designer and um he did all the early Committee of 100 posters and I think probably had a huge influence of poster design in that period of time. On the left, um, he died just last year um but so I got to know Robin very well and Max and we were giving out these leaflets at Hyde Park and we were arrested, taken to Scotland Yard. The leaflets were taken from us and we were held there all afternoon while the mass lobby continued. In fact, in the end, we were let out without being charged. But again, all of this is a huge learning process for someone, I may not have been that young, but who'd not been involved in politics it was a good introduction to how the state could work or does work in these sort of situations. So um, we got out of that without having to be charged or, or um, uhh pay any fines or whatever. But I'd already, I'd the case against me of in Downing Street so I'd now had a criminal record. And then um, uh there was the Aldermaston **(30:52)** which um I was involved in through the New Left Review. We gave out leaflets for that although the Direct Action Committee was mostly organising that and uh, I took part in the 4 days of that march, which again, was an amazing experience really, because um there was quite a big turnout in Trafalgar Square. It wasn't huge by my experience since then of big demonstrations but there were quite a lot of people and not having been, I think I'd been to 1 or 2 demonstrations by that time already not, I'm trying to think what they might have been, not certainly the big ones in Trafalgar Square so there was quite a big send off at Trafalgar Square and um, the march was quite large. But during that first day, by the time we got to Turnham Green and Action I think where we usually came from in subsequent marches, the march had become very small. Really, we had become a lot smaller. I came home that evening with the intention of joining the march probably not on the next day particularly but maybe on the third day, or something like that. But on the news, there was sleet

the the um the next day it was snowing and there was sleet and it was really awful conditions. And if you ever get the chance, you should try to see Lindsay Anderson's film that he made about that first march because it's very, it's very good and gives a very good indication of the enthusiasm and what happened and the march and whatever. On the news it must have been, I don't know how else I would have heard, that the march was very small and it was more or less the sort of criticism, you know, oh the march you know, this huge campaign against nuclear weapons, or whatever, (32:48) 100 people on the march or 200 and I thought, well I can't just sit hear and listen to that, I've got to go. And I went and joined, joined the march on that second day. And um, so, really that was my introduction to the Aldermaston marches and then um I, I became um, um um whats the word, I became addicted to the Aldermaston marches. (33:16) I think a couple of thousand, two, three thousand people maybe and it was seen as a huge success.

FW: So it rallied at the end?

ER: Oh definitely, was big at the end. Yeah at Aldermaston.

(33:25)

FW: But, talk us through, can you Ernest, that you're seeing, your reaction to the news articles and your kind of mind-set when you're packing your bags. Do you have a balaclava, how do you prepare to do that huge walk in the sleet?

(33:44)

ER: I have that (referring to balaclava). I have that which is in all the films at that time – the little felt hat. Not the figurine, that's something I'm repairing for someone but the felt hat, which I picked up in Russia and it's got a lot of delegation badges on it and some peace badges and I, I wore that on the first order of all the marches and it it it's very, I mean in the subsequent years, there was a rally of all um, fifty years, was it thirty years of CND? … '57 '87 anyway there was um something at Aldermaston, I think it must've been thirty years, and I was wearing that and people were coming up to me who'd been on that first march who'd remembered the felt hat so to me, it was a sort of icon really in all ways

FW: A talisman.

(34:32)

ER: That was uh the only thing I wore which had any relevance in that sense. Um and I, I sort of too ashamed to wear it in subsequent years but I, I wore it in those years.

FW: But I mean, did you take provision, did people have provisions?

(34:36)

ER: Oh yeah, people did. I wasn't really organised for that; I was new to it. There had been other marches, I think, in different parts of England. I, I just went really. I don't think I took very much on on that first march, at all. I must have, maybe I must have put a sleeping bag in a rucksack or done something. And I'd actually um done quite a lot of hitchhiking. I mean I, that was, in those years, in the mid-50s, I did quite a lot – I volunteered to work with someone called Danny [Unclear] **(?) (**35:21) in Sicily who was a social worker, who was fighting the mafia and uh, he set up various centres in Sicily and I volunteered and gone on work there, trying to teach Sicilians cabinet-making but I mean they probably taught me more than I taught them. But it was a good experience and I made a lot of friends there. So I'd, and I'd travelled around Europe and made quite a lot of things in that period of time. But on this occasion I think I'd just thought let's go. And um, so I I I had a lot enough of the three days but uh, um I don't remember taking anything particular uh. But I do remember getting involved in some of the organising, which was pretty limited with uh hundreds of

people that did finally started coming on the march with where the people would go in the evenings and um what they would, uh where they would stay. And I'm quite a good organiser – I'm tall and I have a loud voice so I'm quite useful in those situations and did become quite useful. So um, in a way, that was my experience, really, the first Aldermaston march **(36:30).** And then, the enthusiasm and the exhilaration of the last day, I mean it was matched by subsequent marches, the very big marches that came into Trafalgar Square in the early 60s. Um but that was a hugely impressive and exhilarating experience of all those people coming into all of the marches, I mean the fields of all of us. Um so all of these are very good learning experiences and certainly very good for building up a sense of confidence and enthusiasm. Certainly in my experience anyway. Um, so I don't know what, were, was there something that I haven't answered you asked?

(37:18)

FW: Um, I was, the only thing is, if I could just take you back one step. You were talking about the first meeting and how gratifying it was to be with all those people

ER: Yes

FW: And responding to the anxiety and I just wondered if you could tell us a bit more about what that anxiety actually was and what it felt like?

(37:46)

ER: Well I'm not absolutely quite sure what you're asking about the anxiety, what I said, but the, if I'm right, what I'm saying, what I was saying is that, um, the meeting that that was not to do with CND or or any actual campaigning but um, well it was in fact to do with campaigning, it was not to do with coming out of any organisation for campaigning but this meeting in in what was to be the partisan. Which was, you know, you could, if you could recreate that, it would be very, I don't know, sort of indignitive of a revolutionary situation in a way you know. There was this dusty basement, dark uh sort of rubble all around; a group of people, young people, very enthusiastic. Ralph Samuel, who was a very charismatic figure and was brilliant at starting things but very bad at continuing them so he was constantly getting involved in in taking an initiative and doing things and then leaving them behind and doing something else. So people were always following him behind Ralph and trying to correct and stabilise what he'd started. But in this situation he was um, asking people to volunteer for the various activities, which were coming up and that is, I suppose, how I got involved in CND really, because of, as I said, this mass lobby that was taking place. Um, the um, the first, that first Aldermaston march **(39:30)** I didn't really know anyone on the march. Um…I suppose I knew on that first day, people from the New Left Review, I mean people like Stuart Halls, Susie [unclear] (?) (**39:45)** um, uhh and Janet Hayes. There was a group from universities in the Left Review that were on that first day but they didn't, they weren't there on the second day. Um, and I think for me, anyway, the feeling was of huge exhilaration really and in, in doing something that was unique and challenging authority, and they didn't like us doing that, and I'll come to that maybe when I talk about the Committee of 100 which was, I mean, this was, in a sense, a learning experience of what happened a a few years later. Um, and, I mean there were a lot of people on the march who were young people who really were not, I don't think that political but there was the opportunity to just doing something as as youths together and any film you see at that time, you'll see a lot of mods and rockers and people dressed in sort of mod costumes and being on the march and uh uh but enjoying themselves and and I suppose in a way that's important that you can enjoy the politics that you're taking part in. Um but there I don't have any awareness of that time, of that first march, of uh Direct Action people that I subsequently knew people like Pat Arrosmith, Wendy Butlin and Mike Randall, Terry Chandler, people who, you know, I subsequently became friends with and organised with. Uh I was, the only person I would have known would have been Clancy Sigal. Um, and um, and and I was lucky, in a way, that um, all of these experiences were were positive. I think quite often that, I mean just very, jumping forward, dramatically, the huge march that took place uh uh against Iraq invasions when there were all, you know, over one million people. For many of those people on that march, who would have had

the enthusiasm of that number and that drama of that, and then finally in the government, and then Tony Blair was taking no notice of it and saying this doesn't matter. These people's opinions have no credit for me. I mean, that disillusionment must have been huge for many young people. Well we didn't, in a way, I don't think we, we had that, because one victory after another. The large numbers of people turning up when we were told no, turning up, turning up in bad weather when the media was saying this is, this is, you know, this is coming to a sticky end. And um, and uh, constantly the big meeting in Central Hall, which got a lot of publicity um that all of those things were against sort of the media, the media's representation and was seen as successes and so all of that was quite positive. Um, and in that sense, I would have been quite lucky that that was a good basis on which to (laughs) sort of to develop uh, sort of political arguments and activity.

(42:57)

FW: And did you feel that it was sort of a sense, was your sense of achievement grounded on that anti-authority stance, or was it that you felt that you had achieved a bringing to a kind of more collective awareness the nuclear problem? Or was it the two together (cuts off)

ER: I think probably the two together. Um, I think um, probably um…the anti-authority question you asked was probably of some importance to me, because of my own background. Um, uh, having been brought up by a single parent. Uh, having had a enormous number of problems in my early youth, uh, and and problems with authority, and, and discipline. I think, probably, if I'm looking at my own psychological view of this or my own needs or temperament, that would have been of some importance to me. Um, just challenging my experience, my early experiences, but um, it was also, um, actually following a logic that that I had developed from my conscience subjection, which is these things are wrong and and where we based things so much on this argument when there are alternatives. So they were two aspects, which are very personal sort of character thing and also a political and intellectual argument. So for me anyway, I think it was probably both. Which, which probably was quite important when it came to things like Committee of 100 and taking, you know, physical action against um, laws and authority. Uh, but there was an intellectual aspect to it as well (giggles). And uh

FW: And you mentioned, when you were preparing for your tribunal, the reading that you were doing.

ER: Yes

FW: And when you first encountered Bertrand Russell. I don't know if you could tell us a bit more about that.

ER: Well…I didn't encounter, that was before I would have encountered him.

FW: I see

ER: I think, I mean the reading I did was pretty sort of umm, conventional. I mean it would have been out of the NCCL and umm the umm conscientious tribunal sort of manuals that there were, for reading in terms of what the arguments were but I think if you look at my statement you'll see that my arguments were… went beyond a pacifist line. I don't mean in terms of being more radical because I don't think you can be more radical than taking a strong pacifist line but developed along different lines, more to take into account ur the development with regards to nuclear weapons. (45:55) So I didn't umm meet Bertrand Russell until umm the Committee of 100.

(46:02)

FW: Right

ER: Which was '57, four years later really in the committee. I did however have a very personal experience with him because Russell as is RU and I am Rodker RO and when we were arrested at, when we all went to prison over that big demonstration umm and we were both together I had this very umm… (46:31) Upsetting experience really of the prison wardens and the way they talked to Bertrand Russell (46:37) and I met him at the Committee of 100 demonstrations and such like but I… at that time I wouldn't have, I would only have read what he had written and what others had written about war really, about nuclear weapons. Which seemed to me the strongest argument about the way in which our army was developing (46:58). Umm so umm in those early days umm my contacts would have been through people at university's Left Review people like Ralph Samuel, Stuart Hall who has just recently died as well, umm and umm Clancy, Doris Lessing, people who my mother was active with really, umm that would have been the influences I had at that time. (47:31)

FW: I was just thinking about how you were developing your argument about nuclear weaponary I suppose and where, I don't know, when that, I don't know, first came onto your consciousness and how you found out more about it. And whether it was something that was easy to find out about in contrast to what the general perception was from the media or anything else.

(48:03)

ER: umm, I umm, I don't actually know If I have an answer to that umm. When there were the debates at school umm I, I mean there was in a lot of schools were there were debating societies there would have been an argument between the conservatives and labour and when these arguments came up I never took part in them really. Umm or what I did take part in was in (laughs) some arguments about the school had (48:54) was no great authoritarian school being a Quaker, err, school, umm but I did get involved in as a senior person involved in questions of discipline and routine umm which I, I challenged umm so that would have been the only uur area where I got involved in sort of arguments about authority but they didn't touch on at that time nuclear weapons and … as I say really the arguments that I eventually used in that tribunal (49:36) came out of discussions I had with the two people I met and my own feelings because of what was happening at that time and the end of the war umm and what they were saying. And those were the sort of arguments that I developed. And I must have tested that with, I imagine with my mother and people that she was … political people she was associating with. (50:05) But I can't remember any …umm… sort of… you know…moment of saying that's my absolute position. It came about through sort of, just, sort of arguing and meeting people at that particular time.

FW: Osmosis, like you said (agreeing).

ER: osmosis, yeah and I would, I would still take that position now, it hasn't changed really umm.

FW: And so really when you mentioned the umm… research that the Oxbridge graduates were doing which was later about the effects of the nuclear bomb…

ER: yes

FW: Do you remember what the reaction was to that? When that was first exposed?

ER: Well they, well that wasn't an area that they were working on, not really. Oh, oh, what the University Left Review people weren't working in that particularly, the umm, oxford undergraduates that I mentioned, the umm... in fact I almost think they were Isis, (laughs) not the Isis of now but that was whatever college that was. Umm that umm they were, yes, there argument was against nuclear weapons and umm umm. they had pictures in the leaflet they did of a child, a deformed child umm and umm I would've, I would've at some point I would have seen that and read it but that was, that would, well that would have been about the time of my tribunal because I think the tribunal I had was in umm… (51:51) in February, was just after that and then there was the May mass lobby, so I must have, my tribunal must have been about that time. Er…

so.. umm. I would have been aware of those arguments and umm… not sure I can remember exactly whether I … umm… read that too much, I think it was more out of discussion with, as I say, these two people I met and older than me and I suppose in my own family really. Umm… just testing out arguments as one does.

FW: Uhum.

ER: Umm and then writing the piece I had to think a bit about that and writing the piece I did for the tribunal.. .umm... which developed some of those arguments. Umm

(52:44)

FW: In hindsight, looking back at that period, something that we've come across so far is there is kind of this thirteen year period between the dropping of the bomb and the CND starting, and there are kind of umm… ripples in the water of people starting to talk about it and momentum really built up towards the second half of the fifties

ER: Yeah.

FW: And you mentioned just now this photograph or this image of a bomb child victim and would you have seen other images like that. Is it just because there wasn't this much information circulating before the fifties?

ER: I wouldn't have seen anything else. I don't think. I wouldn't. And I umm (coughing) what I would 57 years I've been involved in, so its quite a long time umm and I've not changed my views really which I'm surprised at in a sense, that umm, as people when they get older tend to take a more conservative view of life umm (53:55)… I think that the horror of what happened would've taken some time to embed itself in people's consciousness, I mean what people wanted was the end of the war and the nuclear weapons bought about the end of the war. I mean I don't believe that the whole presentation of that is truthful, I think Japan was probably already trying to come to some sort of peace terms but we, the West, wanted to test nuclear weapons and er in a way the governments and umm always do they use an excuse to get a chance to develop new weapons and see the impact, I mean that's what I think is so horrible and umm hypocritical and dishonest about the whole affair. (54:47) They probably could have got a peace with Japan without having to test nuclear weapons, but they, for them it was an important aspect of developing something which could be used in the argument against Russia and umm… Communism and umm so the umm the development of that umm and its use I think would've had a slow reaction to it, because the first would've been good it's the end of the war and then (55:21) the questions that came out and the way in which umm the umm East/West arguments were being developed it could be seen that this was part of that. And then I think the big questions were being asked about what does this mean for countries that are trying to gain their independence or smaller arguments or umm independence for countries, how this argument and the force that is being represented by this argument umm continue and that was what was being challenged but it took time to overtake the umm fact that it was seen to have helped towards gaining a peace. So, those, and the people who were doing direct action groups they were not, they weren't big groups, I mean they were small groups as you know from talking to Mike and whoever else you've talked to. I mean they had quite a lot of publicity but they weren't, there wasn't a large following. To their credit they kept going. And I think the fact they err as I said right at the beginning in a way the fact… those that early 1957 meeting umm called by Christian Aid or Collins was chairing it had a huge response with central hall being filled with (57:01) two thousand people and various other halls around the area being filled as well that that demonstrated this huge umm dynamic of people really beginning to see what was happening and wanting to have a say about it and protest about it. And that was a sort of umm... expression of that. And it had taken some years to develop, because nothing else was representing and no other party or no other movement was really representing that in any dramatic way. So umm... so it was an important time in terms of umm the surge that there was for umm both peace arguments and against the sort of development of nuclear weapons and what they meant.

FW: And which of those do you think was the prime concern for most people at the time?

(58:05)

ER: (Long pause) I think nuclear weapons probably was… I mean difficult to say umm because um that was also the beginning of some of the left wing groups, umm international socialism umm when was it, the other one, oh crikey, Jerry Healey's group, I mean those sort of groups were beginning to gain support and sort of very left wing groups and about the West and its umm policies towards the colonies and freedom and expression and whatever. So but I think nuclear weapons was the sort of catalyst really they used.

FW: And was the concern, was it, were people more concerned about the home impact and the potential home impact or an international issue do you think?

ER: umm... I don't I really am not sure. Umm.

FW: (Interjecting) I suppose I was thinking we're aware now of the environmental impacts a lot more…

ER: Yeah, but that wasn't, that wouldn't have been an issue then. I'm almost, well I'm sure it wasn't. Umm... I mean then it was about the possibility of nuclear war, about resolving the differences between East and West and if they weren't resolved nuclear war was possible and what you did in (59:48) that situation you put paper over your windows and umm hid yourself in the basement or whatever, ridiculous documents sort of coming out from umm civil society and various organisations to try and plicate peoples fears and apprehension umm and umm the whole cold war thing because that was going on at the time and the end of that might be a conflict between East and West and the use of nuclear weapons. So, I think that would have been the dynamic for the movement towards some achievement of getting rid of nuclear weapons and the Direct Action Committee which Mike would have talked about was aiming at the bases where nuclear weapons were either stored or there were bombers flying from or whatever. They weren't going to civil defence centres it was mainly bases umm if I remember rightly. Polaris up in Scotland umm where the actions were taking place. umm and I think that was the fear umm that I think was being expressed that these weapons might be used again. And… now so many years afterwards, I think there is… not that same apprehension because they haven't been used and people can maybe feel that there are other, at the last minute there can be agreement, a resolve for situations that look pretty hopeless at one moment can be resolved in the next. Umm. But, (interjection) well ,then there is the whole issue of the use of nuclear weapons and the threat of that in terms of suppressing protest and colonial countries and their desire for peace and freedom, and I mean but thats another argument really. Another area.

FW: During this Cold War period, for you personally were you ever feeling that the threat of nuclear weapons being used was imminent?

(1:02:19)

ER: I think there were two occasions, yes, one was the Cuba crisis umm and the other was Berlin, when we were flying equipment and umm goods into Berlin against the Berlin blockade. Umm that I mean for me sort of early days of my sort of involvement but I there was a certain sense of apprehension and fear about that umm and the Cuba crisis was certainly umm a period of real apprehension in my memory anyway, umm there was big demonstrations, I was arrested on demonstrations over the Cuba Crisis, as were many other people. Committee of 100 organised umm demonstrations against the threat of nuclear war and umm the umm you know the West putting a, giving a time table and then the Russian Fleet sort of going towards Cuba and all that. So there was a huge amount of tension and then a lot of people, I mean some people in the Committee of 100 took it even further, people like Pad Harrowsmith and Wendy
Butlin went to Ireland, went to Western Ireland and sort of as far a way from London as they could without sort of travelling hundreds of miles. Umm and there was certainly a fear at that point of something really,

terrible happening umm and umm I think umm I remember Ralph saying that umm he was walking around Central London at one point trying to be as near to the people he knew and the friends he knew as possible just for some sense of security. Umm I mean he's dead now so I can't verify that particularly but I do seem to remember him saying because, Max my friend, he was very friendly with Max and Max lived in Central London near Good Street and he was sort of walking in that area trying to be as close to people he knew and friends that he had because he was fearful of what was going to happen. That was his way of dealing with that fear that he had. Umm, so there was a good deal of fear and apprehension certainly umm, yeah…

FW: And how did that manifest itself in your life?

(1:04:59)

ER: well umm I was arrested one or two times, umm I mean the committee was quite sort of active during that period umm. I umm I was, I went to prison umm over that Committee of 100 demonstration that was banned. What was that 61.. I can't remember the date exactly of the Cuba crisis but I think it was 61 or it was around that time umm and umm I mean I had been arrested quite a number of times umm and I think maybe a couple of times during that period umm and for protest umm and I, and there was a time when one was really quite frightened about what was going to happen. What might happen…Umm..

FW: In terms of ..?

ER: Sorry

FW: If Ralph is walking around close to where his friends live (coughing)

ER (Laughing) Yes.

FW: as a way of suaging his own fears, was there anything that you were doing that would, perhaps not to the same degree, but were you or anybody else you knew kind of …

ER: No, err I don't know particularly umm I mean I had my own workshop then, my own company (1:06:31) umm and I know that I was absent quite a lot of the time with emergency meetings, there were a lot of committee 100 emergency meetings at that time, umm, and a lot of chaos and it was when Vanessa Redgrave was getting first involved and I remember her coming to meetings and sort of talking with a sort of doom laden voice about the future and we must do things. I mean the thing that was always coming forward at that time was we must do something, something, we've got to do something, we've got to response, we've got to show our disassociation with the way the government is behaving, or the West is behaving, we've got to make our voices heard. (1:07:15) was I think one of the feelings that kept coming up at meetings and the sort of frustration in a way of what could one do? what was done umm and I'm sure there were people within that group who were doing things, but I can't remember particularly whether Terry and one or two of the other people up at Holy Loch were doing sort of particular demonstrations at that moment, I'm not sure. (1:07:43) but umm no it was a fearful time and umm there was a feeling being in something like the committee of 100 what can we do that will draw peoples attention to the real danger that there is? At this moment. Umm but umm yeah I mean umm I wouldn't say that we had a big impact on what was, what was really happening or I think umm, in a way what came out of the movement as much as anything was the way it actually bought people face to face with what was happening at the time and the politics of what was happening educating people, young people seeing the reality of a cold war and how what the, what our political leaders were doing in our name and what that was leading to and the negativity really of all of that (1:09:02) I mean it was a huge educational curve I think for many, many people but umm I don't know that we had a big influence really on the policies that were being made, not really.

FW: So can we go back to when you decided (coughing) or when the Committee of 100 was formed what were the initial thoughts behind that?

(1:09:29)

ER: Well I wasn't in the first meetings of that, I mean that would have been, that would have been Ralph Sherman, the American err who had met someone called Gustav Metsker**(?)** err who was thinking along those lines and I think umm (1:09:56) Ralph and Gustav and one or two other peoples feeling's were that the CND was not getting anywhere they had become a sort of cosy organisation. Most of its organisational effort and ability was being put into one march a year and although those marches were huge there had to be something else that was more aggressive and threatening and challenging than that. And that's where the committee of 100 sort of came out of, as well as the fact that there was a Direct Action Committee that had already been doing activities, but Ralph's argument was that if we got enough people we could clog up the mechanism of the state and it couldn't cope with tens of thousands of people who were refusing to cooperate umm and umm he was going around talking to people and putting this argument forward and he got the support of Bertrand Russell which was clearly the most important element of the argument and the dynamic of what he was putting forward to get Russell's voice supporting him. And umm from that point of view CND, what was happening at the time was a very good umm base from which to develop the committee because there was already the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, there were groups all round the country, many were probably at that point maybe getting a bit frustrated the Aldermaston march had been going at that time for three or four years and look theirs no change, we've got to do something more dramatic (phone ringing in background) the Direct Action Committee is making protests but its.. wheres it going?.. not very far. We need a mass civil disobedient movement. And that's what Ralph was putting forward, that's Bertrand Russell had developed his argument er supported and umm Ralph was then going around to celebrities, people like John Arden and Robert Bolt, the playwright, and all of those people, Doris Lessing and all of those people who were names on the first Committee of 100. And umm I had seen a bit about it but not really got involved in the committee and umm… George Clark, who was involved, who was a friend of mine, who I had sort of helped because he was not in a very good emotional state really himself and I had sort of looked after him at one point, he had got involved in the committee and he had umm asked me to come and help with organising the first demonstration. And that's really how I got involved in the committee, through George. Umm and umm was… the err… which was good in a way .. a good learning experience as well, I was the sort of marshall who was getting people out of Trafalgar Square and down Whitehall so it was er a nice experience to be able to sort of ,when the police were, because there were quite a few thousand, quite a few, well, I don't think thousand but a lot of people who were in Trafalgar Square and who were going to take part in the Whitehall demonstration and when the police were trying to stop and break the march up I was able to say actually no we're not doing that we're going all out in one group and I'm sorry I'm not stopping the march, I'm getting it all through, getting it all out of Trafalgar Square and so it stays in one piece and actually it will be better for you because you won't have split the march up. Better for us because we were all able to get in one group in Whitehall even though it was stopped but that was a good experience of being able to (1:14:15) tell the police what we were doing and what we were going to do and not letting them control the situation. So that er was really my first involvement with the committee, I mean I wasn't involved in the very first days of its organising.

(1:14:29)

FW: And where there any differences between the atmosphere on say that march on Whitehall and either the previous CND marches? Or?

ER: Well, I can only speak in a way personally umm although I think it would be sort of representative of umm the general feeling. I think that arrival at Aldermaston on that first Aldermaston march was very exhilarating and sort of the marchers got here, despite the terrible weather the march has grown, despite the media's criticism and umm cynicism about it, the march has grown. You know three, four thousand people, something like that, who've come all the way out to Aldermaston to demonstrate. That huge feeling of winning the argument and having the support was replicated by that first Committee 100 demonstration. I mean the bigger one was in Trafalgar Square and when we were all arrested and we were in prison and

being able to see the people in Trafalgar Square refusing to move watching that in prison was probably the most exhilarating in a way of seeing what could do and what they were prepared to do. But there were similarities in that just against the odds, umm, having achieved a huge movement of people really umm who were prepared to stand up and well really I suppose it would have been equal, did you go on the big march, the one against the umm Iraq invasion, I mean that… million..

FW: (Interjecting) Yes, yes I did, that was…

ER: I mean that, I mean I don't know what you felt, but I would have felt that you would have felt the sort of feeling that we felt that this is amazing, this is a moment to savour and remember (1:16:32) that people are prepared to come out and say we are not going to have any more of this. I mean I know that's not what happened but that feeling of enthusiasm, of oneness, of objecting to what was being done in our name, I think one gets that maybe on a number of occasions and it's a very strong feeling.

FW: And so can you tell us a bit more about the day of the protest in Trafalgar Square and …

ER: Well…

FW: How did you arrange it? How do you arrange it?

ER: I wasn't, I mean the Trafalgar Square one, if I'm talking about the one, I mean I was in prison for that, for the huge one that saw over 1000 people arrested, I was in Drakes Hall and we were watching it on television

FW: You had already been arrested?

ER: Already been arrested, we'd come up in court, umm there were 36 of us I think, something like that, Russell was one of them (1:17:30) and umm.

FW: For a previous offence or to ensure you couldn't be there on the day?

ER: Yeah, it was, we were the main names of the committee organising that demonstration and the idea was to behead the sort of head of the organisation so then it couldn't go ahead but... I mean those, we were arrested, people like Pat Pottle came forward, I think he had already been involved, he had hidden and he came forward with a number of other people and they went ahead of the demonstration and er then the big names, people like Bertrand… was actually arrested with me but then maybe he'd been let out? No I don't think he was there. (1:18:19) People like Robert, no he was also arrested, he was in prison, well, there were a lot of big names I remember, Doris Lessing certainly, umm, other big names who were standing in the Portico of National Gallery and then there were the thousand in Trafalgar Square who'd turned up, umm, and who refused to leave, and had sat right there until the early hours of the morning, and I think over a thousand people were arrested, and we thought that's going to put the state to a big disadvantage, their going to have trouble processing all these people. Of course, they managed it, and umm in some ways maybe that was the height of the Committee of 100's success. It did organise one or two more demonstrations but that was the one that got the most, in a way, the most publicity and was challenging, was the most challenging.

(1:19:18)

FW: And so what did you feel when you were watching that, those events unfold from…?

ER: Well, I think it was pure exhilaration really, you know, the state had tried to shut us up and tried to decapitate the organisation and despite that and the threat of prison and what that would mean for many people, being arrested and for many people you know just being touched by a police man is anathema, in my experience anyone just being in a position where they are just going to be threatened by the police and

arrested is something very fearful umm not everyone but quite a lot people are very fearful of that, so to get this number of people protesting and being prepared to stand out against that threat was in a way amazing err and it wasn't just in London, I mean there were demonstrations in other parts of England. And… so there was a sense of huge achievement at that moment, when we were able to see, despite the fact we were in prison that number of people had turned out. The problem was really, as always there is, how do you follow that up? How do you maintain the enthusiasm and the dynamic? How do you go on drawing people in? And people do feel threatened and people can't constantly put themselves at risk of losing their jobs or you know being arrested. I think it can happen but I'm not sure it can go on happening time after time. So there was no follow up organised. There was no, umm, I mean I don't think we knew what was going to happen so part of the problem was, what do you do after this? And we weren't there? So there were difficulties…

FW: So how soon after that were you released?

(1:21:25)

ER: Well we were er umm in prison for a month, I think. Er, so it would have been a month after, well I can't remember the court case in relation to the demonstration but it was maybe two or three days before the demonstration and so there would stil have been the publicity of us being sent to prison umm open prison, well first spent, we first went to Brixton and the women I suppose to umm Pentonville or whatever umm and then we were there a couple of days. I mean if anything that was the most frightening experience for me. Because I didn't know what was going to happen and umm I was in a cell on my own and I did feel very threatened I must say and I didn't have any contact with any of the other prisoners and I didn't know... at one point I heard some names being called out of people I knew, I didn't know what was happening and that was, I found that quite frightening I must say. Umm and then when we sort of came together, it was umm, a chance to sort of stabilise really and reconnect and when we were called into the governors office and he interviewed us umm and umm the experience of just challenging the governor really, because you are expected to say yes sir, Sir at the end of everything, 'Yes Sir' Yes this, yes sir, all your answers and some of us, I don't know, empirically decided, naturally decided we weren't going to call him sir, we didn't respect his authority and that was pretty challenging, but you did get a feeling of sort of.. if you angered him, if you anger people who you are in opposition to, in a way you've had a bit of a victory because you've actually got under their skin, and so to challenge the governor by answering his questions and not saying Sir… I mean I remember it, the case I was in, the prison officer roaring at me 'Yes Sir!' 'You say Sir' and making a huge issue of this and not responding, I mean not being kowtowed was in a way invigorating in a sense because it gave one a sense of purpose so umm I didn't like that, I must say I didn't like Brixton, if I'd had to be in Brixton for that whole month on my own, I would have found that very difficult. I mean George was in for… I think he remained in Brixton and Ralph did, because they had other charges against them. But umm Mike and myself and a number of the other people were sent to Drake Hall, I mean all the rest were sent to Drake Hall.

(1:24:39)

FW: And I mean clearly it would have been really frightening but did you always at the time feel it was worth it.

ER: Oh yeah, yeah, I don't think I'll ever questioned, I don't think that ever, I mean that may sound sort of… how would that sound… sound rather sort of, well, after the event… but I don't think I ever actually had any doubts about. I mean I may have had doubts about having done something in particular but never had any doubts about the rightness of what I was doing and umm taking the position I'd taken. No, I never had any doubts about that. And I was lucky, maybe, in the sense that umm my parents supported me and my father was still alive then and I had a very nice letter from him and it was, he, umm, and I realised I came out of… because he never talked about what he'd gone through, which would have been much worse than anything I'd every gone through and the fact that when he, we'd have political talks, which were not very often, he'd had, because I didn't live with him so I saw him occasionally, he always took the line of, in a

way my line, but he never talked about it a great deal but if we talked about it in a discussion he was always on my side. (1:26:07) umm so getting the letters that one did and the support from the family that was very important and umm but I, in a way I don't think I needed that, that was the position I was taking and I don't think I would've changed it. I didn't like it but I wouldn't have changed. Umm and I don't remember the prison officers for the time that I was in either in Brixton or Drake Hall, I don't remember them being particularly vic… well, the only bad occasion I had in a sense was when we where in Drake Hall and I don't have a… I didn't have a very good back when I was younger, I used to get slipped disks and the work we were doing in Drake Hall was separating lead and umm was quite heavy work that they were giving us and I slipped my disk and it was very bad and they thought I was malingering. But that was not out of reaction to my political views that was they thought I was being lazy and I was not prepared to do the work (1:27:24) and so I went through a bad time with them not allowing me when I was being taken to the sick area that I had a terrible experience with them putting me on a hard surface and bouncing me about because they thought that was very funny umm, as I say they thought I was malingering not that I was really in pain. Umm. But that wasn't to do with my political view point or anything like that umm so I don't think that was ever challenged, I don't think for any of us it was challenged, the big names who came into prison with us like Robert Bolt, Alex Comfort, the anarchist, umm, well Arnold Wesker, playwright (1:28:09) and Christopher Logue, the poet, they both stayed the whole period of time actually, they didn't sign an agreement to behave themselves which is what would give you the option to leave but Robert Bolt, Alex Comfort and maybe one or two other people did of the names, I mean I can remember Robert Bolt in Drake Hall. I don't know if Mike ever mentioned this? But I can remember the occasion when I think I must have been in the sick bay about that time but Robert.. .they… were making Lawrence of Arabia, he had written the script or written the first part of the script and umm was it the producer? Was it Spiegel? Who was the producer of that? Anyway, Robert had had written this and then he was in prison and he wasn't prepared to come out and the Spiegel… was it Spiegel? Anyway came with this fleet of Rolls Royces to the prison, I remember seeing this, these six cars all drawing up at the gate of the prison and he came to get Robert Bolt out of prison and look right you know I don't disagree with your stand but there are hundreds of people who are dependent on us making this film. I've contracted to make the film, you've got to come out and help us carry on with it and he did, Robert signed out, which of course got quite a lot of publicity. But I don't think anyone felt he reneged on any agreement or anything. Umm, so there was quite a lot of coming and going in those early days at Drakes Hall. And for all the other prisoners I think that was quite an occasion because Chris Logue used to read his poems in the evening and very dramatically and I think he really liked it Chris did. I mean **(01:30:00)** I call him Chris, I got to known him very well and I did work for him, I made furniture for Chris Logan's flat, so I got to know him quite well, so I felt able to call him Chris. And he always remembered that time really well and always thought it was a, um… uh… that he did well and that he was right to have done what he did. Um, so, most of the people who were arrested and sent to Drake's Hall stayed in for the, for the whole month.

RD: And then when you came out and no decision had been made yet about how to follow up –

ER: [Interjects] Yeah.

RD: Was there, was there a meeting, what was the consensus?

ER: There were meetings all the time –

RD: [Interjects] Right.

ER; Quite honestly, I don't remember then the sequence of events, I mean there was a big reception at Friends Meeting House for the people coming out of prison, I think Ralph Sherman was still in prison, as was George. Um… uh…. We must have called a – it was a pretty chaotic time really, um, uh… with meetings being called and then there not being decorum and then disagreements and um, I can remember, I don't know if you know David Mercer, you know, the playwright? David Mercer, a really well known, very, I mean he was one of the best known playwrights of the time and um I knew him quite well cos I also did

work for him and designed his flat up in St John's Wood and…. and um he was, well what happened then in the committee is that Ralph Sherman had done very well in getting all these big names. The trouble with big names is that they also get a lot of publicity when they leave something. I mean they get publicity when they're there because they're supporting you but when they leave they get a huge amount of [raises voice] 'oh such and such has seen the light and really feels this is going nowhere and has said no I'm not gonna support anymore, I'm backing out, or whatever. So we had all that during that period of time so lot of the big names were resigning um because they felt threatened by police and by possibly going to prison, um and uh, not agreeing with all the statements that were being made because they were being made all over the place by different people and the media's attack on the committee, so it was a very difficult time to hold onto the core values of the committee. It was really very difficult and there was a lot of um, argument and disagreement and even with the sort of agreement on the basis of what we're all about, the individual personalities, Ralph Sherman and George Clark were like um, they didn't get on well and they were really at odds all the time. SO I remember that as much as anything else, just the difficulty of holding onto people and getting some sort of sense of um, um, decision that was supported. Um, so I can't quite remember now the sequence of events, I'd have to look through my file and look at that or whatever but I can remember after we came out of prison… that was February 6…. '61, um I think it was '61, I can't remember what was being organised because um, uh there was a white, another Whitehall demonstration, there was umm, there was um, Parliament Square and then there was the idea of going out of London so I can't remember the actual sequence but it was pretty difficult. And um, to hold onto people, to get a core agreement, Ralph Sherman had the word or the ear of Bertrand Russell so if he didn't agree with something and he could get Russell to say well maybe this isn't quite right, that would turn the whole thing over although the majority had gone for something else, so it was a pretty difficult time and everyone was under threat of being re-arrested all of the time.

RD: But you continued to be involved –

ER: [Interjects] Yeah, yeah…

RD: And you continued to feel enthusiastic about it?

ER: Yeah I did continue to be involved, I was bound over, I mean I had agreed to um, uh, not that time when we went to prison but I was then arrested again at one of the other demonstrations and um, uh I remember the person I had got to – the solicitor said 'Ernest if you refuse this time you could be sent to prison for quite a long time'. And I had the business and I had a partner and I had people I was doing work for and I just decided at that point that really I couldn't risk going to prison with all the work I had, there was no one else to take it on so I did agree to be bound over so although I went on to going on the demonstrations and risking quite a bit I wasn't able to sort of be at the centre of, of what was being organised, um, but I did go to Wethersfield and Holylock I think I was arrested twice – uh I can't remember now -twice in the same day .[laughs] Three times I think over a couple of days. SO I was still involved but I was being, I was being a bit careful about, you know, being, being sort of, uh, organising things. Um…..

01:35:43

RD: So this – sorry- this issue of potentially being arrested, uh, people that I've spoken to in the past have said that if they, if they kind of engage in a lot of direct action they have these kind of very serious conversations with their partners and their families about whether they can afford to be in prison, whether they can afford to take that time of work, whether the partner will be happy with it. Before you were arrested for this first time and incarcerated for that month are these…. were you thinking about these things. Were you aware that you might go to prison this time?

ER: Well [long pause]. I was, yes. Uh, because I'd already started my business and I was in a partnership uh… uh…. With someone who had an agreement with me but only along the lines of sort of, you know, um, uh, the argument, not the action and uh so there was this whole question of my responsibility as well as my

political views. I wasn't in, well I was in a relationship then but I wasn't married or… I didn't get marr- married, it's not something that was on the horizon for many years even though, I mean we've lived together for nearly 50 years now um…but that wasn't an issue at the point, um, it was more my business I suppose. Uh and then people saying you, you, you shouldn't go to prison or whatever, um but I didn't have the pressures that some people had, I mean Mike in those times had already got two children and he was with Anne, um and there had been the um, and again I can't remember exactly the sequence of events but he, he'd been imprisoned anyway at the time of the Greek Embassy which he got quite a long sentence for… I don't think that was coming afterwards. So there was this pressure of, of how far do you go and um, I did go to prison on the big February demonstration and a couple of other times I refused to accept the court's order and pay fines or whatever but I did on the occasion when they threatened me with quite a long prison sentence uh, I mean many months, I did agree to be bound over. Um… and I found that very difficult, actually, to accept that. Umm and, and it did, I mean it was, that threat was, what actually undermined the Committee of 100 for many people, uh, particularly the names, actually being involved in writing something or directing something, a play, a theatre, being involved in some project with other people where a lot of money is involved, not theirs, it, it was the issue that caused a lot of the names, anyway, to um, to bow out and subsequently one can see that the names were very important and building up the publicity and the support for the committee but it was also a negative when those people started to resign and couldn't go along with it, that, that position was then taken up by the media as the fact that they didn't agree with what the committee was going rather than the um, the – the- the threat to their professional or whatever their lives was what was really the uh, the issue, not the politics of it. So uh it had a positive effect but it also had a very negative, gnawing effect over the months, so the committee didn't have a very long life really, uh at the top of its activity, um….. I mean it did go on for quite a long while after that sort of, the highs of Trafalgar Square and Wethersfield demonstrations, Whitehall, um… but it was, it was on a decline and I'm still quite friendly, or I was friendly with Peter Duggan, he's died now, he was on the committee in a more involved way than I was and younger people coming along like Andy Papworth, I don't know if you've interviewed him? He's probably in Greece at the moment [laughs] um but he – he, the younger generation that was coming along but was still active in the committee, Andy Papworth and a couple other people I'm still in touch with, were taking on that burden but in a way it was a much less satisfying time because it was much smaller and the difficulty of keeping momentum going um… uh because it had been quite dramatic, its impact in its very earliest days. And uh, I don't, it's interesting that quite a lot of people who are politically active and you mention Committee of 100… well, Committee of 100? What's that? What organisation is that, what does that do? Um these things are very short lived in a way and um, they need to be recorded, which is down to you now, I mean it's so important and the interesting thing is, it is now, that is quite interesting to me, that how this is cyclical cos I'm finding now that a lot of people want to know about that period. I don't know if you know but the Imperial War Museum is putting on a big exhibition about peace and protest and they're very interested in that period and uh, they've already been here and I've shown them all the posters and things I have and but that's not coming up next year, it's coming up the year after, probably 2014 or something uh what are we 16, 16, maybe in 2017. Um, so it's interesting because there are other people as well who are looking at that period so there seems to be a sort of 50 year cycle, 40 year/ 50 year cycle.

01:42:32

RD: That is really interesting, because we've been working with them a little bit for this project but it hasn't been mentioned at all.

ER: Oh what, the Imperial War Museum.

RD: Mmhmm.

ER: Ok well I'll give you the name…. uh I can't remember his name. Um… the, the, the archivist who's in charge of it, I'll give you his name.

RD: That would be really useful actually cos I think it's such a large institution and I'm probably just missing them.

ER: Well Lynn Smith, have you heard of her? I think its Lynn Smith, I'm sure it is, Lynette Smith? She's been to… I've had long interviews, two interviews with her and she's the, the sort of um, uh she's doing a bit of, sort of like the work you're doing and she's been doing research and preparation. But she's worked with the Imperial War Museum for a long time and um, uh, and she's sort of doing the preparations for the exhibition at the moment and they're seeing people and recording and trying to build up an idea of what material they want. Um and… and I think I've got quite a lot of material which always surprises me [laughs]. I've collected this material, I kind of just keep it, I always used to do the fly posting for instance and I always just keep some of the posters and my wife certainly has always said 'oh god, all this stuff around the house' and now finally after all these years it's actually proving useful for people to have a look at it and uh, uh, take account of it. So there's a purpose in the madness of collecting or keeping those things. But that's been, what are we talking about, 60, that's 50 years now, over 50 years.

RD: But talking about longevity Earnest, did you always continue to be involved in CND as well? Because whilst obviously Committee of 100 has been short lived, CND still goes onto this day really.

ER: Yeah, I, I um, I um, uh….I mean I went on all the CND marches and there's a Kensington and Chelsea CND group which I kept involved with in the 60s. I am a member of CND, I'm still a member. I've talked, I've given talks at various CND weekends all coming together but mainly more about someone called Mordechai Vanunu who I've been very involved with and he's an Israeli, I don't know if you've come across his name, but he's an Israeli, he spoke out and declared that Israel had nuclear weapons when they said they didn't and he was sent to prison for 20 years for this and I read about him and they started a campaign to free Mordechai Vanunu which I've been involved in for well, for nearly 20 years I think. Um and um, he's out of prison now, I mean he did his 20 years in prison but they won't let him leave Israel. So, I've talked a lot about Vanunu at various CND meetings and I'm very in touch with David Polden who's on that group, he's on the committee, he's a London CND organiser. Um and so I've kept in touch with CND, I haven't um, actively involved in a local CND group so much, but on certain issues certainly, going to meetings and speaking at various occasions.

RD: And at the time in the early 60s, once you were involved in the Committee 100, were most people purely concentrated on that or was there a crossover? Was it once that you'd been kind of offered direct action, the CND method looked a bit… thin?

ER: Well I kept in touch with the CND group and I have letters from the CND group from when I went to prison for instance and one or two people saying oh you were right, direct action is the challenge that should be taken up and um, one or two things like that. But I've always, always kept in touch with CND. I've not been that involved in the CND, the local CND politics, but I've always been a member of the CND group without being that active, you know, in sort of day-to-day activity. Um, certainly the Committee of 100 did cause quite a lot of divisions because uh there was a feeling that the Committee was taking people away from the CND and um, when um, um the Spies for Peace came out with the regional seats for government's G123 or whatever, where if there was a nuclear war there was supposed to be these centres where people, the bureaucracy was meant to be governing England…. I don't know if you've heard about that but um this was um, I'm not quite sure of the period now, I think in the 60s and that was quite a, a divisive aspect because I can remember on the Aldermaston marches the um, uh, Spies for Peace had just come out, Nick Walter and Mike Lester and one or two other people from the committee had come across this organisation of regional seats of government if there was a nuclear war where the bigwigs would go and be protected and organise civil society from these bunkers and they'd come across a bunker near Reading and uh on the Aldermaston march that year they uh, caused a huge division because um, the committee people Nick Walter and Mike Lester, 'cos it mainly came out of committee people um, uh, sort of, and the march passed very close to this bunker and um so the Committee of 100 people were, I mean Nick Walter was saying the march must divert and go and protest at this bunker and um, um I thought, well one or two of us thought that

was a bit opportunistic because the march had been, you know, months in organising, the CND was very against it, so there was this ridiculous situation where um, uh some people were saying 'this way to RSG6, regional seats of government' and Peggy Duff, the CND secretary was fermenting by the side of the road, saying 'this way for the tea break' and the Aldermaston marchers were going off…in the march in general there wasn't this feeling of divisiveness but certainly within the Committee and CND there was this real sense of, of division and anger and particularly Peggy Duff was absolutely sort of explosive because she felt the march was being taken advantage of. It settled down and there was, there were very dramatic pictures of people sitting around the RSG um and um, uh having a protest there, uh, so there were moments like that. I mean George and I, what we did was try to be in the middle so we were saying 'this way to the RSG if you want to protest against it, but don't forget this is a tea break' and there were people around us screaming and shouting about not going onwards but going to the RSG. So there was, there were those sorts of moments of divisiveness and I think CND always felt that the committee did um, take advantage of their organisation to gain support. But that sort of, that seems to me what happens but anyway… and you know without, without being mischievous about it, you go to where you're gonna get your support and let people decide what they're gonna do. So… but they did cause quite a lot of um… anger at some points, certainly. Um... yeah.

01:50:57

RD: And what are your memories Earnest then of when the Test-ban Treaty was announced, what were your reactions to that?

ER: [Coughs] [Long pause}. Well… when you mentioned that that was possibly an issue I was thinking, desperately trying to go back in my mind and I really can't remember too well what um, I always I think I've always felt that you know, the-the-these agreements are very laboured, you know. They, they are important…that they can say they have an agreement but I always say that they are in a way face-saving, you know, that they're saying 'well we've come to an agreement' but by God if there was any friction or any real threat that they would quickly dissolve. Um, so it obviously is important that the two sides can talk together and then they come to an agreement but it seemed to me it was pretty sort of fragile really. Um…

RD: [Interjects]. So you didn't feel at the time you had a triumph, a win?

ER: [Sighs]. I think I was sceptical. Um, I – I think it was a triumph just to get to that point, just to get to some sort of agreement. But [long pause]. I've always felt so suspicious really, of the people representing both sides… that it's sort of um…. that they're… I mean I've been more impressed by some of the people who have really spoken out strongly for peace and, people like Bruce Kent, who have gone round the country week after week, month after month, talking about peace and about disarmament and taking the argument that some of the people who are representing the government and always felt that there's a certain amount of publicity about it and are they really committed to this and that's always been why I suppose I felt sort of less than extremely enthusiastic, 'cos I've been suspicious of the fact that very often it's more the publicity than the actuality of getting an agreement that they're gonna stick to. But, on the other hand, you know, there has been progress on that, there has been things built on that and it is, it is um… it is important that it can be seen that, that, that two sides can at least come to some agreement and some points on some treaties and actually start getting rid of some of the nuclear weapons, I mean that certainly is important.

RD: And earlier you said that people today have faith that they're not going to be used… do you think that we're naïve? Do you think that we should be- we should scare your scepticism?

[Very long pause]

ER: While we can achieve, while the West can achieve um, its aims by not using nuclear weapons um, which it has more or less managed to do, in terms of confronting first Communism, then uh, some of the other movements and what's happening in the world then it will do that, by the trickiest means, by undermining, uh, double-dealing. Uh it'll work along those lines. Uh [long pause] and…. I think the threat

of nuclear weapons is such that it does actually allow the people in authority who might be making these decisions to actually draw back and not just go forward. But there are people who I think would be prepared to use the weapons in authority, who are in government, who would be prepared to use them or would see them as part of their dynamic…um… and uh, obviously they need to be challenged. And um, I do think it was a shock to the establishment, that demonstration, uh, over Iraq, where you know, one and a half – one mill – actually once you get over a hundred thousand people, it's very difficult to know what the numbers are. I mean I've been on so many demonstrations in my life and tried to count people and work out a method of doing it, which I have over a period, you can work out roughly over, over a hundred yards roughly how many people there are and then multiply that by the time that the time the march takes to reach a certain point. It is possible to work out rough numbers and very often they're less than people think… but once you get over a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand people your, your, your numbers are almost, almost you know, you could almost say two million. It's so difficult then, to count. But that was a HUGE demonstration. I mean I can remember, not going down Piccadilly cos that was a one way march and we were going down the parallel street, whatever that… anyway the parallel street to Piccadilly and that was wall-to-wall, you know, marches, as far as you could see front and back and that was amazing… and that to me did actually knock-back the Blair government, I mean I do think that that was a statement they actually had to take account of and be aware of. Um, I mean they obviously tried to get round it and undermine it and everything but that was, that size and and-and um the way that it did come together as quickly as it had was something that I think the establishment did actually take, was really sort of aware of. And I think that's still carried forward today, when Parliament voted against, you know, taking sort of action. I think, I think now it's gonna be broken, but I think it did have an impact on subsequent Parliamentary votes, intervention and um, uh, it was an important moment really. And I think that I would always argue that um, that the demonstrations do, do um mobilise people's thinking. I mean it mobilises them coming together in numbers, but young people going on marches and being involved in bug demonstrations is quite an important experience and uh is one that probably helps to maintain a sort of support and interest in um those, the arguments sort of causing people to come out on those marches. Um, the difference between having a big argument or a momentum, or a sort of political situation where you have a march and a thousand people come is very different from having 50,000 people coming and I think that, that is important, the impact it makes… so um…. I would still argue, still argue for that and still go on those –

RD: [Interjects] Still direct action.

ER: And uh, I mean there isn't, there isn't the forum for that now, really, but um… well there is, because there are the organisations which are organising those things now but, but um Mike and I re the elderly generation now, we're not the organisers so much…um…. Anyway I don't know if you would want to see those posters. Have you got the time –?

RD: [Interjects] I'm conscious, Ernest, that you've got two and a half hours and we've had two.

ER: Yeah well I can show you the posters, I wanna go with my wife to the, we're going to see the GP. But we're alright for that for a bit longer.

RD: I'm just gonna turn this off, why don't you take – [cuts off].

END - 02:02:2