

**Interview no. 27**

**Michael Randle interview transcript  
17<sup>th</sup> June 2015  
After Hiroshima project**

Interviewee: Michael Randle, DOB 21.12.1933

Interviewer: Ruth Dewa

**(0:00) MR:** Yes, I er it is

**RD:** *So this is Ruth Dewa recording on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June and I'm interviewing Michael Randle. Would you mind spelling your name and telling me your date of birth?*

**MR:** Right, its Michael, normal spelling M-I-C-H-A-E-L and Randle is R-A-N-D-L-E. I was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1933 erm what else we-we-well in Bradford [laugh].

**RD:** *Lovely and this is for the After Hiroshima project at London Bubble. So could you just start by er telling me what you were doing towards the end of the Second World War?*

**MR:** Well I was er still a child at the end of the Second World War and I had lived the previous five years with er my aunt and grandparents in Dublin. So I was – I was in London at the beginning of the Blitz but then, the oldest of what were eventually nine children erm was sent to-to live in Ireland with er in Dublin and I went to a-a convent school in Dublin. Erm so we came back just after the end of the war and then we lived in Surrey er Cheam that Cheam Sutton, that sort of area.

**RD:** *And what was your experience of Ireland towards the end of the war? Was it kind of - someone else that I've interviewed said they kinda felt very detached from it and that they were rather untouched there.*

**MR:** Erm ... well there were mixed feelings because it was not so long since independence and all the bitterness that went along with that, with the er with the fight for independence. Erm ... [laugh] I know one nationalist friend said "he hoped Britain would win the war but he thou-they hoped they would get a good kick in the arse at the same time" so there were some mixed feeling.

Er the thing that I particularly remember was that at the end of the war Churchill made a speech erm in which he really attacked the Irish government for being neutral and er went on to say that the-they had ... that despite that there were many thousands of brave Irishmen who went and-and fought with er British forces, Allied forces erm and this caused a huge sort of ... reaction and de Valera, who was the Prime Minister, went on air to-to reply and there was terri-I-I was at-the-at boarding school and I remember we didn't have radios in-in the dormitories but I remember lying on the floor with my ear on the boards to see what Dev was going to say in-in reply to Churchill and er he sorta hinted that Churchill might have been a bit drunk at the time [laugh] in the first flush of his victor something he made some phrase which was I- that's-that's about erm [ding, ding] and his point was well, Britain was on its own for [cough] for five years of the war but Ireland had fought for its independence, had been struggling for independence for-for hundreds of years.

So er that's one thing that I do remember-there was also a time at which erm there was er a ... talk the-the-[cough] there was a treaty whereby the ports would be available in time of war or something of that kind erm and er at one time it looked as so or certainly there were rumours flying around erm that Britain would come and take back the ports erm and er that caused quite a bit of ill feeling as well as rumours of you know that the British might be coming back. Anyway, those are just my memories of the time as a child.

**RD:** *So I was going to say as you were quite young would you consider yourself then to have been quite er politically aware and er aware of current affairs and international affairs?*

**MR:** I wouldn't say international affairs very much erm we certainly knew and had plenty of history which talked about the-the Irish struggle for independence over many years erm so that was-that was a big focus erm and especially on the independent struggle in the-in the beginning of the century and 1916 uprising and the guerrilla war and then the civil war so and probably now I know more about it so I can't remember how much I knew at that time but that was still a big focus and I know in our – in one of our schoolrooms there were pictures of some of the er leaders of the Resistance and so on.

And I found out but only really later that-that some of our own family on the Irish side erm had well er we had one Uncle erm I'm not sure the exact relationship but er he had fought erm he had occupied been one of those who had fought in 1916 in the uprising there and er my - one of my mother's sisters married a man who was in the I.R.A at that time erm and fought against the British during the – during the war and then fou-you know there was – the war was followed by a civil war and he fought on the Republican's side in the civil war erm and-and the one who had taken part earlier I think he decided that he didn't want to be involved in killing fe-fellow Irishmen so he er – but he would have been on the – more on the free state side so whole families were divided on that issue.

**RD:** *Wow, and er and just going back to the question that I asked earlier –*

**MR:** Yes

**RD:** *- when I said the end of the war, in your mind did you think of the end of the war in Europe or the end of the war er in-er Japan?*

**MR:** Well erm we knew about the end of the war in Europe but we were still–were still in Ireland at that time. The er end of the war in Japan was much more vividly on my mind because we had-were back in London then and I do remember VJ Day – Victory over Japan Day. Erm and in fact we were-went up to London and saw Churchill and the Queen and so on at Buckingham Palace, waving at the crowds and so on. So I was much more aware of that.

**RD:** *That's really interesting because most people I've spoken to it's the other way round.*

**MR:** Yeah well of course er being still in Ireland at that time er you know it had less of- well it was less of an occasion for us than when we came back to London and saw all this thing over VJ Day and a big ceremony and the crowd and so on. So that's much more imprinted on my-my memory erm because well there may have been [laugh] some er some public things in er Dublin but er not much and as I say there was that made feeling between de Valera and Churchill which is the thing that I remember about it.

**RD:** *And do you remember how you found out about the news about the end of the war in Japan?*

**MR:** I don't. I just remember that it was over and that we went up to this big celebration. I wasn't really aware of er the moment that it finished or anything like that. In fact erm you know I er I wasn't really following – didn't follow the-read the newspapers much or follow it much and I didn't even realize about the er the Atomic bomb until erm well it must have been some weeks or months later I was talking to erm my father's sister, another aunt on but on my father's side, and she started to explain about this bomb and er I was terrified of the idea of er this bomb that could wipe whole cities out. But erm when it actually happened it-it sort of passed me by.

**RD:** *What was your opinion of the Japanese before-before the end of the war?*

**MR:** Didn't really have – because we were that much removed from it erm so didn't really have ... I don't know whether we knew very much difference between the Germans and the Japanese, they-they you know they were on one side but I wasn't particularly – it was only much later that I read more about it and heard more about it erm I did have er on my mother's sorry my dad's sister, the one I was talking about, mentioned Hiroshima and Nagasaki erm she was er her, yeah she was married to someone who had fought in-in Burma so knew a little bit about it from that or got to know a bit about it but I wasn't really that erm into the whole politics of it at all at that point.

**RD:** *And this conversation you had with your aunt when she told you about it –*

**MR:** - yeah -

**RD:** *- can you tell me a little bit more about that and did she have kind of particular motives for knowing this information or was it just kind of freely available?*

**MR:** Oh, it was freely available and-and and any-anyone who was grown up or even if maybe being in-in England at the time I'm sure even as a child I would - I was eleven erm I'm sure others who-who were here aged eleven knew all about it and it would have been in the – in the newspapers and so on erm but I wasn't really engaged with it, we were in Ireland and it was something that was happening elsewhere. **(11.35)**

**RD:** *Er and following that the kind of months years erm after the end of the war were you aware of erm kinda murmurings about the erm potential devastation that nuclear weapons could cause with-with tests and –*

**MR:** I-I think oh yes. Well, erm I think as soon as my aunt told me about this bomb that could destroy a whole city erm it was very much on my consciousness that the thought that maybe there'd be another war and you know whole cities would be wiped out. Um I-when we moved back to England I went to – in Ireland we were at a Catholic convent school run by Dominican nuns erm it's a whole Irish background really and er when we came to England my brother and myself went to a Benedictine monastery school in England.

Now one of the things about that is that erm we were taught the notion of the 'just war' and one of the things about just war is that-that war had to be fought discriminately erm and aimed at er military on the other side and not at civilians and er it ... it came to me more and more that er became more and more convinced that nuclear weapons erm could not possibly satisfy that criteria. So I then ... there was still conscription when I was er seventeen coming up to eighteen and er now the other thing to put into the background is that my father had been a conscientious objector during the war. So I had that in background, I used to argue with him and say well sometimes it's necessary and so on erm he-he wasn't involved in any peace movement but he-he he did register as a conscientious objector erm and he was exempt because of er he was running a clothing factory and it was considered essential work. I don't know whether he was making uniforms [laugh] quite possibly, I don't know but er at any rate he-he didn't actually erm wasn't actually called up to join the forces.

Erm but er there was the odd conscription, that was 1951 probably 50 51, I was born 33 so yes about that. Erm and I had to decide whether-whether to be a conscientious objector as well and on the grounds – I started off thinking 'well I think war is sometimes erm justified, the just war idea erm but how could you er obey the injunction to be discriminate if you were using these kinds of weapons' so I started off in that position erm and at that time if you-if you wanted to become a conscientious objector you had to make a statement and you went before a board of magistrates erm who decided whether you were genuine or not. They didn't want anyone just using this as erm an excuse not to- not to join the forces.

Um so my initial statement was entirely erm that-that just war and the incompatibility between nuclear weapons, well it was atomic bomb at the time erm and but my Dad then put me in touch with somebody

who'd been a conscientious objector and I think the more active really. He was erm a black doctor from the West Indies erm conscientious objector strict vegan, [laugh] ticked all those boxes erm and I got talking to him and at that time-around that time, yes it was around then that I started reading about Ghandi and the idea of non-violent resistance and then I thought yes non-violent – you had to resist but you could resist non-violently erm and this is how I became involved in the anti-nuclear-the peace movement at that time which hadn't really got underway at that point. Although there had been – I believe there had been some demonstrations erm some people even objecting to erm to demonstrating against the use of the atomic bomb on-on er Japan erm but there wasn't really very much in the way of organised movement apart from the pacifist movement the Peace Pledge Union and the Fellowship of Reconciliation which was the er the Christian pacifist movement erm and I wasn't really involved – certainly at that time neither of those but erm I think it was about the time that I went to-to the tribunal that I got a copy of Peace News or someone was selling it or maybe it was the doctor gave it to me, I can't remember erm and-but the first issue that I got of Peace News had an account of a group called Operation Ghandi and the idea of that was that you would use Ghandi's method of non-violent action against the whole war system erm and against nuclear weapons in particular [phone starts to ring] I better just check that –

**RD:** *Hmm(18.08)*

**MR:** And this was an account of the first demonstration of Operation Ghandi erm which was a sit down in the **Ghandian** style outside the War Office in Whitehall and I immediately thought that's the-that's the thing I should be involved in and so I wrote to them and said I was interested in joining them. Erm it was-the person who coordinated it was a man called Hugh Brock who was a deputy editor of a pacifist paper Peace News, I don't know if you've come across Peace News erm and er so then we held a regular series of demonstrations erm Aldermaston er where –which was still being built at that time and still called itself The Atomic Energy Research Establishment. It later came clean and said The Atomic Weapons Research Establishment but we weren't convinced that it was just energy, we were fairly sure it was to do with atomic weapons which indeed it proved to be. Erm and we went to Harwell which was another research centre for Britain's atomic bomb. We went to Porton Down which was the microbiological research establishment erm and oh yeah, the first one that I helped organise in a way was at Mildenhall which is a big American air base and almost certainly they were flying erm planes with nuclear weapons erm and so that's how I became involved in that erm and it grew from there but ...

**RD:** *So just trying to unpack this decision –*

**MR:** - Yes

**RD:-** *to write to them erm would-did you have any kind of erm – was this your first demonstration you'd been too?*

**MR:** Erm yes ... I didn't actually go to – Mildenhall which was the first one ... I didn't in the end take part in and there two women lay down in front of the main entrance expecting to be arrested erm I was planning to go in it but my Dad blew his top and I was still working on his farm anyway [laugh] erm I should tell you the outcome of-of my tribunal hearing before the magistrates. They erm they decided that I was probably genuine erm and I was given - you were given alternative service and my alternative service was on the land, working on the land. It was in some vital industry and so I got alternative service on the land erm and my father by that time had bought a farm so it really [laugh] made no difference to me. I carried on working on the farm. Er that's a sort of condensing things a bit but that's roughly there, what happened.

So the-the first time, that Mildenhall was our-the first one that I was involved with erm and I went with Hugh Brock and-we-to-to survey the base and see where we would have our sit down and so on erm but I actually didn't take part erm I was-it was on a Saturday, I would have had to have the Saturday off and I was in theory working, working for him so he strictly said no, you can't do that. Um but then I went on the other

ones th-th-th- I don't remember the sequence erm but there was one at Porton Down – I went on that one, I went on the Aldermaston one, we did two-two at Aldermaston, one that year and one – that would be 1952 I think – and then one again the following year.

Erm ... so there-there my first demonstration might have been at either Porton Down or-or Aldermaston erm and then we had - the other very interesting thing and it had repercussions later was that when people erm who were involved in that kind of radical pacifism or non-violent action in other countries, if they were coming through England erm to London say, oh well it was London erm Hugh Brock would invite those of us in the-in the Operation Ghandi, it-it er changed its name after about six months to the - a rather more mundane but maybe more sensible title called The Non-Violent Resistance Group erm but when people came through London we er he would have them come and we would meet them in one of the houses of one of the people in the group and they would talk about their experiences and we did met some very interesting people that way.

Erm one of them was a black American called Bill Sutherland who had been imprisoned as a conscientious objector erm and was er very active in the American movement. Another was a man called Bayard Rustin and er Bayard, again, he was another black American who had been involved in civil rights campaigns. He was-he was employed by erm the Fellowship er The American Fellowship of Reconciliation, that was the er Christian based group and it was run by a very interesting man called er A. J. Muste erm A. J. stood for Abraham Johannes but I never knew that until he died and then there was something which actually spelled it out. We always knew him as A. J. erm but he was-he was erm very political astute and er judged that the er the point where you could ... that needed to be addressed in the United States was the race question and so he employed erm Bayard Rustin, some of the people that later became well known in the-in the later civil rights movement erm James Farmer and some others erm and they were deployed to go to the south and talk about this method of non-violent resistance as a way of opposing the racial discrimination that was going on.

Bayard came and-and gave us a talk erm and that was really interesting about his experiences erm of using non-violent forms of resistance to racism erm and just to jump forward he became a close associate of Martin Luther King and it was he and James Farmer, the trade – the black trade union leader erm who came up with the idea of a mass march on Washington for jobs and freedom and Bayard was the one that co-ordinated that and so he went along [pop] with that er anyway to sort of continue the narrative, I don't know maybe I'm going off to long on all of this!

**RD:** *Not at all.*

**MR:** Well alright! The Non-Violent Resistance Group carried on for a few years but didn't – it had some impact like er because it was a bit unusual er to have something which was both er breaking the law at times, sitting down and-and causing an obstruction, but was entirely non-violent and committed to a non-violent position erm and so we did get some publicity but not-nothing very much. But then in 1950 – well erm 1956 erm I was by that time a regular reader of Peace News and-and went up and er helped pack it and that kind of thing and er then Hungary happened, the Russians went-moved into Hungary and Suez happened and er this changed the political landscape actually erm it changed it in two ways.

First of all erm people who had not really challenged British foreign policy or defence policy down the years, that it had – that had been – consensus of er accepting that erm not without, of course there were some people that took a different line but I mean there were a fairly general consensus er favouring erm ... favouring the defence and foreign policy. There was more-a bit of controversy over the er erm the Korean War erm but generally people went along with-with that official position but that really er the-the invasion of Suez erm that caused huge dissention. There was a massive demonstration in London addressed by an Aneurin Bevan erm left-wing labour he well had been had been-had been the Minister of Health and he-he was the one that really got the National Health Service off the ground erm but he addressed which I missed

because I was playing Rugby somewhere erm but I did go on a number of demonstrations and came up to London and distributed leaflets that said we should resist this and use civil disobedience to stop it and so on. [29.13] That was on the one side, on the other there was Hungary, and that had an impact, uh, on the left, the people on the left who um say in some, who were in the Communist party, or who um at least looked to the Soviet Union as something as providing, not necessarily pro-Stalin, but looked to something more different coming out of, um, you know, a different economic and political system. And then when the Russians moved into Hungary...destroyed the...the uh...the movement there, that, that brought, I think these were some of the forces that brought into being the New Left. You had on one hand the universities and left [review? – not sure] which was mainly based in the universities, and uh mainly in this part of the country the uh, the new reasoner, and they eventually amalgamated and became the New Left Review, which is still going, and still doing some very...very strong intellectual work on these theoretical and practical issues. **(30.40)**

But, now in 1957, Britain...announced that it was going to explode its first atomic bomb – no, not its first atomic bomb, its first hydrogen bomb, it had exploded its first atomic bomb a few years earlier, but this was going to be the movement into thermal.. thermonuclear weapons, and that was going to be, um, Christmas Island in the Pacific off Japan, and uh one of the people who had been involved in our sort of circle, called Harold Steele, he was a Quaker, and he announced that he was going to go to Japan and uh, get hold of a boat and sail into the Christmas Island, into the testing area as a uh, sort of Gandhian direct action to try and prevent these this uh hydrogen bomb, and about 50 people volunteered to go with him. Now he got as far as Japan, and was negotiating to get the, the boat to sail there, and um but then Britain let off, you know, detonated the bomb anyway. **(31.58)**

Um and, uh but when he came back, there'd been quite a bit of publicity, much more than we'd had in the past over this effort, and there were uh, letters in the paper, and, so it did get a fair amount of publicity, this, uh, rather spectacular idea that these British people were going to sail, put their lives in danger if necessary um, to try and prevent this, uh, Britain moving into its thermonuclear armament. Um, so when he came back, there was, uh, Hugh Brock, there was all this connection went through Peace News, the...normal resistance groups, Operation Gandhi, it was really much the same crowd, plus, people from the Peace Players Union, sort of more straightforward pacifists. But Hugh Brock had come out of that, and uh so had some of the others and um in that y'know, that direct action side of the movement. **(33.07)**

Um...In fact, the whole Operation Gandhi, um, came out of uh, a study group within the peace players union, the purely pacifist group, um looking at the significance of non-violent resistance, and Gandhi's style of y'know, Gandhi's whole approach, they, they set up a working group back in the late 40s on um, uh, on Gandhi and uh, non-violent resistance. Um, and it was within that group, some of the people said well we've talked about this for a long time we should actually do something about it, and that was the sort of origins of Operation Gandhi, and, and everything that followed from that. Um, well, Harold Steele, as I say, he didn't actually get to the site, but a lot of people had volunteered to go with him, and uh, when he came back, Hugh Brock said well, we should follow this up, um and he called...uh...a meeting to discuss how we could take this further. **(34.24)**

But I should just switch back a year, because um, when the Hungary thing happened, I got in touch with uh, I was living in Sussex then, um, suggesting that we should try and get a group together, um, to support, to express support for the non-violent forms of resistance that some of the Hungarian people were putting up. Um, and uh, try and get a group to do that. Um...in the end I was on my own, and I walked from Vienna to the Hungarian border, um, I've probably got a photograph somewhere, but, anyway, they won't be able to see that, but um, with a board saying in German, English and Hungarian, um "Freedom, not through war, but through non-violent means", uh, [repeats phrase in German]. Um, and I walked that, when I got, we did everything very openly in the Gandhian style, we thought that was what was um, part of the whole approach, so I arrived at the Austrian checkpoint and said I was going in, I didn't have a visa or anything, and they said, well no you're not, we don't want any trouble on our borders with Hungary, when all this

stuff is going on in Hungary, um, and uh, they got in touch with Vienna and the police drove, police car drove out from Vienna, um and took me back to Vienna and uh, said I would have to leave within two days.

**(36.35)** So, that... that was a little personal attempt to put this into practice, of course it was quixotic in a way, [mumbles]. Well, I did have leaflets and I managed to, um, I worked on the leaflet with somebody who's become quite an uh, expert in a way on civil resistance, um, an American called Jean Sharp, um and uh, he's written volumes now on, and is...sort of acknowledged, one of the acknowledged experts in the field. And he helped, he and I worked on the leaflet together, um, and I managed to get it translated into, through contacts in Vienna, managed to get it translated into Hungarian. I didn't manage to get it translated into Russian, which was a bit of a pity considering that we were appealing to the Russians not to shoot unarmed demonstrators, and uh, they wouldn't have made much of something in Hungarian or German or English, but anyway, that, so I had these leaflets. So that was part of my involvement, uh, and um, the year, that was '56, and that following year I went to work full time at Peace News, at the uh, pacifist paper where Hugh Brock was, and Jean Sharp was working there, so I go to know those people.

**(38.21)** So, uh, to revert back then, to that meeting that took place after Harold Steele got back to London, um, Hugh Brock, very much on the basis, entirely really, on the basis of his experience with our Operation Gandhi non-violent resistance group, suggested that the, to forward with this work we should go back to Aldermaston, but this time it would be a four day march. We, we had in the earlier ones we would meet up in the morning, coach was hired, we drove out to Aldermaston, or to, to whichever site it was, and walk round with banners and have a public meeting and so on, and then drove back home again. But this was something different, the idea was that we would, um, try and get a much larger number of people to walk from London to Aldermaston, and suddenly, because of all these political changes that had happened, um, suddenly there was huge interest, in fact, it was absolutely overwhelming, we didn't know how we would cope with all the enquiries, but we had lots of, of offers of help as well. The New Left people came in behind it, um, and uh, the Cooperative movement were offering to supply the uh food on the way. Um, a lot of Quaker, uh, meeting houses threw open, and uh schools threw open their doors for this, for this march that was going to go through.

**(40.10)** And one of the speakers at that, uh, was {Brian Ruston} again, and he gave a very good rousing speech from Trafalgar Square, we started off in Trafalgar Square, a traditional place for a big public meeting like that, and then uh, set off and walked over the next four days to, uh, Aldermaston. And that was front page news, it was huge, uh, I mean we'd had nothing like that ever before. Um, and that was, uh, the birth of ....well, there were some other angles to it. While we were still getting ready for this, um, for this march, we had an artist get in touch with us called Gerald Houlton, and he said, well now I have some ideas, um for, uh publicising and for uh, symbols of this march, and he met Hugh Brock, myself and Pat Arrowsmith, who was the secretary of the uh, the uh march committee. We set up a march committee, consisted of a Labour MP, Frank Lawn, Walter Wolfgang, who's been in the news the last couple of years, he's a sort of radical leftist.

**(41.37) RD:** *I met both Pat and Walter recently...*

**MR:** Oh you have, okay, right okay...

**RD:** *Yeah*

**MR:** Uh... yeah, we were on the march committee and uh... I've lost my train of thought a little bit....uh... yes! I was talking about Gerald Houlton wasn't I. Gerald Houlton came and he brought these, um, sketches and showed us this symbol which he designed, which was, uh, if Pat has probably told you about this, which was a semaphore signal for N and D, um, that was N – y'know it's the sort of ship to shore these, they have flags and they put them in different positions, and that was the symbol for N, and that was the symbol for D, put a ring round it, and that's how the uh, the famous nuclear disarmament symbol, or peace, peace sign as

it's known in the States. That's how that came into existence. And he had....I've got actually a postcard with uh, with the design on, a reproduction of his original uh, drawings. Um, and I always tell a story about that...I, I was working at Peace News and there was one of the people who'd been involved in the uh, Operation Gandhi, the first sit-down outside the War Office. But he was looking for more traditional peace symbols, like a broken rifle or a dove or something of that kind. And he looked at this symbol when we put our first leaflets out with this uh, enigmatic symbol on it, um, and said 'what on earth are you thinking about you three?' he said 'this doesn't mean a thing and it will never catch on', so, how wrong can you be? But, uh, I never saw him for the rest of his life, and he lived into his 80s, but he was wearing the badge, so, he acknowledged he got that one wrong. But if the march had flopped, if there had, y'know, if that hadn't really taken off, then I guess he would've been right, that it wouldn't have, wouldn't have worked.

**(44.13) RD:** *And how do you feel when you see people wearing it on kind of, not having any clue what it means, if it's printed on a t-shirt or something?*

**MR:** Yes, it's a shame that they, but, well, one just has to hope...and if I get a chance I say well, you know where that...what that symbol means, you know where it comes from? Um...least I ought to do that, but I don't really do it very often! But it, it comes up in conversation, um, and uh then I can explain it. And for instance, a few years ago, my, our granddaughter was at school in the States, and her mum's from California, and we went to her school, it was for grandparents and friends, of, of the children. And uh, in the main reception area there was a big floral symbol of the nuclear disarmament symbol, so, we were all invited individually to say a bit about ourselves and so on, so I chose that, and said, y'know that symbol...I was there at the birth of that, and explained what it was, and uh... the uh, both the pupils and the teachers were very interested, and invited me back to give a talk at the school the next day or the day after, to talk a bit more about the symbol and what it meant.

So even though it's a fashion item, um...it, it sometimes gets through, or people will be curious and ask where it came from, or, somehow. So it's a pity they don't all know what it means, but some of them maybe learn about, about the movement behind it through having it as that sort of fashion item.

**(46.24) RD:** *Absolutely. Um, just taking you right back, so when you first wrote this letter saying I believe in, kind of what you do. How welcoming did you find it all? I think for instance nowadays, just to draw a comparison to this demonstration we were talking about on Saturday. I think some people strongly believe in the sentiment behind it but wouldn't have the confidence to necessarily go along. And how did you find that, kind of, um, it sounds like you became very good friends with, um, the people in due course?*

**MR:** Well, very quickly. As soon as I met up with Hugh, who was a lovely man really, really very, very interesting. He'd been a conscientious objector, he'd spent some time in prison during the Second World War, um, and I met some very interesting people. Another person was Alan Skinner, who was a trade unionist, um, and a conscientious objector in the First World War, and spent I think 2, 2 and a half years in prison, and uh, he developed I think TB or something when he was in prison, and I remember he had this bad leg, so at the meetings he always had to have his leg up. And that was all through, through years experience in prison and the conditions and so on.

Um, so yes, it was very welcoming, these were older people, to me very impressive, that the, uh, things they had done, and um...well I was quite fired up to be part of it, and to put this, uh, this...this idea, this ideal of non-violent action into practice. So yes, I became actively involved.

**(48.27) RD:** *And did your father ever acknowledge with you this, this shift you had between kind of, challenging his choice to be a conscientious objector, to becoming one yourself?*

**MR:** Oh, oh he was delighted when I became a conscientious objector, and I think it was at that point that he put me in touch with Dr Kerr, yeah...um...Central American, uh, West Indies probably...doctor. So yes, once he heard I was going to be a conscientious objector he was thoroughly delighted. It was only, when I



started, I remember when I was talking about going to go to Mildenhall and the idea was to block the entrance, um, and uh, he described that as waving a red rag at a bull. So, he, he didn't believe in that sort of provocation, just wouldn't take part himself in the war. But he wasn't on the lines of radical action at all. So he welcomed the fact that I became a conscientious objector, and sort of supported me on that, um, but, uh, didn't want me to get involved in these things. Later on he, he uh, not only accepted it, but, um y'know, was really supportive and really upset when I was imprisoned, which we'll come to.

**(50.02)** - Um. But... the Aldermaston march was a big success.... Um, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament...the other thing I obviously must mention is the birth of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Um, which had arisen initially out of a series of articles in the *New Statesman*, which I remember reading, by uh...J.B. Priestley, local man. And uh...he wrote a series of articles about his objection to nuclear weapons, and out of that arose, I think, initially, private meetings of some of the left wing, and uh, great and good at the time. Canon Collins, who was the dean, dean of St Pauls, uh, Kingsley Martin, the editor of the *New Statesman*, J.B Priestley, Michael Foot, um and uh, I think they formed a committee, but the public launch of CND was um, in February...of...19...58. Just working up towards the Aldermaston, you know...not, very long before, our planned Aldermaston march which took place Easter of that year. And they had mixed feelings about the idea of a march. Not about the objective, but about the idea of getting people out on the streets, and um, uh, I think Hugh, well, Hugh did manage to persuade Canon Collins to speak at the initial meetings, so he did do that. Um, I know J.B. Priestley was quite sceptical about it, and in fact after the march I do remember he had a letter in one of the newspapers saying he wanted to make it clear that the Aldermaston march had not been organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. However, it was such a success and such an impact, that they then wanted to, to run it the following year, and they then took it over. And we were quite happy that this movement, which had a much bigger following than ours, we were quite happy for them to take it over and organise it.

**(52.50)** - Um, and uh, I remember I think Pat Arrowsmith was saying yes, but there's, you've missed *the* Aldermaston march, but Alan Skinner saying look, if this took off, so it became a kind of annual event, this could be really be uh, have some impact. So, we weren't at all hostile to the idea of them doing that. But there were tensions between us, our... well, we had, yes that group that was formed when Harold Steele came back, which called itself Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War, but initially it was the Committee for Non-Violent Action against Nuclear War, but anyway, it became the Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War, or DAC for short, so it was the DAC that organised that first Aldermaston march. Uh, and we followed that up with six weeks...six or eight weeks, maybe it was nine weeks, anyway, it was of uh vigil at the Aldermaston, and ended up with us, a group of us going to the forecourt which, technically was trespass, so it could have been that we could've been arrested for it, but we didn't actually block the entrance so they left us alone, but we stayed there day and night for a week. Um, and uh, we were joined by Donald Soper who was the, one of the few well known people on our committee, he was the moderator of the... Methodist Church, and quite well...he would regularly be on radio programmes and so on.

**(54.53)** - Um...so...we stayed there for a number of weeks, then we were finding out about this...rocket bases that the Americans were building in East Anglia, and um, this was to house the Thor rockets. At that time they didn't have the inter-continental range missiles so they needed somewhere that was closer to the European mainland where they could place these, and Britain as the close ally was the obvious place. And so they started building these uh, Thor rocket bases in East Anglia, and uh, we heard about this and campaigned in the area. So we didn't just have sit downs, we would go to an area, we would contact the local trade unions, local organisations, and um, try to build up a basis of support for what we'd be doing. Uh, but finally in December we had, uh, organised to occupy the site, and it wasn't very well defended, there were sort of, rolls of barbed wire, but we had a big long banner which said "Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War" or something like that, and um, we just laid that down on the coils of barbed wire, and people just walked in. I was still on the out...we sort of split our forces so that some people would be in the outside dealing with the press and the organisational side of it, and then people went in. So I wasn't actually in the group that went in. But that proved, again, because it was something, uh, so unusual in the political context of Britain, in post-war Britain anyway, I suppose you'd had things like the squatters movement after the Second World War, and, you, going back to the suffragettes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and so

on, but this was, distinctly non-violent, and at the same time quite bold and radical action. The police on that occasion did not arrest anyone, they left it to the workers who were, they were still building the site, and they left it to them to deal with these demonstrators, and they turned the hoses on people, and people climbed into the giant cement mixers and stuff. Um, Pat Arrowsmith was on that.

**(57.43) RD:** *And when you're planning something like this, do you have discussions with your family, if you had one, or each other about um, your willingness to be arrested, or what would happen if you were?*

**MR:** Oh yes, we did, um...we even had uh, briefing meetings where we would discuss what, whether to plead guilty or not guilty if we were arrested, and what our demeanour should be and so on, and the strict emphasis was on non-violence. Even with the Aldermaston march, because we didn't know whether it might be infiltrated by people with a different approach, but I remember, Jean Sharp it was who, who um drafted a, uh, leaflet, about behaviour on the march, and what to do in different circumstances if there was any violence, how you would surround people and isolate it, and strictly keeping to a non-violent discipline. And I know one of the things we always said on the leaflet was, this, you don't have to be a pacifist to, to uh, take part in this march, but we **do** ask you to observe a non-violent discipline, and if you don't go along with that, um, y'know we don't, you're not welcome on the march, don't join it. Um, if people wanted to have a violent march, they could organise their own march, but this was a strictly non-violent one. And and the same, uh, of course, when there was the possibility of arrest, we would sort of meet, and it was relatively small numbers...the uh, apart from Aldermaston march, but there was no actual direct action, I mean, there was no civil disobedience, there was no risk of arrest there.

**(59.45)** Um, but uh, where there was, we would have meetings – I remember going with April Carter, who was, who became secretary at the committee and talking with the lawyers about what charges might be brought and what the uh, um, what the legal implications were – y'know where we would appear in court and what the magistrates could do, and so on, what sort of penalties they could impose. Um, so yes, it was quite a bit. Then I guess people individually would've talked to their families. Um...I had left home by then, so my dad didn't have quite so much leverage anyway. And he hadn't objected to my going to the other demonstrations, which uh, um apart, after the ..... that first demonstration at the American airbase, um, we didn't have any sit-downs, so we weren't risking arrest, and I think he was satisfied that if I just went along for a day's demonstration, um. Uh... and, by the time it came to the Direct Action Committee and where we were arrested, I was no longer at home, and uh, I think he was coming to accept he couldn't do anything about that anyway! Um, and uh, so...two weeks after the first demonstration, it was near Swaffham in Norfolk, it was a place called North Pickenham, where the actual site was being built, uh, rocket base.

**(1.01.39)** Um, and uh, when we went back a fortnight later, the police by then knew that they had something to deal with, so they, the uh... fences were much stronger, it wasn't so easy to get over them, and there was a big police presence, and when we tried to enter the base, and they stopped us, we sat down and were arrested, were carried away and arrested, and were taken to...Norwich prison. And we were remanded in custody- it was coming up to Christmas, and it was...December, um, near Christmas, and there was a huge...we got a wonderful reaction, we got so many sweets, cakes, all sorts of greetings... and dozens and dozens of cards, I mean we were, it was great cos we virtually took over that prison. It's a fairly small prison, fairly progressive prison actually. Um, but uh, they had, they didn't have room for us in the workshops, so we used to do the, sew the mailbags believe it or not, in the main hall where all the cells were. There was quite a big Quaker presence there, and I do remember one instance where the uh, prison officer came along and started giving some orders about sewing the mailbags, and the Quakers decided they were having a meeting, so it was a meeting in silence, so they said to the prison officer, 'be quiet, there's a religious service going on here' [laughs] he was thoroughly nonplussed, he said 'well, there's a time and place for everything'.

**(1.03.42)** Um, now the one person I should mention also at this stage is someone called uh, an Anglican priest called the Reverend Michael Scott. Um, he's not so well known now, but then he was very well known, and he was known in relation to opposing racial discrimination and apartheid in South Africa. He

had been, he had been a priest in South Africa, and, uh had taken part in a sit-down to prevent... a township where black people lived, they were all going to be moved, and he took part in that. And, the great thing that Michael did was, or one of the great things he did was, when...at the end of the war you had certain territories which had been mandated um, territories under the old League of Nations, so that they were under the protection, as it were, former colonial territories, that were under the, that were given a mandate under the old League of Nations to be, to be administered if you like. And at the end of the war the question came up of what would happen to these mandated territories, whether the country that held the mandate whether they would be part of that or be separate or whatever, and South, the union of South Africa, um, had south west Africa, as the, that was part of their mandate, and they said if it's alright, they...we talked to the chiefs and we know their position, and they want to be part of the union of South Africa. And Michael Scott went on the back of a lorry, met some of the chiefs, and came back with a statement, which he presented at the United Nations, at the fourth committee, which was the uh, decolonising and dealing with these mandated territories and so on. He got in under the aegis of the Indian delegation, and he was the first person who wasn't a representative of a state to address that committee, and he said 'I've met the leaders of the Herero tribe in south west Africa, and they definitely do not want to be part of the union of South Africa', um, and that held it up...eventually there was a war of independence there, which, of course, was decisive in the end, and that's the origins of Namibia, so Michael Scott played a really important role in that, and there is now one of the main streets in Windhoek which is the capital, is called uh, Michael Scott Street. [clears throat] uh, sorry. Sometimes these small things which seem insignificant at a certain point can have this big repercussion.

**(1.07.08)** Um, well, to get back to the Direct Action Committee. France, decided, um, France was now under the leadership of de Gaulle, and uh, they weren't...I don't know if this was part of it, but they didn't want to be outdone by the Brits, in terms of having a prestigious nuclear weapon. And so they announced that they were going to explode their first atomic bomb in the Algerian Sahara, uh, Raggane in the Algerian Sahara. Um and uh of course there was a war going on, the Algerian war of independence was going on, um, and it was April Carter who, I remember, got the maps out and studied the maps and said 'look what we should do is, um, try and create an international team to go, y'know, in the same spirit as, um as the Howard Steele venture, and and incidentally that was followed up by, there was an American group, which worked, which we worked very closely with, called the uh...uh...what were they called? I'll think of it in a minute...anyway, um, it was our sort of equivalent Direct Action group. Committee for Non-Violent Action, that was what it was called. Byard Ruston was a member of it, AJ Musty was a member of it. And so we linked up with them, and uh, we uh, I uh, went to France and met with some of the anti- ...some of the peace movement people there. Um, and uh eventually we decide...we...decided that we could get enough people to form an international team to go from Ghana, go, um, drive up through the Sahara, through the French West Africa, as it was still under French control. Burkina Faso, which is now...uh, no, no it wasn't, it was, it was...oh what the hell. Anyway, now it's Burkina Faso, Upper Volta it was called.

**(1.09.30)** Um, and so I went out to... now one of the other – very interesting how these connections happened – I mentioned earlier on, Bill Sutherland, black American, very close friend of uh...Byard Ruston. They'd been in prison together and so on, as conscientious objectors. Bill had gone, travelled to Accra in the, it would be in the 50s...married a Ghanaian woman, a very well known poet now in Ghana, called Efu, I forget, well, I know her as Efu Sutherland, but that won't be her original name. Um, and she became the Minister of Culture in the government eventually. But uh, so he was there, and he had by that stage, he was the personal secretary to Bedamer, who was the finance minister in the first independent government in Ghana, and uh, so, we were in touch with him, and he was saying this would be a good place to go from, there's been outrage at the idea of France exploding its bomb in Africa, and there was a bit of a populist thing saying if you want to explode your bomb, explode it over Paris, [laughs] don't come to Africa and explode it here. Um, and uh, so I went out, um, with one other English person to establish the base in, in uh, Accra, and then we were joined and had volunteers from different countries. Um... Byard Ruston joined us, and he was a very dynamic character, and a very good organiser, um, and really helped to get the whole thing going. And we had volunteers from Ghana, Nigeria, we had someone called Nksuma Kakli, who was

the head of the Basuto Land Congress Party, the main political party in, uh, Basuto Land which is now Lesotho, and just, just again going forward a bit, in 1990, 91, he became the prime minister of independent Lesotho, so yeah. From small beginnings some of these things happen.

**(1.12.26)** Well, Byard came over, Bill Sutherland was there, there was a woman called Esther Peter-Davies from France, and a man called Pierre Martin. Anyway, yeah we got this international team together, um and uh, raised money to buy uh, some trucks and try to drive up...up to the Sahara. Well, we were stopped at the, at the border to French controlled territory, and after several attempts and adventures, we, the bomb was exploded anyway, so we didn't manage to do it. It was a bit like with Harold Steele, they let the bomb off before we could get there. Um but Michael Scott was very well res- known and respected in Africa because of his actions. He – Michael Scott was also part of the team and I do remember when he arrived in Accra, when he flew into Accra, that he was greeted like a pop star. People were out on the, y' know, the um... at the airport, he was, he was treated, as I say, like a pop star. Um and ah... he – after the French exploded their bomb, he saw **(unknown 1:14:00)** and ah suggested a conference in Accra that would um bring together the issues of nuclear weapons and Colonialism, Imperialism and that-that-those would be the themes of the conference. And invite people from the various liberation movements all over Africa to come to Accra to-to-to discuss these, these two themes. Um and I stayed on for, for a year to help organise that conference and to bring people that I knew from - my role was to contact people that I knew in-in Britain and the States and so on and invite them ah to attend that conference. So I stayed altogether a year in Africa.

Erm... and one of the ideas that came up at the, at that big conference that took place erm was erm to set up a training centre, a non-violent training centre, for erm liberation movements and, and peace movements in er in Africa um... Well, for various reasons it didn't, didn't get off the ground so at a certain point I um decide – well, I decided that there were things I could do back in Britain that were y' know more – as this other thing wasn't going ahead and I'd be better coming back here... Well, the reason why I came back was I had a letter from Michael Scott saying that there was now an attempt to form, to put direct action on a much larger scale. One of the things that happened when, when I- we were still camping on the, on the edge of the French territory in the, in the ss... uh in Africa there was eh another of our demon – of the direct action committees demonstrations was at a- a base called Harrington in the Midlands. Erm but before it could take place the authorities moved and erm summonsed all the, the members of the committee who were in ah Britain at the time erm and uh they appeared before the magistrates and were charged with um... [pause] bad behaviour, I forget what the actual term was, but they had to give an undertaking not to go on organising these demonstrations, that's what it amounted to. It was something like 'to be of good behaviour and to keep the peace' Oh! It was a breach of the peace, that was the, that was the charge, they were threatening breach of peace. And of course our reply was always 'Who's breaching the peace?' you know, 'us peacefully demonstrating or you with your weapons of mass destruction?'

Erm so all the members of the committee erm who were in Britain at the time were ah sent to prison, and um I think for ah, for two months. Michael Scott and I escaped because we were in Africa – erm but it was great publicity for us because the uh the Ghanaian papers were saying y' know, our associates had been arrested and warrants were out for our arrests while we were trying to demonstrate against eh against the French nuclear test. Um, anyway Michael Scott told me about this and I think eh oh April no may, it may have come from April as well... um... or Pat Arrowsmith, anyway it was some one-or more- of that group **(1:17:57)** who came and said y' know th-there was this move to try and, and form this committee. And the idea was put forward by a-an American post graduate student who was studying at LSE um, Ralph Schernman [sic?], and he was impressed with the, with these, idea of these ah non-violent demonstrations but thought that it was on too small a scale to have much impact. Um and ah... so he proposed the idea of a committee of 100 people, um as many as possible of them would be well known names; Bertrand Russell, ah Michael Scott erm and a whole – i-it was a period when there was a great flourishing of, of artists and writers and quite a lot of them came in behind this idea and agreed that they would be part of this

committee. So erm the idea was that you would have a large enough organisation that ah the police would - or the authorities - would hesitate to arrest them. Particularly when there was so many quite well known people among them and that if they did do so this in itself would be a, would be a major demonstration. Ah, that was one side of it, the other side was that there would be a promise in advance that this demonstration would only go ahead if we had at least 2000 people. Now we'd never had more - I think Harrington we had about ah 90 or 100 people - we'd never had numbers on a demonstration that involved direct action - there was of course Aldermaston was different - erm but uh... [Pause] The idea was... it would not go ahead unless we'd got a pledge in advance. We had pledge forms and unless 2000 people promised, had pledged that they would take part it wouldn't, it would be, it would be postponed or cancelled. **(1:20:18)**

Um and ah, the first demonstration was going to be in February of that year. The other thought was that we would have a demonstration - instead of being at these bases erm which were difficult to get to and um, y' know, it was hard to get large numbers of people to those sort of bases - that these would take place in the centre of cities. Erm the downside of that is you were just blocking ordinary traffic rather than military traffic erm, round an air base, so there was always a bit of controversy over that. Erm but we decided that we would have a meeting ah in Trafalgar square, we would march down Whitehall and we would sit outside the Ministry of Defence, which is round the back of Whitehall facing St James's park. And we had a, we had a sort of manifesto. In the, ah, in the style of Martin Luther we were going to nail this onto the, the Ministry of Defence doors saying y' know 'the people of Britain would not put up any longer with this threat of nuclear destruction.'

Erm so in all we had a good send off, w-we went down Whitehall, sat down outside th-the Ministry of Defence and I, I had the hammer and nails and Michael Scott had th-the manifesto to-to be hammered up and a horrified member of the... of the staff inside came outside and said "don't you... y-you can't hammer nails into this door, this is... [laughs] ... it's just not possible!" And the police at that stage erm seized the, ah.... seized the hammer and nails so we-we didn't have that possibility... So in the too true British compromised fashion we stuck it up with sellotape [laughs] but we still got our manifesto up there.

**(1:22:36)** So that was our first big demonstration, the police despite the threats that they were... that it was forbidden and that er these streets were blocked off to us and we shouldn't, y' know, we were risking arrest by defying that - they didn't make any moves, they let us sit there. We sat there for three hours erm and erm then ah... dispersed. And Michael - sorry, Bertrand Russell - aged 90, or maybe it was 89, h-he sort of led this, this march back up Whitehall. And the pictures the following day were of this sort of rather gaunt ah figure leading this demonstration back up Whitehall. So actually that was a big success and ah th-the papers the following day were sort of hailing it as well... 'they've pulled off their first big success' and so on. We followed that up in, that-that was in February, February the 18<sup>th</sup> erm 19- it would be 1961, erm we followed that up with a proposal for a people's assembly outside i-in the green opposite parliament. And you weren't allowed to demonstrate there, erm, so that would be an act of civil disobedience as well. Ah but we would start off with a Trafalgar square meeting. As we started to walk, walk down Whitehall the police blocked off half of it, ah well they - I think th-they blocked us altogether, and we sat down and about 1000 people were arrested, but they were charged with quite relatively... well actually, very trivial offence of, of obstruction. So when we appeared in court, which we did in batches um over the following days and weeks, ah people were sentenced to a fine. Um and if you refused to pay the fine you were given a day's imprisonment which meant you were locked up in the police cells um until the court rose **(1:24:52)** so it was, it wasn't a terribly strenuous sentence and ah... I remember I was reading a book called *Brighter than a Thousand Suns* um which was about ah about nuclear weapons, about the bomb. So, that went off well... Then we had further demonstrations but the big, the one, the-the, we had one outside, which didn't involve civil disobedience ah but was a very dignified and-and quite successful in terms of publicity a-and impact um outside The Cenotaph, which was a traditional place for sort of military er memorabilia and, ah, remembrance. Erm well ours was to say y' know 'we must avoid war in future', ah, certainly nuclear war erm and that went off successfully. But we were building up to what we hoped would be a really big demonstration, erm, on the 17<sup>th</sup> September and called for thousands to come and hold a public assembly in

Trafalgar Square. The poli – the authorities were starting to get a bit worried about the size of these demonstrations and they did what they had done with the direct action committee um summonsed a-about half the committee, including our famous names like Michael Scott and... ah, Bertrand Russell. And now Bertrand Russell had been imprisoned in the First World War for supporting... f-for an article he wrote in support of conscientious objectors so he was y' know a long term campaign. Erm the writers like ah Arnold Wesker, poet um Christopher Logue, we were all ah taken to a police station, we were summonsed and then had to turn up at the police station. I've got some pictures of us all being on our way to the Magistrates court um... You had a choice, as had the people back in the direct action committee days, um... you could either um sign to be of good behaviour and to keep the peace, ss-sign a bond at effect, which meant in effect that you were um saying you wouldn't carry on organising and taking part in demonstrations. If you refused that um mostly we got ah a week's – sorry no, a month's imprisonment. Erm in the case of one or two people like Ralph Shernman [sic?] and others that they thought were ring leaders erm it was two months. And Bertrand Russell was initially sentenced to two months, then ah they er, the doctors had - or the lawyers had a word with them and said 'you realise he's on, on a liquid only diet and er he could die at any time.' And whereupon the magistrate reduced it from, from two months to a week. And we were all taken first of all to Brixton prison, but Michael Scott – sorry ah Bertrand Russell and his wife erm Edith Russell were taken immediately to the prison hospital wing er and they stayed and looked after him. Because the one thing that they didn't want was this 90 year old, famous philosopher, famous round the world, dying in a British prison for opposing nuclear weapons. Erm the rest of us, a-after spending a day in in Brixton were taken er to um to an open prison er... Drake Hall open prison in Staffordshire. And we spent um spent a week there, one or two people a bit longer. But that wasn't a bad, bad experience because we had, we had very good company. Robert Bolt was one of the people w-who was there for a time, but Robert Bolt... he-he-he's a playwright and he was um best known for his play called *A Man for All Seasons* um about Sir Thomas More. Um... and [pause] yeah we had a number of people who were quite well known oh Yes... but, but Robert Bolt he-he was working on a script for Laurence of A-Arabia...

**(1:29:49)** Oh, yes. But Robert Bolt, he was working on the script of *Lawrence of Arabia*, which became a very famous film, a very successful film. But he was still working on script, and the person who was the director, I think it was, came, drove up to the prison and demanded. He said, "You are under contract to us to complete the script, and you've got to sign yourself out." So very reluctantly he did so, but we didn't hold it against him. We thought "Well, he's done his bit."

Another quite well-known person who was in prison with us was Alex Comfort, who became very well-known later for his book, *The Joy of Sex*. Maybe you've come across it. It had a big impact in the 60s. But he had quite a long background in the sort of anarchist-pacifist movement, and was certainly very well-known at the time. Anyway, that was...

The build-up from there... We thought, well, the demonstration was an incredible success. There was thousands of people in Trafalgar Square. The big mistake that the authorities made, was to ban the meeting in Trafalgar Square. Now, Trafalgar Square was the traditional place where you had your meetings. They invoked the Public Order Act, which was brought in to deal with Mosley's fascists in the 30s. They invoked that to ban the demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

I think the result of that was that thousands of people who weren't necessarily signed-up members, or committed to the Committee of 100, thought "We're not going to have this! You know, this is where we always have our meetings." So it swelled the number. We had, I don't know, 14,000. Maybe more. Then – this is how much it was new on the scene, this whole approach – the ITV had just being formed then. Prior to that, it was the BBC. ITV cancelled all their afternoon programmes in order to give live coverage to the demonstration in Trafalgar Square. That would never happen now. I think about 1,000 to 1200 or 1300 people were arrested.

So, it had a huge impact. Our feeling was, "We are on a roll." The government also felt they were on a roll. The other thing that happened was that Committees of 100 had been formed regionally and locally, so that

you had a Scottish Committee of 100, you had a Welsh Committee of 100, you had a Sussex Committee of 100, you had an East Anglian Committee of 100, a Cambridge Committee of 100, and they all wanted a demonstration, or many of them wanted a demonstration. I mean, it's fine as regards Wales and Scotland. That was because they had enough members or supporters to come and make quite a fair -sized demonstration.

We did rather disperse our forces, but the main focus of the London group, anyway, of the London Committee, of the committee based in London, was Wethersfield Airbase, the American airbase, where we were virtually certain that the Americans flew on continuous schedules with their atomic bombs, so that if there was a surprise attack, they could go and wipe out Moscow, or whatever they were going to wipe out. We said we would have a demonstration there and occupy it, sit on the runways, prevent these bombers with atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs from taking off, and so on.

The police then moved in a more discriminate way, of the authorities anyway. They raided the homes of the people who were organising it. When I came back from Ghana, I became secretary of the committee. I was staying at Hugh Brock's house in London, and that house was raided, and they took stuff from there. The Special Branch raided the offices, and a couple of days before the demonstration, we were – the six people who had worked in the office, and they knew about – were all arrested, and charged under the Official Secrets Act.

Nobody was suggesting we were spies, but airbases are prohibited places within the meaning of the Act, to use the legal phraseology. If you tried to go onto it for any purpose – the wording was “for any purpose hostile to, or prejudicial to, the interests of the state”, you could be charged under the Official Secrets Act.

A day or two before the demonstration, just to try and scare people off, the Attorney General in the House of Commons, had warned that anyone taking part in this demonstration would be liable to arrest, and charged under the Official Secrets Act. Just to make sure that people didn't think they were bluffing, they arrested us and charged us under the Official Secrets Act.

The demonstrations weren't a great success. I think we reckoned we might have had 7,000 or 8,000 people in all. But it wasn't anything like what had happened in Central London. Again, it was partly that we were dispersing, and going to places in the countryside, and it wasn't in the city centre. I think it probably was in Wales and maybe Scotland. I think they had a big sit-down in St George's Square, but also they had something at the base, the Polaris nuclear weapons base, an American base there. It wasn't an American base, it was a British base, but using Polaris missiles.

The trial itself became quite a big event. A lot of publicity. We had Bertrand Russell come and give evidence on our behalf. There were six of us charged. One of them, Pat Pottle, defended himself, but the rest of us were defended by a very, very interesting man called Jeremy Hutchinson, who had recently become a QC. A book has just been published, about a week ago, called *Jeremy Hutchinson's Cases*. I'll show you a copy. It deals both with the Committee of 100 demonstration, and he was involved in a lot of those very well-known cases in the 60s. The trial of Penguin Books for publishing *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. About half a dozen very, very important cases in terms of civil liberties.

So we were defended by Jeremy Hutchinson.

**RD:** *Did he come to you?*

**MR:** Well, we would have come... The way it worked is you always went to a solicitor, and the solicitor then decided who to approach. Our solicitor was Peter Kingshill, who was a hundred percent with us anyway. He said we should, if we could get him under legal aid – we didn't have any money – under legal aid, if we could get Jeremy Hutchinson, he would be the person to do it. He had made his name also defending

George Blake, who was someone who was in MI6, the British Secret Service, and had passed secrets to the Russians, and was eventually sentenced to 42 years' imprisonment. That case is dealt with in this book that's recently come out, written by another QC incidentally.

So it was good publicity for us, but it also probably did dampen down... You know, people could see that the authorities were really going to go after us if we carried on this.

**RD:** *Yes, how did you feel about that shift from them calling you in to actually raiding your houses?*

**MR:** We – certainly I – had anticipated that if we got this thing up on a big scale, we would face more serious charges. So it was no great surprise. I wasn't particularly anticipating the house being raided, but it was no great surprise when it did happen. We always knew that if we got this thing onto a large enough scale, it wasn't going to be on the scale of Gandhi, but at the same time, we were going to face serious charges. We were prepared to go to prison because this was an issue of life and death. It was a period when the whole world could have been blown to bits basically, you know.

**RD:** *So you said, "this issue of life and death". Did you personally ever feel another bomb being dropped was an imminent danger?*

**MR:** A number of times, when there were political crises. Over Berlin, the building of the Berlin Wall, and most dramatically, the Cuban Missile Crisis. Then it really... I mean the national newspapers also anticipated that there could be... That weekend could see a nuclear war. The Russians had supplied missiles to Cuba, and there was a convoy of them crossing the Atlantic to supply more missiles, or to deal with the missiles that were there. This was the period of Khrushchev on the Russian side, and Kennedy on the American side. The Americans said, "If you go any further, it'll be war." They were getting ready for preparations for a nuclear war. Absolutely.

I remember that the, I think it was the Observer, had a little item why deterrence had failed. They were anticipating there was going to be a war, and tried to analyse why this great deterrent hadn't worked. Well, we narrowly escaped it because – and again, Bertrand Russell played a role there. I don't know how much credit he should get for it, but certainly some. He wrote to both Kennedy and Khrushchev. I mean, he was a sufficiently well-known person in his own right as a philosopher, and as an opponent of nuclear weapons, and so on. He wrote to both Kennedy and Khrushchev, saying they should desist, and begging them to back away from that. Khrushchev, if I'm not mistaken, he actually backed away, blinked first if you like, in American-style terms. He actually announced it via Bertrand Russell in reply to Bertrand Russell, saying that they wouldn't go any further towards Cuba.

So it certainly had an influence, and has had an impact. What had happened at the end of the trial, and apparently I've forgot to mention that, is that most of us were sent down for 18 months. There was one woman who was among those who were charged, Helen Allegranza, she got 12 months. But she had the loneliest one, because she was on her own in Holloway Prison, and the rest of us all went first of all to Wormwood Scrubs. Then most of the people after that went to open prisons. I had got into a number of rows at the prison, and so the Governor called me up and said, "Well, we don't like to pass on our problems to other prisons, so you're going to stay here." Actually, that suited me because I was doing a correspondence course, and I took my A-levels and O-levels during that year in Wormwood Scrubs.

The one thing, experience, of open prison that we did have showed me that it was virtually impossible to study in an open prison, because you were all in a big Nissen hut. It wasn't impossible, but I mean, it was very, very difficult. You were all in this big, open Nissen hut with loads of other prisoners, and there was no kind of possibility of our sitting down and studying. Whereas in the closed prison, it wasn't that easy because for the first four months, we were three in a cell, and the other prisoners weren't necessarily... They wanted to play cards or games, or something else. It wasn't that easy. But I eventually had a cell on my



own, so then I was able to get down to some serious study. So that's how I got into the world of academia, if you like, because I took two O-levels, two A-levels, and a university entrance exam.

When I left prison, I worked for Peace News for a few months, and then went on to London University and studied there.

**RD:** *So, when you spent your year in Africa, and taking it back to this Peace News days, were you still an employee of Peace News whilst you were there? I'm just wondering.*

**MR:** No, I had moved from Peace News. It's a bit I've left out of the narrative. When the direct action committee was formed, I stayed on at Peace News for a while, but then on the suggestion of April Carter and Pat Aerosmith, I became a full-time worker for the Direct Action Committee. So the answer to your question was, I was still employed by the Direct Action Committee. So, yes.

**RD:** *Did the money for staff wages just come from fundraising?*

**MR:** Yes. That's right, yes.

**RD:** *OK, brilliant.*

**MR:** Then, sort of beyond that, I did my time at the University. There's a part of the story which isn't to do with nuclear weapons or the peace movement, but one of the people we met in prison – you may or may not know the story – was George Blake, who was serving a 42-year prison sentence. We got to know him quite well, and liked him. Eventually we were able to play a part in his escape from Wormwood Scrubs. Anne, whom you met, and myself drove him in a hidden compartment in a camper van, and dropped him off in East Germany. He went from there to Russia, where he still lives, aged 91.

**RD:** *Are you still in contact?*

**MR:** Well, I haven't been over the last couple of years. I'm in contact with his son. He's not well, and I don't have... Well, I've had a number of people wanting to interview him, do programmes about him, about his escape, and so on. I'm corresponding via his son. I've got the email address for his son. But until a couple of years ago, he always rang us on the anniversary of when we dropped him off in East Germany, just to say, "Well, another year." It worked out well for him, and I don't think it adversely affected British security in any way. He went to work eventually, after a couple of years I suppose, for an organisation, for one of these think-tanks in Moscow. Actually, it was the equivalent of the SIPRI – you know, the Stockholm International Institute for Peace. They had a sort of parallel Moscow version of that. He used to edit the English language version of their *Peace Yearbook*. I think those think-tanks played a positive role in convincing the Russians, particularly Gorbachev, that they should adopt a different approach, giving them a better understanding of how Western societies worked.

I feel he was part of something very positive when he did get to the Soviet Union. He eventually... His wife whom he had divorced, but he married again, a very nice woman. We did go over and meet him many years later. The sequel to that escape was... Eventually, a book was written which virtually identified us, and when all sorts of rumours started going around, we thought the best thing to do was to come clean, and say, "Yes, we did help George Blake to escape. And these are the reasons why."

Our book was called *The Blake Escape – Why we helped free George Blake*. So, how we helped free George Blake, and why. The last chapter was – well, not only the last chapter – was giving our reasons why. Although we disagreed with what he did in passing information to the Russians, the 42-year prison sentence was unjust, and as Jeremy Hutchinson said, a miscarriage of justice. Because what they did was, the maximum sentence for breach of the Official Secrets Act was 14 years, which is not an inconsiderable period

in itself. But he was charged with five counts and found guilty on all of them. He confessed actually, eventually. Three of those were to run concurrently, and two of them consecutively. Whereas the clear intention of Parliament was that 14 years would be the maximum sentence because – you know, if you're a spy, you're a spy, you give the information – but they divided it up into different instances, and charged him under all those accounts. So instead of a maximum of 42 years – of 14 years – he got 42 years.

Even Klaus Fuchs, who had, back in the – it would be the 50s – had passed information on, had passed nuclear secrets to the Russians. He was charged under four counts. Jeremy Hutchinson brings this out, because he defended, as I say, he defended Blake and also represented him on the appeal. He pointed out that one of the most distinguished judges at that time, said although Fuchs was charged on four counts, he gave him what he considered the maximum sentence of 14 years. At this time, and under Lord Parker, who was a very, very conservative, pro-Establishment judge, he counted them all, and sentenced him separately. Then three of them ran concurrently, but two consecutively. It would seem the will of Parliament should be 14 years maximum, but they multiplied it to make it 42 years.

Jeremy Hutchinson, who became Lord something... He then renounced his peerage because he's, you know, he's a good man [laughs]. Anne and myself attended, and our grand-daughter, attended the launch of the book a couple of weeks ago. He's now aged 100, sharp as a button. He gave a really fantastic short address, and berated the present government and their threat to the Human Rights Act, and the cuts in legal aid. He says the new Law Chancellor is totally ignorant of the law. So he made fun of this figure, dressed up like someone from a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, approaching the Queen with this document about what they were going to do.

Our point was, we didn't approve of what he did. It was an inhuman sentence. On that basis, we were prepared to help him out. Eventually the person who really organised the escape itself, masterminded it, you could say, was another prisoner called Sean Bourke, who was an Irishman. He was in prison for sending an explosive device to a policeman that he had had a falling-out with. Fortunately the device didn't do any damage, but it was attempted murder. So he was serving a fairly long sentence. But I got to know him. I was in the same workshop as him, and on various classes, both with him and George Blake. So we all knew each other quite well.

After we had left prison, when Sean was nearing the end of his sentence, and you have this sort of semi-freedom where you work outside the prison, and you have weekends off, and so on, just to ease you back into civilian life, and he came to see us. I had dropped the odd Christmas card to both of them. A letter to Sean a couple of times. So he then got in touch with us. We were living in Kentish Town at the time. So I said to him, "Well, how's George?" He said, "Well, that's why I've come to see you. We're going to spring him." He had got these plans as to how he would do it. He'd already got quite a way with it, and managed to smuggle in a walkie-talkie. We didn't have mobile phones in those days, but walkie-talkies, where you could communicate one-to-one.

So, they were planning the escape, and he came to us initially. That Sean Bourke came to us to see if we had any money we could...because they had nothing to get this thing organised. They couldn't even buy a get-away car. I was still a student, just finishing. I was married. We had two young children. We said, well, we didn't have money, but we might be able to approach people who could put up some money. Anyway, that's the beginning of our involvement in it. But that's a different story. You may not really want to be involved in that part.

**RD:** *How did Anne feel about your actions? At what point did you meet Anne?*

**MR:** I met Anne when she came into the office of the Committee of 100. She didn't know much about nuclear disarmament at the time, but she was staying with a friend of ours, Helen Allegranza, who was a member of the Committee of 100, and one of the people who got sent down. She had stayed with her for a

few nights. I think some family connection they were able to call on, and so she volunteered. I think Helen said to her, "As a thank you, you could go and do some typing and secretarial work at this committee." And she always tells how the first day she went in there, I came in. I had just been released from the police cells, because it was the demonstration where they just put you in prison for a day. This disreputable character came in, that she had no interest in whatsoever, wearing Jesus sandals, as she called them, and looking a bit of a scruff.

Then she did start coming to the demonstrations. The demonstration at Trafalgar Square, she held the banner. There was a big banner, and she was holding one end of the banner. I invited her to come to the pictures with. That was the beginning. She said no, but later on we did. And things gradually worked out that way.

**RD:** *How did she feel about, for instance, your prison sentences?*

**MR:** it was very difficult for Anne, because she was living with her mother. Sean, our oldest boy, was born while I was in prison. We got married just before I went to prison. Sean was born in August of – that would be 1962. So she was living at home with her mother and stepfather, and younger stepsisters. I think it was a difficult time for her. She eventually – well, certainly before I came out of prison... My sister Terry that we were talking about – Theresa, Terry – who was married to Alan Lovell, who was also on the Committee of 100, they decided to rent this house together in Green Lanes, just up from Finsbury Park. So she was living there with them, and when I came out of prison, we all lived in that same house together. But it was a difficult time for her. Of course, there was the whole Blake escape thing. You'd have to ask her about that. [laughs] that was a bit tense.

**RD:** *How did it feel for you? Believing that you were in prison for a good cause, but still missing major events like the birth of your first child?*

**MR:** Yes, that was difficult. Even more difficult was some years later, in 1967. That was after the Blake escape. The Colonels took over – there was a coup in Greece, where the colonels took over. A military coup. We'd had – the Committee of 100 had very strong links with a similar committee in Greece, which was campaigning for greater democracy in Greece. In fact, they actually call themselves "the Bertrand Russell Committee". It was very directly linking towards us. When King Constantine and Queen Frederica came to visit London during that period, the Committee of 100 and Save Greece Now Committee mounted a really big demonstration, which the police actually went for. They were riding there with their police horses and stuff. When the coup took place, and the right-wing were back in power, the military were back in power, some members of the Committee of 100 organised an occupation of the Greek Embassy. I was involved in that, and Pat Pottle, who had been in prison with me and the Committee of 100... A number of Committee of 100 people organised the demonstration, and occupied the embassy.

We were all charged initially with quite serious charges of a fray, for which there were very long prison sentences. Eventually it came to trial in about October of, that would be 1967. There were about 50 of us involved, occupying the Embassy. There was quite a big contingent of LSE students. They were all given a conditional discharge. The rest of us were held overnight while the judge decided what would be an appropriate sentence for the rest of us. We were feeling pretty optimistic at that time that they... If the students had got off with a slap on the wrist, they wouldn't do too much to us. Most of the people were fined £50, something like that. Those of us, there were three of us, there was no reason to believe – I mean no evidence – that we had had any more hand in organising it than anyone else, but they looked at our records. Terry Chandler had been one of the ones sentenced under the Official Secrets Act, myself, and another person who had been in the Committee of 100, and a bit unfairly, he got sent down as well.

Terry Chandler was considered the ringleader. He got 15 months, I got 12 months, and this other person got six months. Pat Pottle, he was on the demonstration. He was one of the ones arrested, but as the police

were driving the van to the West End Central police station, he noticed that the back-doors weren't properly shut. He was sitting near the back. When they got to the traffic lights, he kicked the door open and shouted, "Everybody out!" And everybody ran out of the van. The police were taken by surprise, I think. They certainly recaptured one woman, who was a Greek. We had a number of Greek people on the demonstration, Greek students. One of them had on a very tight skirt, and she wasn't able to run so fast. The lawyer – this is just for interest, a point of interest – the Lawyer we had was Ben Bernburg [sp?], a very good civil rights lawyer, who had defended us way back in the Committee of 100 and earlier days. One of the people on the demonstration was a Greek student, and they eventually married and are still married. It had a happy outcome in that way as well. She's a lovely woman, really, really good. He's very much involved in prison reform. He's retired now, Ben Bernburg. [sp?] Felicia's her name. I think there's a longer Greek name, but we all knew her as Felicia. So we've remained really good friends down the years.

When eventually Pat Pottle and I were charged for helping George Blake escape, it was Ben Bernburg [sp?] who was our main defence lawyer. We had two very good QCs at the start, but we were fully acknowledging that we have done everything that the Prosecution had said, because it was based on our book. So we weren't going to deny that that was true. Our defence, we told the lawyers – I mean we told the barristers right at the start, "Look, if it goes to trial, we're going to defend ourselves and say what we did was against the letter of the law, but it was right to have done it."

The barristers, one of whom was at Jeremy Hutchinson's launch the other day, Geoffrey... What was his surname? Anyway, he's become a very famous civil rights barrister. Yes, he was at the launch. He and Anthony Scrivener, another top QC, they defended us in the initial stages, which was at the High Court, because what our solicitors said is, "Look, it's clear that the police must have known back in 1970 or 71. Sean Bourke, the Irishman who organised the whole thing, the getting out of prison, had followed George Blake to Moscow, but then thoroughly disliked it there, and eventually came back to Ireland. He wrote a book, called *The Springing of George Blake*. He referred to me as Michael Reynolds, to Anne as Anne Reynolds, said which part of London we lived in, the age of our children roughly, and he called Pat Pottle Pat Porter, and said that these weren't their real names. So, it was obvious anyone who knew the case would put two and two together, and certainly the police would have done that.

We were expecting a knock at the door at any time, but it never came. Later, there were police reports and so on, which we didn't know obviously at the time. But in 1987, a former MI5er I think – MI5 or MI6 officer – called Montgomery Hyde – he was a writer – wrote a book called *George Blake Superspy*. It was virtually a plagiarism of Sean Bourke's book, but he added one more detail, which absolutely pinned it to Pat and me as being the people who helped him. He said there were two other prisoners, Pat Porter and Michael Reynolds – these are not the real surnames. They were serving 18-month sentences for organising the demonstration, the Committee of 100 demonstration at Wethersfield. Well, I mean, why didn't he mention the name? There were only two possible candidates. Then we were immediately, within days, interrogated by the police. On the advice of Ben Bernburg [sp] and the other lawyer, we just didn't say anything.

Then all these rumours started going round that Vanessa Redgrave was involved. She had been in the Committee of 100, but she'd got nothing to do with the Blake escape. There's always that suspicion that maybe we were working for the KGB. There's always been that thing, you know, is CND just another Russian, another Communist front organisation? We thought, "Look, the only way we can really scotch this is to say what happened, and say yes, we did all this. These are the reasons. If you want to prosecute us, you prosecute us. And they did.

Then the lawyers said, "Look, the police must've known back in 1972 or 70 when Sean Bourke's book came out. It's obvious they knew then. So we got through to an Irish journalist. He was interested in the case because of the Irish connection, and he had talked to one of the Special Branch people on it, called Rollo Watts, his name was. He had told the Irish journalist that yes, of course, we did know about it. So we were certain that the police knew in 1970, but they hadn't even come to interview us. Our hunch was that they

would rather have it believed that the KGB sprang him with all their thousands of pounds, and that it was a big operation by the KGB, rather than having two nuclear disarmament activists and Sean Bourke, an Irishman, having organised it, and got the person serving the longest prison sentence of any sentence in the British courts, apart from life imprisonment. But life, you normally get out on parole after so many years, 12 years or so.

We were convinced, and the lawyers were convinced. They said we should appeal to the High Court for, not a miscarriage of justice, an abuse of process. That if the police knew, or the police had very good intelligence that we were involved, why did they wait for 20 years or more, maybe 25, whatever it was, and then arrest us? That this was an abuse of the process because it should be within a reasonable time frame. If they knew then, why didn't they act then? Why did they not even come and interview us then? As I say, our feeling was it suited them better to have people believe that this was a big KGB operation.

So that came to the High Court. We asked to see the police files, because we knew that these existed from the Irish journalist. At that point, the Home Secretary – his name was Waddington – he intervened, and said that he employed the Public Immunity Order to prevent us from seeing the police documents, saying that the documents couldn't possibly be of any help to us, and that it was against public interest for us to see the police documents. The Judge, to his credit – I mean, he wasn't meant to see it either – he said, "I'm going to have a look at these." He looked at them, and he said, "The Defence ought to be allowed to see these, because I cannot be sure that it would not be to their advantage to see it."

Then I became ill one day, and had to go to hospital, so I missed the dramatic moment, but another document turned up which was a memo from MI5, the secret intelligence service, to the Special Branch, to Rollo Watts, and very revealingly it said... Well, first of all, when we got the document, the police document, the Rollo Watts report memo about what had happened, what they knew, they actually mentioned us by name: Pat Pottle, Michael Randle, and one other person who wasn't in fact involved. It drew comparisons between us and what Sean had written in his book. They said, "You know, this fits. We think these are the two people involved." They didn't have evidence that would stand up in court, but they didn't try to get it. Why didn't they come and interview us?

Anyway, the Judge, despite – he was very good in saying he would have a look at the documents and then letting us see it. Anyway it was great that we had this. Then of course, when that document came out, when the Special Branch and MI5 exchange, that was very powerful for us. We were able to use that when it came to the trial. The High Court judge, it went over a couple of years, all these hearings... But eventually, in 1991, we appeared at the Old Bailey. We still had our solicitors, Ben Bernberg and John Waddam [sp?], Who became the Lawyer for the National Council of Civil Liberties, now called Liberty, run by a very good woman called Chakrabarti, Shami Chakrabarti. So, we had them in court, but we defended ourselves. But they were there, and then we could, during the period that the trial was going on, in the evenings and weekends, we were able to talk to them and they could advise us on how things were going, and what to say, and so on.

Pat and I defended ourselves. We said everything the Prosecution says is true, but we think it was an inhuman sentence. We pleaded... It was the suggestion of one of the lawyers, you could plead necessity. The law on necessity covered cases like, if a house was burning... In the normal way, if you broke into a house, that with the crime. If the house was on fire, and you broke the door down you couldn't be charged with breaking and entering, because it was a case of necessity. At that stage, at that point, there wasn't exemption for police cars and ambulances to break the speed limit, and so there was a case of if a police car or ambulance or fire brigade went through a red light, it was breaking the law but it was a case of necessity to do that to get to the fire or whatever. So we pleaded that this was an inhuman sentence, and pleaded necessity.

The Judge said that applies only... We had – I had spent days and days reading up the cases, so I had all the cases I was able to site, and so on. The Judge ruled that it applied only in very rare cases, and it certainly did

not apply in this case, and the Prosecution were to ignore it. One of the things that happened that was very good, was that on our insistence, the jury were there for the legal argument. So they knew what it was about. We were able then, when the trial began, we were able to smuggle in the fact – because it wasn't really relevant – that the High Court ruling wasn't relevant to the main trial. But we were able to read out what this MI5 had written to Special Branch. So the jury all knew that the police had known in 1970 that they had taken no action, and that the document, that memo, had said that the big fish had got away, that's Blake and Bourke had got away, and it would look like persecution to go after the the little fish. So it was clearly a kind of political calculation. The jury knew about that.

The other good thing is the judge at the trial itself, the first two or three days, he gave the book – our book was given to the jury, so they had read it through. So they had a thorough understanding of what our case was, and why we had done it. So, I think we got their sympathy there. Anyway, that's all aside from the peace movement stuff, but that's an interesting story in its own right.

Now, the fortunes of the disarmament movement, going back to that: the Committee of 100 really faded towards '63 -'64. They carried on, but they were a different sort. There weren't mass demonstrations any more. They were more like the old Direct Action Committee demonstrations at bases, with relatively small numbers. People facing prison, and doing some good, imaginative actions, and stuff. But it wasn't on the same scale as it had been at the start of the Committee of 100. Then, CND itself kept going. They had the annual Aldermaston Marches, which reached, I think, 200,000 by the mid-1960s, but then eventually they decided that that was losing its impact.

So, nuclear disarmament sort of faded to the background a bit. Of course Direct Action Committee continued. The Committee of 100 continued on until about 1968 or so, and then finally decided it was time to dissolve. But there was a big revival in the late 1970s, early 1980s, when the Russians were deploying their SS 20 missiles in Eastern Europe, and the Americans were deploying the Cruise and Pershing missiles.

There were massive demonstrations all across Europe, including in Britain. Again, suddenly we were back to mass demonstrations and really imaginative actions, perhaps the best-known of which was the Greenham Common, where the women set up a camp, and stayed there, and said they were going to stay there. Eventually, the missiles were brought in, but they said they'd stay there until they were taken out. Eventually, under the terms in 1987 it would be, of the agreement in Reykjavík, Bush and Gorbachev – or was it Reagan by that time? – Yes, it was Reagan at that time. They reached this agreement on withdrawing the shorter-range missiles from Europe, and under that agreement, the Greenham Common Missiles were also withdrawn.

That was a big revival, and of course, the movement is still going on. The big thing now is whether Trident missile will be renewed and updated. Unfortunately, the Labour Party, which under Michael Foot was against nuclear weapons, they are in favour of keeping on Trident and updating Trident, and so on. But the Scottish National Party, they don't believe in it, and that's a threat. [laughs]

**RD:** *I was just thinking, with Jeremy Thorpe in the Labour leadership race now...*

**MR:** He's always been very good, yes. He's a good anti-nuclear and, peace campaigner, and on the Left. Will he be elected? Probably not, but I'm really glad to see that there is somebody there, representing a different approach.

**RD:** *Yes. Do you mind if I just ask you some questions about some of the things you've said? Just thinking about the process behind these things, going back to when you first identified Aldermarston as potentially a nuclear weapons base, rather than nuclear energy, how did you source these places?*

**MR:** The Aldermarston one was discovered, that something was going on there. It had been an American

base during the war. In fact, I was at school only a few miles from Aldermarston, and I remember on one occasion when the Americans visited the school, and brought their projector and showed us a film. They were goodies for us at that time. [laughs] But a guy called Laurence Brown lived in the area, and he saw what was going on. They must have had some notice up about the atomic energy research establishment. He was a member of our Operation Gandhi, our non-violent assistance group, and tipped off Hugh Brock that this was going on. That's the way we discovered it.

Laurence Brown, during the first proper Aldermarston march, going forward to 1958, he led all the way, because it was him and Hugh Brock who had suggested that what we should do is go back to Aldermarston. It was Laurence Brown and Hugh Brock who knew the route, and knew where their base was, and so on. Who took us round the base. Yes, he was the one who had first discovered it there. It was still being built, and most of the audience we had were cows galloping inside the fence, and so on.

*RD: It wasn't until I went to the archives at Bradford University a couple of weeks ago, that I was speaking to the Archivist, and she told...*

**MR:** Was that Alison Cullingford?

*RD: Yes.*

**MR:** Oh, very good! Yes, I was going to suggest to you that that was somewhere you should definitely go to.

*RD: Yes, I'd been in touch with her for a bit.*

**MR:** Right. Oh, very good!

*RD: She was telling me that, you know, the first Aldermarston demonstration was in '52. Until she said that, and until you spoke about it, I had not heard anything about it at all. '58 would have been the starting point, as far as I was concerned. So, can you tell me a bit more about that early, '52-'53?*

**MR:** That was a small, essentially pacifist, group. It was a march round the base, rather than a march to the base. The first proper Aldermarston march, where people walked all the way from London, that was, quite right, 1958. Those other demonstrations would be small, and very little national publicity. I think Reynolds News, which was a left-wing Labour Party, Labour paper, they reported it. But I felt there would be something in the local press. But it was at that level, so I'm not surprised. Only people who really delved into it know about the earlier ones, which didn't have the same impact. But they were the germ of it. It was directly from those early marches that Hugh and Laurence Brown proposed at that meeting this is what we should do.

*RD: OK. And the first one in '58, the march from London, can you tell me in as much detail the kind of process before? So all the organisational details that would go into doing that? You've said that Quaker schools and meeting places would open their doors up for sleeping places over-night.*

**MR:** Yes.

*RD: Just so we can get an idea of what it was like from start to finish?*

**MR:** Well, we had set up an office in Peace News, a small room above the main Peace News office. And Houseman's Bookshop was also there, as it is now in London. We'd set up this office, and hired Pat Aerosmith to be the secretary. I mean, it was a matter of letters, writing to people, and getting responses, and then people hearing about it, and getting in touch with us and offering to help, and so on. That's the way it built.

The march committee consisted of Walter Wolfgang, Frank Allaun and myself, Hugh Brock. We met usually about once a week. We met usually in a room in the House of Commons, because Frank Allaun was able to organise that. He was an MP for one of the northern towns in Lancashire. I forget now which one it was, but anyway... That was the process. It built up to such an extent that the people at Peace News were going mad, because their phones were constantly engaged. I can't remember now, but I imagine that we had another line put in, but I can't say that for sure. I know at one time it was really frustrating for the people trying to work from Peace News, because their line was continually engaged with people ringing up, and wanting to know at Aldermarston, how they could help. Distributing leaflets, all that kind of thing.

*RD: Would you say that that's because... Something that I've been trying to get clear in my mind is this dropping of the bomb in '45. Then this first march in '58. Then there is this kind of very long period between the two. You seem to have been quite engaged during that period, but a lot of people said that it took them years and years and years for the news and information to filter through. Would you say that '58 was a kind of a combination of people all thinking the same thing for a while, and in response to this letter by J. B Priestley. That was the kind of momentum behind it?*

**MR:** I think J. B. Priestley, his articles – it wasn't just one letter. I think he had a series of two or three articles about the bomb. You had the Tribune coming out against the bomb. Michael Foot. [interruption by telephone] We met – that committee met once a week, and Pat was doing the organisation secretarial work. Hugh Brock was very much involved, and he was more experienced, because he'd been involved longer. He was older, a bit older than us. So he played a very important part.

J. B. Priestley's article was very important, and I think the atmosphere in the country had changed very considerably, because of Hungary and Suez. The threat of war seemed very much nearer. I think people, quite a lot of people, were scared. Actually, this isn't as stable as it looks. It could eventually be a war, and a nuclear war at that.

*RD: You think it's because the bombs in Japan was an issue of distance, then there was the fact of bringing it over here. That would potentially make people kind of wake up...*

**MR:** Well, I think it was two elements. There was one element of a very well-founded fear of what a nuclear war would be like. There was another very important issue, the nuclear fallout, that more became known about nuclear fallout, about what happened to Japanese fishermen who were caught up in the fallout from the nuclear tests, American and British nuclear tests. There was quite a big movement to stop the tests. Yes, it became very much a close issue here. That is true. But there was also the element which had perhaps existed longer, which was that it was outrageous to be preparing to drop bombs on cities, killing in that absolutely indiscriminate way. So, I think there were two elements to it, and I think Suez and Hungary showed the instability of the international system.

Yes, so I think those were factors. Yes, I think it was partly that it was close to home, and that the realisation of the power of these bombs. It was people like Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein. They made this famous declaration, the Einstein-Russell Declaration, which was drawing attention to the dangers of nuclear war. It was building up, the knowledge of what a nuclear war would be like, was building up. The knowledge of the fallout, the radioactivity. That was increasing. So, all these things, I think, came together, and contributed to the fact that this large anti-nuclear campaign came into existence.

*RD: Not including the long-term effects, which would present themselves in time, but the shorter-term ones and the immediate ones, do you think that it wasn't known by the public? Because the information hadn't filtered through yet? Or because it was being specifically censored?*

**MR:** I don't know whether it was being censored, but it wasn't given any... There wasn't a great deal of



publicity about it. There was some voices, like those of Russell and James Cameron, who was on the executive of CND, who were writing about it. I don't know whether there was a deliberate attempt to stop people knowing about it, but it wasn't widely publicised. There was a certain complacency about it. First of all, of course, for a while, from 1945 to '49, I think it was, when the Americans had the monopoly of nuclear weapons, so no one was going to drop a bomb on us because the Americans were the only people who had the bomb. But then, when the Russians got the bomb, then that brought it nearer home. Then there was scares about – which came a bit later, I suppose – the Russians getting ahead, and the missile race. That was a bit later. That would be in the 60s.

Certainly the knowledge... There was more information available, and I suppose we'd have to look at the papers to see how much publicity it was being given. It certainly, by the late 50s, people were more aware of it.

**RD:** *OK, thanks. A little bit of what we've been doing is looking at the newspapers. That's the kind of secondary phase that we're going into.*

**MR:** Oh, good! Yes.

**RD:** *I was just amazed that the week after the bombings, there might be an article this long, on page 7 or something, about the new technology, rather than making a big deal about it, and the actual devastation. That's just our early research.*

**MR:** Well, that's really interesting, because as I say, I wasn't reading the newspapers at that point, and only became aware of it in the weeks or maybe months after the thing had happened, when my aunt was telling me, "Oh, no, it's just one very big bomb that can do all this."

**RD:** *What was the tone of the conversation that you had with your aunt? How was she telling you about it?*

**MR:** I don't know, just giving me the information about it. I don't even remember how it came up, but anyway it was from that moment that I realised that there was something different going on. Then it was – there was a lot of tension between Russian and the West. You had the crisis over Berlin, and the Berlin Airlift, and the possibility of a war to make sure that the Russians didn't take over the whole of Berlin. The Airlift was a way of supplying West Berlin without an actual military confrontation.

But it was quite a scary time. The danger of a war with Russia. I remember when I was at school, even. I didn't leave school until 1950. One of the history teachers saying that he thought that in the future, it would be World War II, Part I, because World War II, Part II, would be the West against the Soviet Union.

There was quite a... Certainly in that milieu, there was a feeling that it was going to be war against Russia next time. Even towards the end of the war, there were people talking about the next war would be against the Russians. When we were living in Ireland, there was a nice Scottish woman next door to us. She said, "No, we won't go to war against Russia." She was convinced that that was all baloney. But it came a bit closer when the war against Germany finished.

**RD:** *Just to jump around a bit. You spoke about Pat and April, and some of the other women that you [inaudible]. Can you tell me a little bit about the role of women within the peace movement?*

**MR:** Yes, well, they certainly played a very important role. The leading organising woman in the campaign for nuclear disarmament was Peggy Duff. There were a lot of women involved. Certainly in the campaign against A- and H-bombs, which preceded CND, and the campaign against the A- and H-bomb tests, women played a very important role. I seem to remember – and I'd have to check that – of women organising a march against... I don't know whether it was an all-women's one, but certainly women were very much

involved at that early stage. And later. Probably they didn't get as much recognition as they should have done, until much later. I mean, there were certainly people in the Direct Action Committee and the Committee of 100. There was a woman called Pat, an Irish woman. Very active in the movement. Pat O'Connell. April, Pat Aerosmith. Peggy Duff. There was another woman, I can't think of her name for the moment. So, yes, there were quite a few women involved. But the big demonstrations happened in... With the Greenham Common, there were all women demonstrations. It happened a bit later on.

**RD:** *On these early Aldermarston marches – not the very early ones, but the ones from London to Aldermarston – was there any tension between different sets? Some people coming there as being entirely pacifist, other kind of religious groups or political leanings?*

**MR:** There was certainly different tendencies within it. Some would be pacifist, some not. As you say, some religious, some purely secular. But we were together in opposing nuclear weapons. I don't sense there was any great, and certainly not antagonism. People knew they were coming to this thing from somewhat different backgrounds, or somewhat different premisses. But still it was the feeling that nuclear weapons were an evil, that they were a threat, and that we had to be a coalition against them, whatever our views were on religion or socialism, or whatever.

Yes, there were different... People were coming from different starting points. But I don't think it was big factions. People would... On the Direct Action Committee demonstrations, there were Quakers, there were atheists, there were... But it wasn't a sort of antagonism between them.

**RD:** *Was there a fashion in the terms of the clothing?*

**MR:** Duffle coats! [laughs] Yes.

**RD:** *Exactly! Is it a stereotype that has roots in something?*

**MR:** It does have roots with the... I mean, the duffle coats were a good, practical garment for walking dozens of miles in the rain. [laughs] The first Aldermarston march, the second day it pissed with rain. It was actually appalling weather. I remember the headline in one of the papers saying that it was the coldest Easter for 40 years. It was rain and sleet, and everything was thrown down. But the duffle coat, it probably went beyond the march. It was a good, practical coat. It had a bit of a military look to it, but it was practical. So I suppose fashion went with what you believed in, as well.

**RD:** *OK. Could you tell me a bit more about that first march? With the rain, et cetera. Did that lower morale?*

**MR:** Not at all. I think that the fact that it was continuing in all that weather actually impressed even the right-wing press. It was daily being broadcast and reported in the papers, that here there were women pushing buggies, in these pours of rain. It came across that these weren't some kind of political fanatics. They were ordinary people who were taking part in this march. I think it actually had a very positive effect, that the fact that we were able to continue, and that we doggedly persisted in this. Have you seen a film, which was made by – which was directed by Lindsay Anderson, who went on to become one of Britain's leading film directors, about the Aldermarston March?

**RD:** *No. I'll make a note of it and look it up.*

**MR:** Yes. I have it on VHS and I've been trying to get it transferred to DVD. But you should be able to... If you get in touch with CND, they'll probably have a copy of it. That's well-worth watching. It gives the feel of it.

**RD:** *OK.*

**MR:** But no, I don't think morale suffered. I actually was with an advance group. I had the task of making sure that this singing group, which had strong Communist connections, didn't sing songs that gave the impression that this was a sort of pro-Russian...

**RD:** Was that Karl Dallas?

**MR:** Yes, Karl Dallas... Have you met him?

**RD:** Yes, the last time I was in Bradford, that's who I came to see.

**MR:** Yes, yes.

**RD:** And he told me – oh, that's so funny – because he told me that they had someone with them who was quite keeping an eye on them, and making sure they...

**MR:** [laughs] That was me. And there was a lot of tension there at the time. We get on all right now. But there was definitely a Communist element there, that there was a something choir, a Communist choir or... Fine, they did a good job, but we got scared. Because there was such... Any kind of peace march would tend to be – or peace action – tended to be written off as “Oh, this is the Communists.” The Communist peace movement. Because there was a pro-Communist thing from Moscow. It existed, but the problem was that everything, any kind of talk of peace, tended to be dismissed as a Communist front. We were determined that we were going to make it quite clear that we were not only against the British nuclear bombs, but the American nuclear bombs and the Russian nuclear bombs. We weren't a pro-Soviet bomb. We made that very clear, and we wanted to make sure that this advance group weren't giving the wrong impression. So I was with them. It was a very uncomfortable position to be in. [laughs]

**RD:** Am I right in thinking that originally that group... that music wasn't planned for the march? That it came in later?

**MR:** Well, they came and volunteered to... I think they approached Pat Arrowsmith in the first place, and said that they could provide the music. It was Gene Sharpe, who was a bit more politically savvy – but also very strongly anti-Communist, I would say, certainly very... yes – who sussed out that this was a group that had quite strong Communist connections. I'm not saying they were all Communists. I don't think they were. But there was that link with a sort of left Communist singing movement, or that tradition. He was the one that recruited me, and said, “Look, we need someone to go to the meetings and discuss with them what songs they were going to sing.” We actually censored it in a way. We said, “Not this song, because it gives the impression that it's just the American bomb that we're objection to, and it isn't. It's both.”

I think they did a good job of it in advance, but I was there to keep an eye on them [laughs]. I think there's still a bit of... I think Karl Dallas sort of regards me as... [laughs]. Yes, I was referred to as the Gauleiter, because I was the one that was going on, making sure that the right songs were sung.

**RD:** Funny! Did you stop over for the three nights?

**MR:** Oh, yes. I completed the whole thing. But I didn't do as much walking, because the singing groups would drive ahead and set up, and then sing the songs in the various towns that the march would be going through. So I didn't walk the whole way the first time. It was only on the last day that I was – that we all went together. There was a very impressive moment on the last day, as we approached the base. We said it would be done in complete silence. That actually was very powerful, I think. Instead of everyone screaming and shouting. This large crowd of about 5,000, I think at the end, walked passed this base in complete silence. I think that actually had quite an effect. Then we met in a field opposite the base. The Falcon Inn fields. Falcon Fields. Then there was a public meeting there. Martin Niemoller, who had been in prison

under the Nazis, was one of the speakers. I'm not sure whether [inaudible] was a speaker at the end, but he certainly spoke at the meeting in Trafalgar Square.

There was an incident right at the end. I don't know if you've read about this, where the McQuirter brothers – they're the ones who brought out that yearbook of outstanding events. What was it called? Anyway, it was some kind of yearbook, which recorded first things of its kind to happen. I think it still comes out. Norris McQuirter and his brother. They were quite right-wing. At the end of the march, they drove up in a car with a loudspeaker on the top, preaching against the march. As they entered Falcon's Inn Field, one of the marchers jumped up on top of the van, and pulled the plug out. Pulled the connection out. That one incident, which was totally isolated, and nobody else in the march would have known about it apart from those right close to it, that incident brought the headlines in the right-wing press the next day. "March ends in violence." That was bloody disgusting. It was purely... You might be able to find that. It would be on the last day of the march.

**RD:** *Yes, I'll have to look for it. I hadn't heard that before.*

**MR:** Yes.

**RD:** *What were the sleeping arrangements like? If you've been walking all day, for these miles, and then you've been rained on, et cetera?*

**MR:** Well, it was village halls, schools, Quaker houses, Quaker halls. There was the cooperative. I think the London cooperative movement, who supplied – who had a van and were dishing out – where you could get sandwiches. Local pubs, and so on.

**RD:** *Were people carrying sleeping bags as they marched?*

**MR:** Yes, they were. Yes. I don't know whether all were, but certainly that was the recommendation, that people brought sleeping bags, because they were told they'd be sleeping on floors, to make sure you've got the equipment to do that.

**RD:** *When people marched together, so for instance, when you were on the last day, would you march in a block, as some demonstrations do now? Or was there more intermingling so you could meet new people?*

**MR:** I think there was more intermingling. We hadn't managed to form blocks by then, so... I don't know whether there might have been Christian CND. I think some people would be under a banner. I think. I just can't remember whether the first march, whether that kind of grouping had happened. You might be able to see it on the film.

**RD:** *When you went ahead to these towns, what was your reception like from the local people there?*

Michael Randle: I think a lot of the people who came out and watched on the side walk, you know, on the pavement, would be sympathisers anyway. A lot of people just clapped us in, which was nice. There was... It comes across in that film by Lindsay Anderson, that there was at least one counter-demonstration. [bell rings. Interruption] This must be Anne. [To Anne] We're still here. It was mixed, but generally, it was the people who supported us who came out and clapped us in.

**RD:** *[inaudible] kind of people who would organise a counter-demonstration?*

**MR:** Well, I think it was... I think one of them was a clergyman, who maybe felt it was a sort of Communist demonstration, or something. But people on the right-wing of politics, or people who thought that it would, that Britain needed to have a bomb, that this was a bad idea. So, it comes in the film that there was

certainly... It shows a picture of some of the counter-demonstrations. I can only remember... Well, as I say, I was going ahead with the group, but I think there was probably just one. Again, it was a smallish group.

**RD:** *OK, brilliant. Is there anything else you'd like to say?*

**MR:** No, I think I've probably talked for long enough. I did bring along some... It's just in case you want to have a glance... [interview cuts off]