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Bessie Bond - tape 1 of 3

This is Bessie Bond interviewed by Stephen Pelt - the copyright of this recording is vested in the ACTT history project. Tape 1

Q Now, as a starter, could you tell me where and when you were born and what your family name was - I mean, you weren't called Bessie Bond - in other words your earliest memories.

A Well, I was born in Glasgow, on 26 June 1901. My own name is Span and my father died when he was 28, so my mother had to bring up three girls, of which I was the youngest and we had a very poor life, but a happy life. We lived in one room.

Q Can I just interrupt you there - you say your father died when he was very young - what was the work that he did?

A He was a commercial traveller, you know, that sort of thing, and he contracted what was then known as Galloping Consumption and he died when he was 28. So we were brought up, for some period, on Parish Relief and my mother eventually, well she had to work, and she laterally - she went out with a pack, you know, to try and sell things. She wanted to be available when we came from school and so on and that's how she tried to earn a living. I never remember her bringing home much money.

Q But, just one thing you said - she wanted to be available when we came home from school - was it a big family?

A Three of us, three girls, I was two when my father died so I just remember seeing him - he was very tall, over six feet, and ginger hair. And how he came to England, he came from the Ukraine to escape from the Tsarist Army. My mother came to - I said England but I should have said Scotland, right? - as a girl - I thought very adventurous - she couldn't speak a word, she came as a singer(?), - she came from Lithuania and I think she worked as a machinist, you know, in the factories, I kind of remember being told by her, and I would imagine married fairly young. So I don't know a lot about the background of my father except I know now that a book has been written about the Span family which I have not been able to get hold of. I tried through - my mother always told us that anyone with the name of Span was related to us - do I need to go into all this?

Q Well, it is interesting background.

A And a few years ago - I mean I was already living in London - and my sister, by accident, who went to Glasgow - a member of the Span family had a tobacconist shop in Glasgow, by sister looked in and she was told by this cousin, I suppose, that there was a book written about the family. Some professor had written it, of his own, you know, so there must have been some background to make it worthwhile. So I didn't know much about it. Well, a few years ago, I was thumbing through the telephone directory and I came across one Span. So I thought - it was a Maidavale number - so I rang up and a woman answered the phone and I said 'are you Mrs Span', she said 'Yes' and I said 'Did you come from Glasgow'. She said 'No, my husband came from Glasgow.' I said 'Well, I am related to him in a way, I knew his father, his father had a shop in Glasgow as well and occasionally I ran an odd message for him and I maybe got a sixpence at the end of the week, which was a fortune, you know.' And so I said that I would like to talk to him to know whether he could help me about the book.' She said ' well, he has gone out for the Sunday Scottish paper' I didn't know there was a Sunday Scottish paper, 'and when he comes I'll get him to ring you'. He did ring and I told him I knew his father and so on and that we lived quite near the shop where his father had the shop and he said 'well, I have got the book but I am moving tomorrow to Kingston on Thames and it is buried in cases. Will I send it to you?' And then he sort of said 'What do you do?' I said 'well, I was a trade union organiser and I retired at 60 but since then I have travelled very widely and I had worked in Vienna and Moscow and so on.' And he said 'do you play tennis?' I said 'no'. He said 'do you play golf?' I said 'no'. I felt that I was let down there. 'Do you belong to a social club?'. I said 'no, not at all.' And from then on the conversation ceased and I have never heard a bloody thing since. Isn't that amazing? Absolutely amazing. So that's that. But so I don't know....I believe I may be able to find the book, it is not in the library, because it is obviously a specialised book. No publisher. You know, he had it published himself. So I don't know how to get hold of it.

Q Anyway, your personal memories of life in the Gorbals...

A I didn't live in the Gorbals.

Q I beg your pardon.

A I was born in the Gorbals, but we moved from there to a district called Denniestoun and we lived in one room which, knowing where I was born in the Gorbals, this was a cut above it, although it was one room. You know, it was still a slum but a better slum, put it that way. One room. And it was a very happy home life, you know, very poor, never any money and brought up

a lot on Parish Rrelief for a long period. And then - oh we did a moonlight flit there because - I remember that as clearly - will you put this in the book?

Q If you like?

A I remember my mother getting a barrow and yanking the grate out of the kitchen, you know, one of these lovely kitchen grates - black and the metal and always beautifully polished every Friday morning and all the furniture and put it on to this barrow. And my mother had a brother who said that he would put us up for one night so I remember mother wheeling this barrow to where my uncle lived - her brother - and we all slept on the floor at his place. So the next morning she must have gone to look for a place to live and that same day we got one in a very slummy place in Glasgow and that was in the district called Cowcaddens where Scottish TV is now. I believe that is all demolished now - the whole street - that was a real slum, you know. And that was when my mother started going out with the pack, you know, to try and - oh we went home from school because the school was on the doorstep, for our own lunch, got it ourselves, except on washing day on a Monday, my mother did the washing and it was all on the pulley and the tin bath on two chairs and the board, the wash board. So we used to come home at lunch time - and even when we were working - there was still the same pattern on the Monday, she always did the washing and every Monday, which we looked forward to, although there was no room to move, we had egg and chips which was out of this world. She was a super cook, you know, and all very plain cooking. So that was that.

Q But you say you came home from school - what was your schooling like?

A Oh, well Scottish schools are very good, oh no problem there and, of course, my sister and I were very clever, you know, both of us, and of course my mother being Jewish, my mother's thought would be doctors you know or professors and it was a very Jewish thing, you know, education. Oh it is a very Scottish thing, education, but that wasn't to be. So I left school at fourteen, on a Friday, and went into a factory on the Monday and was trained at tailoring and I became a very, very skilled tailoress and I stayed with this man - I had very good training, you know, all handwork, very, very, very good training - you want me to go on?

Q Oh please, sorry, so you went straight to work, you didn't have special training - that was your apprenticeship?

A Yes, I was there, I got five shillings a week and I walked - I could go home for what we called dinner then, it was never called lunch. That's middle class you know. So I walked home

from there and I stayed until I was sixteen. I got thirty shillings at the end and I felt very, very confident because I was very highly skilled. I started to make clothes for myself and the family and took in sewing as well, so I had a little coterie of people that - about five people - that came to me regularly to have things made, you know, suits, costumes, all women, costumes, skirts, coats, that sort of thing and they came to me regularly. So I kept myself from when I was sixteen, then I left that job and I got a job in a very posh place in Sauchiehall Street where I got oh probably about thirty five shillings and that was all high class ladies work, again very highly skilled and I could do at that age - sixteen - I could do what even a lot of people there couldn't do like - well I'll explain to you. What we call putting facings on coats and what they call basting in and basting out and putting in sleeves which was very highly skilled, you know that sort of thing. And then I went to another job and got two pounds ten a week or two pounds five, then eventually another job in a very high class place where I got my sister into this place, she wasn't skilled, she was what was called a felling guy. She was a kilt maker during the war, she made kilts.

Q I am just going to ask you because this was all during the first world war.

A She made kilts during the war and she moved from job to job and I eventually got her in as what they call a felling hand and this was a posh place. And at that time we were in the party, sort of committed Socialists and, of course, we wanted to try and organise a trade union.

Q Just one other thing, you were committed Socialists then, what was your and your sister's attitude (or the whole family) to the war?

A Well, my mother, during the war I was at school. I was in school during the war and left and then I was working when I was fourteen so the war - that would be 1915 when I was fourteen. So I left and it was still the war and I worked in this posh place in Sauchiehall Street the day of the Armistice. And then we all got the sack. So from then on there was a slump, you know, in tailoring anyway. I remember the whole family were out - there was another sister, an elder sister, that she was - it is difficult to describe her - she was very beautiful but she was not good at making her way, you know, my mother knew she wasn't as confident as we were and she rather tried to protect her, you know, that sort of thing. So we were all out of work. And then my sister went into munitions as well, was that after kilts or before? - she was certainly in munitions for a while, not all that long. I remember she worked in a place called Houston and they worked underground, you know, munitions. So then eventually we got into this other posh place and we had arranged for an organiser of the tailor - I was already a member you know, of the Tailor and

Garment Workers Union, and someone told the boss and the man was due to arrive about eleven o clock and just before eleven o clock the boss called my sister and I over and threw us out of the place, you know. So that was that. So that was sort of looking for work again. And then I got into other places and, of course, my aim was to get to London and it was very difficult my mother being a widow. My sister eventually got married - the elder one - and went to live in Manchester. So that even made it more difficult. So there was just the two of us to keep the home there - you know the anti-socialist one. She had become a speaker and a lecturer - brilliant woman, absolutely brilliant, brilliant Marxist, philosopher, absolutely. So she was in great demand, you know, for her services speaking and whatnot and speaking at street corners and all that. And we were both sort of active and we joined the CP when it was formed, I think she a few months before me. And I joined later.

Q Was this the time of Jimmy Maxwell or?

A Maxton, but he was the ILP. The ILP was very prominent in Glasgow and very revolutionary but not revolutionary enough for us because the Russian revolution had happened in 1917, you know.

Q What was your - you say you wanted to go to London - what was the reason - just to ...

A Well, just that I wanted to uproot myself, see the world, you know, that was my Mecca. And how I managed to achieve that. You see we were friendly with - they used to come to the house - Willie Gallagher, Harry Pollot Wallie Hemmington - they all came to the house through Sadie, my sister, because she was a speaker and she was thought the world of, absolutely, you know, in great demand and so on. And one of the prominent party people in Glasgow, his name was Aitken Ferguson, he was on the executive of the party. But I will tell you first how I was going to achieve to get to London. The sister that married in Manchester, whatever business he was in I can't remember, I hated this brother in law, his business folded up and they wanted to come to Glasgow and had nowhere to live. So we had another room, we had two rooms, but there was no furniture in it but a bed and a table, sort of thing, you know that, and I believe we had a chest of drawers, I can't remember how we achieved that but we had one. And my mother brought them in and I thought that this was my opportunity, the place was overcrowded, mind you we all slept in the same bed in the kitchen - that was the three of us, my mother, I slept with my mother and the two sisters slept at the other end. You know, the hole in the wall. And so when they came I thought well this is my opportunity so I got - I mean my mother was broken-hearted, you know, a

terrible wrench for her. So this Aitken Ferguson, I arranged for him - we could go to London on a day ticket for twenty-six shillings - so I arranged with them to take my luggage - suitcase - to - I don't know how I even achieved a suitcase, I don't remember buying one - leave them at the party headquarters and I would pick it up when I came down. So I went on a twenty-six shilling day trip because you couldn't take a case with you except a small thing. And I remember I gave my return ticket to somebody at Euston, there was always somebody waiting there, I never charged for it, I gave it. And I stayed with the Gallaghers for a week until... My sister, by this time, the Labour Research Department, thought they would take her for a period to work there because they thought it would be a good sort of development for her. I thought it was a mistake really. So she stayed on and then we both, after the week, we both got a room near the Gallaghers and then we moved from this room - it was overflowing with mice, they were all over the place and it was a horrible, horrible place - and we found a room in Camden Road and then at this time we were well embedded in party.

Q What time was this - in the early 20s?

A Well, that would be 25, at least I came in 25, I was 24, so this was all in 1925 - roundabout July - the Glasgow Fair - that was it - I arranged to come during the Glasgow Fair when everything closes down and I gave my notice. That place I worked at, they thought the world of me because I really was very highly skilled and I knew I could get a job anywhere although I didn't have luck because my reputation had gone round eventually and it was a very small area, you know. I did work in one trade union factory, that's right, and that was during the war. No it wasn't - it must have been after the war because I was in this posh place at Armistice Day and I got the sack and I got this other job and that's when I was really in the trade union properly. I had to be in a union to get the job, quite honestly. But I was a member, but a sleeping member, not wildly active. So then in London we were in what was called a St Pancras Branch and all the intellectuals were there. There was another factory worker but I was the only one - they were all intellectuals - Clements Dutch, Emil Burns, Eleanor Burns - all the top people and, of course, very active. G P Wells, H G Wells' son, was married to a woman called Marjorie Craig who became very friendly with my sister and there was a very, very rich party woman who lived in Grays Inn and she had uprooted herself, she still had her flat there, and went to live in Finland when I think she married the Secretary or lived with the Secretary of the party there and she said to Marjorie that if she knew any nice people who could take over her flat while she was away she

would be delighted. So my sister and I got this posh flat. You had to ring a bell to get in, you know, the gates were shut at night and so on. We had this super flat with the telephone, we didn't have to pay a penny, you know, phone nothing, no bills at all. I sent my mother home five shillings a week, every week, I sent that - I don't know what Sadie did. Well, anyway the General Strike had happened while we were there and it was right in the centre of town so everybody came and stayed there if they couldn't get home, you know. My sister was speaking all over the place and I was working in a very, very high class place in South Molton Street, you know, off Bond Street. And I was working during the Jenners and I walked to work and so on and I was coming home this day from work when, on the stairs, I met Willie Gallagher's wife Jean. She said 'I don't know whether you should go in Bessie, the flat is full of detectives, they are looking for you and they are looking for Sadie my sister'. So I said 'why should I run away, you know, I have nowhere to go anyway?' So I went up and it was quite true, there were about nine or twelve and, of course, they were looking - we published a paper and we used to go out and distribute it, you know, sell it and so on, distribute it, and by this time, unknown to us, the young Communist league took in a Gestetner and they ran off a paper for young soldiers, right? At this time I was friendly with Ralph and, of course, he was very busy and out doing this and that, speaking and whatnot, and when he knew about this he rushed up there and threw them out of the place because he knew the place was watched before the detectives were there, the place was watched, we knew who went in the flat, detectives all over the..... and there were bodies there every night, people sleeping there because they couldn't get home. So he threw the young Communist league out with the Gestetner and all but they left the original thing. Well anyway, this is a little bit later. So they were looking for (a) the paper that was being published - I forget what we called it - and looking for my sister and for me, right? Oh and the man who was - Inspector Frost - he was the man. So the telephone rang when I was there and I don't know if you have heard of the woman called Kay Beecham. Well, I answered the phone and she said 'what is going on there?' I said 'well, it is not very convenient' and the Inspector - it was these phones with the other hook that you took off - so he had the other thing listening so I said 'well, it is not very convenient to talk' and I hung up. He was furious. So I was whisked off to Canon Row Police Station in a Rolls Royce. The detective that took me there took a shine at me and said that if there was anything he could do for me he would do it with pleasure and so on. Anyway I was left there and waiting and they were still hunting for Sadie, you see, my sister. And I

remember the man there, he was sitting like a judge and he said ‘a nice girl like you, terrible, how do you get mixed up in all this?’ And I wasn’t bad looking then, I did wear glasses, you know, and I knew I wasn’t bad looking, that I had lots of young men chasing me. And about an hour later Sadie came in, so they eventually caught up with her. So she sat beside me and they said exactly the same thing to her, you know. So they said ‘we are going to put you in a cell tonight and we will put you in the same cell - and it was supposed to be a cell where Matahari had been in - was she imprisoned here at all? Anyway, when the wardress came round to open the thing she said ‘you are very lucky having two of you in the one cell, you know, because I was only an ? thing like that’. Well, we didn’t sleep, you know. And I think it was she who said it was Matahara - well anyway that is incidental. But in the morning we separated as in separate cells because prison officers came round to check up on you. So we were then taken to Grays Inn Police Station - that was next door to Grays Inn the flats we were in - a corner of Grays Inn, I don’t know if it is still there. And there we were charged, I suppose. And the Inspector was there that time, so - Oh no sorry, anyway we were charged and we went to the flats and they were barred and bolted - wood put across the door with a note up ‘all enquirers about this flat please call at the Treasurer’s Office’. So we called at the Treasurer’s Office because we had no money on us, nothing, except what we stood up in. By this time, the detective - they took away a lot of my personal things when they interviewed me - they knew more about me than I knew myself - when I came to London and all that. So we went to the Treasurer’s Office and said that we would like to get in, that we had no money, no change of clothes or anything. So they said ‘we can’t let you in unless we get permission from the police’. So I think that was when Inspector Frost turned up and they allowed us in but he took view of everything we took. And I think it was then that he took the things away, other things they wanted. And so the Inspector said ‘when your case comes up - 38 Metlandburgh Square was a big house that all these intellectuals lived in, you know, Clements Dutch, Pat Dutch, the lot, and Jean Gallagher looked after them - Willie stayed there and eventually and Jean. So she did the cooking for them and all that. They said ‘we’ll leave a message there when your case comes up’ fantastic. By this time, you see, I said Ralph was on the scene, oh and my sister had a boyfriend, then, he was at the Labour College, he was a minor and he got a scholarship to the Labour College. So the four of us were out on a limb so we both found a room here and there, you know, odd nights and so on until I hitched up with Ralph and

my sister hitched up with Harold. So where do you want to go on from there? Oh, you won't put all this in?

Q No, I am just listening. So you were in London. When you say 'hitched up' did you get married to Ralph.

A I lived with him. The first flat we found, he came from a very middle class family, and he was the only son and there was a sister. He didn't tell them, of course. He was working at the Communist Party headquarters which was a big blow to the parents, you know, going to work there. He didn't tell them he was married - I think he was frightened, you know, thought it was too much of a blow, living in sin as they called it then and working there. So we had a flat in Doughty Street - 22 Doughty Street - and the Maitlandburgh Square was just at the side. So he stayed there for a few months.

Q So were you doing any trade union work in London or, put it this way, how was it you met up with ACT?

A Through Ralph. Ralph knew Grierson and we spent any free time we had was at the cinema and Ralph had a book where he had a review of every film and he got to know Grierson even while he was working at the party headquarters.

Q Was he then reviewing films for the Daily Worker or...

A He set up the Workers' Film Society and that is when he got to know Grierson, sorry. So that would have been - yes, we were living together then and he set up the Scala Theatre in Charlotte Street and all the Russian films were shown and, of course, Grierson was in his element. Mind, we saw some of them - we were members of the Film Society where Ralph was.

Q The London....

A Yes, that used to be at the New Gallery Cinema in Regent Street. So I was in with all these people, although I couldn't open my mouth, I was so shy with them, you know, because I was still a factory worker, you know, still working in tailoring and I worked through my something. So eventually Grierson took him on at the GPO film unit when they were down at Blackheath.

Q But that was much later, wasn't it?

A That would be in about 1934 I suppose. I was working for ROP, I went to ROP (that's Russian Oil Products) I got a job there, that was an office job in the buying department, I got very rich then I was. That's right, I joined that in 1928, was there for six years, 34, and I think Ralph had already worked for the GPO film unit, that was 34. Yes, he had, because we moved in 34 to

a flat in Bellsize Park Gardens, we shared it with another couple, and I remember we had a party there that Anstey, Taylor and all these people, all the film people were there. So he was involved with them then, so he must have been working with the GPO film unit at that time.

Q But before that he had worked with the Film and Photo League?

A Oh, that's right. I think that was when he was doing the Workers' Film Society. Yes, it was called Workers' Film Society I think. Workers' Film Association. And I think we had Sunday shows there.

Q And, in fact, the Workers' Film Association worked, I think, in the same building, or it had an office in the same building, as ACT in Wardour Street.

A No,

Q My mistake?

A No, no, never. They only had one room in Wardour Street anyway.

Q Let's get on to lists, I am going ahead too much. You got involved with ACT because of Ralph. When was it that you joined and in what capacity?

A Oh, well, that's another story. During the war they moved from Wardour Street, they couldn't afford to keep up the place because everybody was in the army - no funds. And they only had the one room there and they moved out to Stanmore. George's home when he lived with his parents, a small suburban house, and we had one room about from the size of the thing there to here where....

Q Was that in 39?

A Yes, 39.

Q So you were already working...

A No, no, I'll tell you. Before that I used to help - when they had the Randall Meeting at the Caxton Hall, George would say 'would you like to come and give us a hand?' So I would go and help there, you know, that sort of thing. And then when they moved to Stanmore, he only had a secretary - Miss Pearson he called her Freddie - and he said...

Q That's George Pearson's daughter?

A Yes, that's right. So she was there when ACT started, a very, very competent woman. So she ran that office on her own completely because George was always out, you know, and George said to me that if they had any extra work would I come and give a hand. So they paid me my expenses, you know, and this time it was the height of the war, so I didn't take a proper

job during the war, kept myself at my disposal to help whoever wanted me. I used to work for the Party, I used to work for anybody that wanted me and I was in great demand here, there and everywhere. But I kept myself free to work for the union, you know. So I did, now and again, I did some work then and before we moved to Stanmore, by this time Ralph and I, you know, the thing had gone wrong, that's right, the thing had gone wrong, and George always wanted me to work full time there and I said 'no I wouldn't do it because Ralph was on the Council and all that', although I knew everybody in the union, I used to go to all their functions, we all used to have dances, you know and all that, so I knew everybody and they all knew me, that I felt there was a bit, you know, full time it was a bit likea bit of nepotism you know and I didn't like the idea. So when the thing went wrong - Ralph was very friendly - well that won't go in the thing - we used to meet once a week, I mean he was very interested in me and so on and what was happening. We had already moved to - oh that was after that - we had moved by this time to a bigger flat in Parliament Hill and the same couple came with us and it was a maisonette, that's right, we moved there and that's neither here nor there. So we moved there in 37. So time went on a few weeks and I thought 'oh God I expect I will have to go back to the bloody workshop again', you know, that sort of thing. And out of the blue Ralph said to me 'you know George is asking again if you would like to go' and I thought 'what could be better now? I am a free agent, you know I am on my own, so why not?' So I went - I was still at Stanmore - and I worked there, Bert was the organiser - Bert Craig - so I more or less worked for him, you know, because Miss Pearson was tied up with George's work on the whole.

Q So this is war time?

A This is war time. And then Neilson Baxter who was the Treasurer found this place in Soho Square to buy - the Union had no money, you know, and a shot in the dark, it was the best thing the union had done - I think it was four thousand pounds if I remember correctly, something like that, and that was when the buzz bombs were going and all that. But I was delighted because I hated going out to Stanmore, it was a hell of a journey. So we moved to Soho Square and that was nearly towards the end of the war, you know, the buzz bombs, whatever they were, so we moved there. So I was safely installed, very happy, getting about free for the week, you know, that sort of thing.

Q And what was your official position then?

A Oh just an ordinary office worker, oh nothing. I never gave it a thought. I had no ambitions, none at all. But I will tell you this, occasionally when anyone rang up and wanted Bert and I said 'I'm sorry he's not in could I help you' just out of the blue, not thinking I was going to be any great shakes. And they would tell me, maybe a shop steward, and I would say 'do you think it would be a good idea if you did so and so', that sort of thing. And apparently they rang Bert and they said that I had given them good advice, that sort of thing, you know. And then we moved to Soho Square and time went on and Bert gave me a little more responsibility. And I said 'if there is anything I can do to take the load off you, like going to tinpot shop steward meeting of a unit, if I could go and help him to elect a shop steward or something', he was delighted because he was out all day and it meant - because you know I used to work until eleven o clock at night most nights when I was more involved, you know. So I did things like that, maybe went to a lab meeting or something to help them to elect a shop steward. And I think, you know, Bert was quite impressed with - I always left a note to tell him what happened or when I saw him I told him - and I think he was quite impressed with what I had done, you know whatever it was. And I had an idea that he may have recommended me when they wanted another organiser. So that would have been about.

Q I'll stop a bit because when you are comfortable. So we are carrying on - we are nearly at the end of the tape actually. In fact, I tell you what I will do, no it's a few more minutes. In effect, you became an organiser without actually being appointed as one.

A Oh aye, well the war - I was appointed but not elected. Well that's how all the officers were all the way through, never been elected - they were all appointed. But now they will have to be elected because of the government ruling.

Q So this was near the end of the war?

A A year or two after that. Probably about 47 - I was an organiser for about eighteen or nineteen years, you know, that sort of thing.

Q So I suppose. When did the union in effect come into its own. Was that after the war?

A After the war. Now after the war, all the service people were members, that was all organised, you know, all the RAF and the - well all the services.

Q What was it - the army...

A Army and Phil Leacox stayed with us because he was billeted in Wembley, he stayed with us for a long, long time. He was in the army unit, you know. He stayed with us for years.

And all the service people were in. And then when the war ended there was this great influx. They were all members, everyone of them. All members of the union. And they appointed a chap, I mean he wasn't....

Q Just to get this correct. Anybody that was in the service film unit - that would be army - was there a naval...

A A naval film unit yes, Max Anderson was in the navel film unit.

Q They automatically got a union....

A That's right, they were all - because there were film technicians, you see, this was really the build up of the union to start with, a real build up. I mean, during the war, the labs were well organised, that was true and, of course, the film industry was flourishing then, you know, with war films and whatnot.

Q I am going to stop just for a moment to change the tape over.

Tape 1 - Side 2

A Yes, there were periods when, by this time, although we never had money coming in, the house, out of work, and my sister was a speaker and so on. Willie Gallagher used to call when he was in Glasgow and there was another lovely man - my mother would go with Gallagher and this other man Alex Geddes, who was a big shot in the party, he was an international whatnot in the party, he always called. And there was one occasion when Willie called, my mother always had the kettle on, well we always did, you know, when any visitor came. We never knew anybody was coming, you know, they just came and chapped on the door and you were let in, you know, no phone to announce that you were coming, and he knew there was no food in the house and he and Alex Geddes went out and where they got this bloody food I've no idea but they came back with a load of food and they said that they had been down to the docks and they knew everybody in the docks and they had given them food for us, and that is absolutely true.

Q This is when you had left school.

A I was working, it was after the war because we were out of work.

Q After the first world war?

A Aye, that's right. We were out of work and no money coming in. You see, for instance, at this time of the year tailoring factories had their holidays and they very often closed down and your job was finished, you know, at that time. I remember that only once, them doing this. But they always called when they were in Glasgow, both, occasionally Tommy Jackson called and Wallie Hemmington occasionally, you know, and so on.

Q You were telling me, if you could tell me again about when you were much younger and your mother was owed some money, how you were sent on errands. Could you tell me....

A Straight from school, a halfpenny on the tram to Uddingston one Friday, Riddrie another Friday, and as I said she couldn't read or write but she explained where the place was and it was a country to me, you know. A very, very, long tram ride and I used to call. You know I said' my mother said she is not in' and this often happened when a child came to the door, 'my mother says she's no in', you know. I think I came back with sixpence now and again, you know. Dreadful.

Q Anyway, we are back to the end of the second world war. Just before we go on about ACT, did you ever get connected yourself with any kind of production work or..

A Oh, when we were are at Blackheath, the GPO, I was sometimes asked to do a commentary and two camera boys - well, - they were big shots - I loathed them and they made fun of me, you know, and I did little bits of dialogue here and there down at Blackheath, I never got paid for that but it didn't bother me, you know. Jonah Jones, he's dead now, Chick Fowler's still alive but he is still working in Brazil, he went to Brazil with Cattlecantie(?) in the early days and he is still living there, still alive.

Q But you didn't really do any other direct work...

A Oh, no, no, no, no, no, just occasionally. As I say a little commentary or a little bit of dialogue and I remember once going across the road to - where Budge Cooper - datafilm unit and I have a feeling I did a commentary there for them. I remember Budge Cooper asking me - they wanted a Scots voice. I don't remember hearing it to tell you the truth but..

Q What was that in - Mining Review or...

A One of these or maybe a shot of a mine somewhere because they made mostly films connected with the mines. And they did the film Mining Review, you know, Donald...

Q It was Mary Beale's...

A Mary Beale and..

Q First husband.

A Yes, Census Guyson(??), well he took over when Donald thing left to go to Dundee - Alexander, Donald Alexander.

Q ?????? Anyhow, so your job, your early job at ACT was - you slowly became an organiser and you were more or less the only organiser for a while, were you?

A No, Bert Craig, he was made the senior organiser and I was the other organiser, you know.

Q So in those days, if you can remember, who were the people there and who was doing what.

A You mean at the office?

Q Yes.

A Well, there was the General Secretary, there was Miss Pearson then she went into production, she worked for David Lean and the famous camera man who became a director as well - very well known, one of the tops - I tried to remember his name yesterday - .

Q Not Neame?

A Ronnie Neame. She left and then George had to find another secretary and I got him a wonderful secretary, I don't think directly, no not directly, after Pearson, I got him a wonderful secretary eventually. So there was him, his secretary, there was Bert and his secretary and, well we shared a secretary, him and I, that sort of thing when necessary, you know. Not all this nonsense where everybody has got a secretary down there - talk about overweighted! Anyway, that's another story.

Q And when you travelled around, because you travelled round the country a lot, you had, I imagine in those days, a fairly good salary? What about ...

A Very poor. You know what the salary was when I finished up - £17.00 a week and that was in 1961 - £17.00 a week, that was my salary.

Q So how did you travel around? You don't drive do you?

A No. I could have had a car if I had wanted but I didn't want one. I used to go on the train or the bus, Beckonsfield on the bus, Greenline that sort of thing, and trains. My first real travelling assignment was to Scotland, which I was delighted about, and I remember Grierson gave me an introduction to two very top-line people in Edinburgh - a man called Norman Douglas, is that a name? and a date to meet them in a certain grand pub or something in Edinburgh. He had arranged that for me and he rang me up to tell me. So I did Edinburgh and Glasgow and I ferreted out little units, they were working all around the place. I was there for abut a week or ten days and in Edinburgh - Kitty Marshall was working at Basey's(?) then and she want on a reckie for them to Scotland and she was going to be in Dunfermline which is fairly near and I arranged to catch up with her. We had a rip-roaring time, you know, going around all the slum pubs. I met up with her for a few days.

Q Was Forsyth Hardy....?

Q No, that may have been one of the chaps because I had never Forsyth but I think one of them - I have an idea it was Norman Douglas or something - so I met them and I met one or two dodgy units, you know, in Edinburgh and so on and two or three in Glasgow. So that would have been in probably 47 or 48, that sort of thing. That was my first big assignment. And then I was assigned to looking after the labs, shorts and documentary, stills camera thing which I loathed.

A Why was that?

Q I just didn't like them, they were so silly people - up here, terrible. Anyway, it was a job I had to do. I had about six sections - stills, I think production and continuity as well and publicity, I

liked working with .... and the shorts and documentary, that was my favourite, that was my favourite and that was a big section. And the labs, I loved the labs, I loved doing that. They were the two big sections. So that's, yes, that's more or less.

Q Tell me, as an organiser, you say, for instance, enjoyed working with the labs. How did you go about it, did you make personal contact?

A Oh yes, well I always write up the shop steward, said I was coming down. Or maybe there was a problem to sort out and I would have a meeting and the problem arose and I would give what I thought was my view and the shop steward may have said 'well, this is his view, you know, but the chaps don't like it' or something and eventually we came to some accommodation or it may have been that they wanted to elect an new shop steward, that sort of thing, which was an easy thing in a way, you know. But I very often had to go out on a night thing to Denholm labs to meet the night staff - that was very eerie that. A car was laid on for me then, that was arranged, a car was laid on for me and I would go to the Denholm labs, they maybe had a problem that I had to try and sort out or there was some little conflict, you know, here and there. I did that quite a lot - Denholm Labs thing. And I went to Denholm during the day a lot, you know, to the labs. And another sort of - maybe somebody would ring up saying that they were very keen to join the union but there was nobody in the union, could I or somebody go down and see what we could do, and I would maybe go to some new unit documentary or some place and try and get membership, you know, from there. You know Joe Telford who became an organiser, well I helped to organise his - oh he was marvellous himself, he was up there, you know, absolutely. But I helped to organise the whole shop, I'm not saying I did it on my own, I mean it was all basically him but I did all that, you know, that sort of thing. And they were a new set - lettering artists - they were a new. And he, he at that time was in - what was that union, it was a very small union - and I actually knew the general - he was the sole person - I don't think he had a secretary or anything - but he was the sole person who ran - it was a small union - and when Rank Organisation were doing lettering he thought this should belong to ACT because it was associated with films. So I had to sort that out to get their membership into my union, our union. That took quite a hiccup, but we got it eventually, that sort of thing.

Q I am sure you have got lots of stories but are there any things that you are particularly proud of that you were able to solve yourself or dramatic?

A Well I thought everything was a victory. Oh dear.

Q It doesn't matter if you....as you say you have answered me everything was a victory.

A Well, to me - invariably.

Q Did you get involved with the , let me think when it was, 1954, when ITV started, were you connected with this?

A No, Paddy Leitch joined as an extra organiser so he was assigned to that. But when television first started we didn't have an organiser exclusively for television but I remember going to Wembley Studios and the woman there, she was the director, and she asked me to come to show... and it was interesting for me, a completely new development. And I was shown how they worked and operated, saw them shooting and all that. I found that very interesting. And that was one of the early ones, and that was - I am sure it was Wembley Studios - that used to be the old ATC studio, you know, during the war. So that was 54, 55 I would think and then 56 was the big intake and then Paddy was assigned to that and he did a very, very good job, excellent. In fact, he was his own enemy later, you know, unfortunately, because he was very good indeed.

Q Now, this is a personal thing. My first recollection of you is in the mid fifties when you used to hold court on Friday evenings in the Highlander with your little notebook, and I was one of many people who came and you would take out your notebook and say things like and you would leaf through it and you would say 'now, maybe if you telephone on Monday morning to such and such an address, maybe you will be able to get a job' and I think you helped lots of us this way.

A Well, I know I did. Absolutely.

Q But this is a very good memory. I mean this is the unofficial side of the union but the Highlander was almost an annexe of..

A Aye, and of course, people would ring up saying 'Bessie, can I meet you in the Highlander, I have got a problem' and I was sort of out there and then, you know. So that would be anybody - features, anybody, you know. Oh that was lovely, well it was all lovely to me. I enjoyed every minute of it. It was super. Oh yes, a lot of my successes were done in pubs, you know.

Q Now, you must have a lot of memories of different film and television, what shall we say - eccentrics, personalities that you met - have you any particular memories or is it a difficult question to ask....

A I am sure I have got loads of them, loads of them. I don't want you to include this but you know Darling Cyril Arrapol?, a great friend of mine, he came back from Brazil penniless and I don't want you to include this....

Q OK I'll turn it off.

A I could tell you, I could tell you the life story of dozens of them, the life stories of them really and then somebody would come and maybe, not the wife but maybe a relation of the chap and they would say 'do you know that so and so has deserted his wife and is living with so and so'. I would say 'Excuse me, it is not my business, is there anything.... no it is not my business'. I didn't want to get involved in that, you know, but oh my God everybody's life story. The ins and outs!

Q Now, something quite different, how do you feel that ACT, I call it that, changed particularly when it became ACTT? Is it a business of the enormous size of the...

A Well, of television, was the television.

Q Yes, I realise that, but do you feel the union has changed over the years? Obviously its function has changed over the years.

A Oh well, I mean about now, I don't want to speak about now, because I am not involved but...

Q No, I meant while you were there. You were there for how many years?

A I was there until 1961, so I was there about six years.

Q During television?

A That's right.

Q But you were there a total of ....

A Well, all over, even when I wasn't paid. Nineteen doing this and that and going to all the functions. Oh well, of course, it changed radically. We had this big intake of television people which the film people resented and there was a lot of problems because they resented television people getting a job on films, you know, on the studio films, they resented it. But they didn't mind taking a job in television although they were studio film technicians. And I said 'you can't have it both ways', you know. One must have the right to do the other, you know, that sort of thing. So there were problems there and the film people gradually declining, because of the state of the film industry, was gradually declining. You see it had to be acknowledged that television was the thing, you know. But then there were a lot of - I wouldn't say serious problems - but the film

people loathed the television people - resented them. But you see the television people didn't resent the film people, you know what I mean? And I think how it has worked out has been marvellous for the film people. Some of them would be on their beam ends wouldn't they if they didn't have television work?

Q But this resentment and transition stage, how did the senior staff at the union cope with this? Did they have meetings to discuss it or is it something that took so long...

A No, I think it just happened. Say you were at a section meeting or something it would be brought up, you know, that sort of thing. And well, as far as I was concerned I stated my case, you know, it was all I could do. Being a realist, you know, I had to state the case. Was that wind?

Q Yes, it is suddenly getting very windy indeed, it is blowing through the shutters. How important do you feel that the original ACT was in shaping the industry as it played a very important part? This is a big question, I know.

A Well, it was just fabulous. You see, like last night seeing - and George's speech is about the early days. He was a phenomenon, there was no doubt about it.

Q This was George Elliott(?). Elman(?)

A George. Absolute phenomenon, marvellous. So I would say that any of them there couldn't hold a finger to him, even today, you know, the people there. I don't know them all intimately, they all came after I disappeared, you know. Oh I think it was just fabulous how - and how the negotiations for agreements and so on. Oh it was just stupendous really. You know what they did to give the union the power it had, the strength. And respect as well, you know, coupled with that, that was the thing, and they weren't devalued, remember, the union wasn't devalued in any way.

Q In the documentary side, which was something you were particularly interested in, your fellow countrymen and women were very prominent. Did Grierson have many connections with the union? I can't ...

A He wasn't a member. He was made an Honorary Member, he was never a member.

Q What was the reason for this?

A I have no idea because he is not anti-trade union, you know, John his brother in law, was a member and Donald Taylor his other brother in law was a member and Marion was a member his sister and Ruby was a member - Ruby you know who went down in the ship that went to

Canada with the school children. He wasn't anti - I mean he was a very powerful man and I always said to John he was a bloody despot, you know.

Q But, yes, it is strange that he didn't become a member. Maybe because during the whole life of the union he was working as a producer wasn't he?

A Well, even that. But you see, I mean, he was travelling - he was in Canada for years, he was in America for a period, you know, and these things. But I don't know whether he would have joined but he certainly wasn't anti-union, you know, and respected everybody who were active, people like Ralph and Ivor Montague and so on. And Sid Cole, I mean, he thought the world of them, he thought the world of Ralph, I can assure you. I'll tell you something very privately - not for the book.

Q OK well I will switch it off.

A In the early days, well a lot of this personal reminisce you will be able to..

Q Yes, I have turned it on again now. This is one of these vague questions but if you could have had your life over or your life in the union over again would you, with hindsight, do you think you would have behaved differently or worked differently or are you quite happy with how things went?

A Do you mean my own personal performance?

Q Yes.

A Well, I consider I did a good job, I don't think I did everything one hundred percent, you know, but I have a feeling I was very popular and people thought a lot of me. I think people did like me and a lot of people came to me 'go and see Bessie she'll sort it out or help you'. And a lot of people came with their personal problems as I told you, you know. I don't see how I could have behaved differently. I say I maybe made the odd mistake or so and I went down to George and said 'do you think I did right or not?', you know, and this is where George was marvellous. Even if he thought I did wrong and it had to come to the executive, he would work it round in such a way that, you know, you didn't, as it were, do the union down - well, I don't think I ever did the union down, you know. But then these things, he was marvellous and you could always go to him. For instance, I always hated Middleton. I never trusted him, never. And I went down to George and said 'you know, I don't trust Middleton'. He said 'oh bloody old woman, you know,....' and I was right, you know, he fiddled the union funds and I discovered that through going round and card cheques, you know. And I knew it. And I knew it.

Q What were your relationships with management when there was a ticklish.....

A Oh, my relations with Middleton were never good.

Q No, sorry, with management.

A Oh, marvellous. I remember going to one dodgy place - this is another personal reminisce - mind you I had to tell George about this because I was worried about it. There was a little commercial firm in Dean Street and they had a shop steward there but it wasn't - they weren't observing - it was in the early days of commercials, you know. And it was a bit dodgy going to tell them to read the riot act to them and so on. So eventually it was arranged that I should go and see the management. And he was petrified, he thought there was an ogre coming, you know. So I went there, very sort of with-it man, rather, and we got on like a house on fire and oh he brought the whisky bottle - they always did you know - brought the bottle out. And he said to me 'I wonder if you would have lunch with me, I am meeting my ex wife and there is a problem I would like to discuss with her about my son and I would like you to officiate.' So I had this lunch, super lunch, I met the wife, she came to the office, she had married somebody else I think RA(?) or someone in the RAF. And we had a long talk and talked about the son. She left and we stayed on, another drink and he said 'you know, I would like you to meet my son, I think you are a very wise woman, I would like you to meet my son and maybe you'll come out to dinner one evening'. I didn't want to meet his bloody son - I'll tell you how I got out of it, it was fantastic. He said 'I am going into the London clinic tomorrow or the next day for some nose operation or something. I will get in touch with you when I come out. And there was a vague date made for say a fortnight later which, theoretically, I put in my - I did put a note of it, you know, with the cross, saying I didn't want to keep it sort of thing. Right? So the day came and I remember I had to go down to Denholm Labs on a job and that was usually an all day job with travelling, having lunch, talking, having a meeting and getting back. And normally I used to go straight home. But I did go into the office that day, forgetting about this bloody thing. The minute I got in bells were going. I can't even remember his bloody name! But ringing all day, secretaries, 'will you turn up to, whatever grand restaurant it was, to meet Mr So and So'. 'Oh' I said 'I thought the date was tomorrow'. 'Can't you make it?'. 'Well, I'm terribly sorry, I cant, as a matter of fact I have got a friend coming to' - I was having Muir Mathieson's daughter - Muir invited me out one evening, he said 'I would like you to meet my daughter, she wants to get into the industry' and I met Muir at the Dorchester. Asked where we should meet I said 'let's meet in a pub'. She said 'no, we'll

meet at the Dorchester'. So I met her and she was a lovely girl, so I invited her to come and stay with me that particular night. So I said 'I've got a friend coming'. 'Bring her too'. I said 'I can't, she lives in the country' - you know he's got a farm, well he's dead now. But he has got a farm out in Henley or somewhere. 'And as she was coming up from the country I have no way of contacting her'. So I said 'I am terribly sorry, you know, I understood it was tomorrow'. So that was that. Well, anyway a few weeks - it must have been nearer Christmas - that's right - so appearing on my doorstep - you know, Christmas I had always a round of parties and what to drink and whatnot - and I got home this evening and there was a case there and another huge parcel. I lived in an attic then in a small flat in the same road. This was Parliament Hill itself where I lived with Ralph for years, you know, before we split up. So I got my neighbour downstairs to haul up the two boxes, one was a case of whisky, twelve bottles, and the other, when I had undone it - I don't know if you remember in my flat I have got this samovar - there was this bloody samovar made into a lamp with a shade I didn't like as it didn't suit my.. but a suede shade with bobbles. And I was worried sick getting this. And usually Christmas week George always had a few days off at home before Christmas. I couldn't sleep that night, you know, I don't mind taking a bottle of this because at Christmas I used to get - I never had a case of whisky, you know - but the odd bottle, or bottle of perfume or something, so I didn't think that was... So I couldn't wait to get into the office and I rang George and I told George I said 'George, you know I have been organising this unit - I can't remember its name'- I knew the editor, that's right, she was Dorothy Stimpson, the editor. I said 'I have organised this unit .....would I let her observe everything and I assured the man that I would be doing the same to everybody else that we knew and whatnot. And I told him about this bloody thing. I said 'I feel terrible George'. He said 'What did you have to do for it?' You know George - blunt! I said 'Well, I organised the union and I have got them to agree...' He said 'Is that all?' I said 'What are you worried about?' I know George got fabulous boxes of cigars and this and that. He said 'Is that all, I am glad you told me'. So that was - I would have sent it back quite honestly. So I was glad I told him. So that sort of thing, you know. Oh dear. Oh that man, he was quite keen to - I don't know whether an affair - but he had a flat in Charles Street and he had a boat somewhere and there was always a hint, you know, you must come and see my flat and then we can go and see the boat somewhere. I never saw him after that. I wrote and thanked him for the whatnot you know.

A Anyway.

Q So that's - oh I was worried stiff, oh.

Q Tell me about some of the other ACTT people - Anthony Asquith. It strikes me that he is such a very surprising person somehow to be a trade union man. What kind of man was he in your memory?

A Oh a lovely man. I mean he was a trade unionist but you see George did all the prompting for him. You could tell when he was President, he didn't know his arse from his elbow quite frankly. Lovely man though. Super man. And George got him to do things that he would never have dreamt of doing - to go and negotiate at Kodak for instance. Yes, he was an impressive figure, you know, and whatnot. Well, I was in charge of Kodak, you know, that was one of my penalties - Kodak. Oh he was a lovely man. Delightful. Anyway he was a very unhappy man - you know he had to give up drink - you know he was arrested several times, you know, on the booze. He had to give up drink and some of his homosexual capers and whatnot.

Q Talking about Kodak - what about negotiations with BBC. Did you ever get...

A No, no. At that time they had appointed this Bill Barnard(?) assigned. There were odd things I did but no negotiations of any sort, no. Never. You know we always gave the BBC special membership - they paid a guinea a year or something membership. No. You know Paddy Leitch is one of their - I think he is the Deputy General Secretary.

Q How did you come to leave, is it when you retired?

A Oh yes, sixty. And I'll tell you, there were at least three sections who didn't want me to leave and they said 'we would like to go and see George' and I said 'no, that's the rule of the union'. Oh the editorial section which I loved, I loved that. And the short docs - they definitely wanted to put up a fight for me but I said ' no, please'. I gather now the retiring age is sixty generally. In fact, I could have gone on for five years to tell you the truth, I could have gone on for five years - you know, to sixty five, which was, for the men, and I thought it was a bit rotten having that as it was if you believed in equality, you know. Anyway, I didn't want them to make it an issue of it.

Q I haven't started yet you see.

A Lovely chap, do you know him?

Q Anyway, just let me ask you - there used to be a phrase that went around - I remember this - 'not a word to Bessie'.

A Not a word - and they said as well.

Q Could you tell us some of these stories about some of the union members that you remember and interesting anecdotes like that.

A Well, you know, anybody I met in the pub, you know, they said 'Bessie's due here, not a word to Bessie' you know. And then when I used to go round for a card check they would say 'Bessie's here, take cover', you know, because a lot of them were in arrears and so on, 'scarper' or they all got the impression of a terrified old maid coming. But I was pally with them all, you know.

Q Can you remember any particular incidents when this happened. You were telling me just now....

A Well, I was telling you about the Adam Faith thing when I went there. It was either him or one of his chums said '...

Q Where was this?

A It was Elstree, but I can't remember whether it was the big studio or a small studio, you know they had two or three up there. It wasn't MGM and I don't think even it was ABPC but one of the studios up there..

Q But he wasn't working as a singer then was he?

A Oh no, he was a pimply faced boy of seventeen. I mean, not presentable even to look at, you know. And I remember either him or his chum saying 'oh Bessie Bond's here', you know, 'scarper,', or 'take care' or... And they all used to run - because I was on a card check, you see, and I would say 'well, so and so here and couldn't find him' that sort of thing. These little old anecdotes - of course, I used to laugh. But I remember that with him. I don't think my name would mean anything to him now. But you know he was used - wasn't he used for one of the ACT films as a singer because he had been a member of ACT - I think it may have been one of ACT's own films, but I can't remember which one.

Q Does that kind of thing happen very often?

A Oh about Bessie's coming, you know or the word went round - Bessie's coming. Oh that was common.

Q There were other incidents - was it Douglas Slocombe you were referring to?

A Oh well, the Billy(?) Williams(?) he was at a do and he came up to me, you know, and he says 'always remember Bessie's coming' you know, 'look out' or something like that. Nice chap. He is very famous isn't he?

Q How important were the card checks - did it mean a great deal to the union funds.

A Well, eventually, not at first. Although when I started there - now I should tell you - that was one big job I did - looking through the membership. And I discovered a lot of anomalies where money hadn't come into the union and then I think it started then. I've an idea I suggested it, I've an idea I did. And then it sort of started and I knew the money had come into the union and it hadn't put down in the accounts or whatever you call it, you know. Yes, I discovered quite a few anomalies and that was very early on when the union wasn't all that significantly (could it be magnificently?) established. They hadn't gone down to what I would call that sort of organisation of making card checks and so on. And that was when I discovered - well it was a lot later on when I discovered Middleton - that was a lot later on - but I never trusted that bugger, I loathed him as well, absolutely loathed him - shifty.

Q How were the unions finances, unless this is confidential - were they rather rocky at times?

A In the early days but they became marvellous, but they are rocky now. I think this is a tragedy, absolute tragedy. Should never have happened with the membership we've got and the fees they pay, you know. Oh that broke my heart when I saw....broke my heart. I mean, I know there was a lot of extravagance as you know on the booze front and all that but after all that's not the only, you know. There is certainly a lot of generosity on that front but the books were never out of order, you know, the funds were always - we were always solvent, you know. And it's only - well that's when they must have got this chap in to - ? me I don't know whether I am right here - in reading his report I don't remember anything being said about being overstaffed, you know, but this is something I've thought for ages and ages. Terribly overstaffed. I know the union has grown a lot, you know, but I don't see why they should have a secretary to every organiser and all that. Mind you it's the members that ask for all this and the members asked for an organiser for this, an organiser for that, which you know I think is a bit over the top. Now I didn't agree with them having an equality officer but in retrospect I think that she has brought a lot of women into activity so I have withdrawn that from my own - because you see the union's thing was equality. So to have an officer just for that seemed to be the wrong thing but now in retrospect, because I go to the annual meetings, you know, and now there are lots of women who get up and talk, they are involved, on committees and so on. So I think, you know, there has been some good accrued from it, you know.

Q That's end of Tape 1 - side 2.

Tape 2 of 3 - Side A (side one of the actual tape) (Bond Interview, interviewed by Stephen Peat)

Q Now it must be, or it must have been, in you working time, in comparison with the enormous union as it is now, or as you knew when you retired, and the little union when you joined it - how did it compare - did the size that the union grew into in any way affect its work or performance?

A Not in my day, not in my day, definitely not. As far as I was concerned, not in my day. You see we only had Paddy Leach as organiser and Bert Craig as senior organiser. That's right. And Paddy never turned anybody away as far as I know. Bert, when he was around, didn't either. There was still this personal friendly contact, you know. And I think even with George, if he was around, you know if somebody called and asked for George, and he was around and not in a meeting or anything, I am positive he didn't turn anyone away. Because very often if it was someone that came with some complaint, if it had something to do with something I was doing or Bert or Paddy he would call them down and say 'get on with it' and tell them what it was and get on with it. And that happened frequently. He would call me down and say 'a lab chap has come in - something about how he had been treated when he got the sack or something' and would I see to it. And that was, you know, that was my job, you know, to see to it and get on with it and I was sure that chap didn't make an appointment, you know. He happened to be there and George was there.

Q Did George Elwin in the early days if he had time, he would see people who called in on the off chance?

A Absolutely, absolutely, no question, unless he had to rush out to a meeting or something. He would maybe say 'well Bessie will see you' or ' Bert will see you if he is around'. That sort of thing. But I have to go off to a meeting now - that sort of thing. And that would happen with me sometimes - I just couldn't - I am going off to a meeting or some negotiation or other - the same with Bert, you know. There was that sort of arrangement. But I gather now it is difficult to see anybody. I know the union is a lot bigger and so on but - so I am told - terrible criticisms about the employment from people that have spoken to me.

Q What about relationships with other unions. Did you yourself liaise with other unions?

A Well I had to, particularly with Kodak and an occasional studio, very occasional, because I wasn't features and occasionally I had to - if there was something going in and Bert wasn't there it came to me to do it, you know that sort of thing. Oh I had to go off and go on my own to a studio to sort out some silly little dispute where an actor on the floor had insulted a technician - a lovely thing - I don't know whether you should record it. There was one - it might have been an Everest film - I went to the premier and one of our friends, the documentary director, his father was a millionaire who had a flat, an enormous flat, in Park Lane, and he had arranged a party for after this thing, you know. So I went to this party, can't remember who I went with, it might have been Margaret Thomson, I think it was Margaret I went with and Liam Cloar because Liam was one of the producers, you know, and his wife, and Cyril Franko was the director who worked at Crown at the time, and it was him who invited us all to his father's party. So I went there, of course everybody was there, Shelley, Peter Finch and Peter Finch spoke to me because he was one of my heartthrobs, of course I was tickled pink and all sorts of top film stars and so on - the wine was flowing. Well, a long, long time later I had to go down to Pinewood to sort out a silly little dispute where an actor had insulted a technician, either a camera man or the assistant director or something. So I went on the floor and production had to stop and it was a film that Peter Finch was on and he came up to me and he said 'I know you' - I nearly fell flat on my face. I said ' I know I have met you but I didn't dream' - I don't know if he associated - but he was very nice and spoke very friendly to me and I had this silly meeting - I have an idea it was that actor whom I loath who did a lot of Ealing films - Tommy Trinder - whom I absolutely - you know he was very brash and he had been insulting and I had a set-to with Tommy Trinder and have the assistant director in and get him to apologise - that sort of thing, you know. So that - I don't know why I said Tommy Trinder must have been on the film - it may have been another film in Pinewood but production had to stop so that I had to be on the floor and hear this complaint, you know. So that was a little hobbly you know. I had to go to quite a lot of studios to sort out MGM occasionally, you know, and ABPC, some of the smaller studios - Riverside, Teddington, you know, and Warton Hall and so on. But I wasn't a feature - that was my main job - but you see if anything going and maybe Bert wasn't available I would go and fill the bill. We all sort of...

Q So you dealt mainly with documentary...

A Documentary.

Q So it was the guild...

A The film producers and all the documentary - Crown Film Unit - and all the documentary units that were around at the time - film producers' guild, well...

Q Well, there were so many weren't there?

A Loads of them - Data, Rail, Wallace Productions.

Q But, let me think, there was one group who went and, except for one or two films...

A Ray Films - them I dealt with quite a lot.

Q Merton Park.

A Oh Merton Park - well that was part of the Guild, you know, the features side of the guild.

Q What about Group 3 - did you have anything to do...

A Yes, I had the early days of Group 3. I remember when Sid Cole was making a film and that was when Grierson was doing it. I remember once I had a problem there and I had to go there and Sid Cole was there, the director was a man called Bromley. I can't remember what the issue was but I had to go down there and sort something out. I don't think Grierson was the easiest of employers to work for, you know. I don't think he would observe union rules for a moment, you know. I always say to John - he was a bloody despot and he was. I liked him, you know, but a man to fear really.

Q What about COI because - this is my first memory - they were often considered from the point of view of employment rather the people you went to last if you couldn't get a job....

A That's right.

Q Was this because by regulation they couldn't, or wouldn't pay more than the minimum union rate? This is what I seem to remember.

A Well, in those days, mind you they were glad to get jobs at the COI because it was a fairly long term job or it may have been a permanent job and eventually they paid over the rate, eventually. But in the early days a lot of the BBC left the BBC and went to ATV and the other channels, you know. But eventually they did pay over the rate and were very good employers, you know on the whole. But, do you know, they wouldn't recognise the union?

Q But, I seem to - there was a time when one went looking for a job and you were told 'there's this job, and this job, or there's a COI job.......' If everything else fails.....

A That was the last resort. .....some of the BBC was people that did scripts and that sort of thing, the long time they took to pay you, and they paid very poorly for scripts and that sort of thing, for people who did outside, you know work not at their headquarters. There was always

that and David Elden who does a lot of work for the BBC, he works at home, I don't know if he does on the cartoon side, but he has got his own studio in the house I went to yesterday and he says that they are buggers to - they take so long to pay you, you know.

Q But when you first were working for ECT a lot of the people who are now almost myths from the documentary world - some are still with us like Anstey ...

A Well Anstey is retired. He is alive that is what you mean.

Q Yes, Basil Wright.

A Yes.

Q Harry Watt.

A He's dead.

Q Yes, indeed, I was thinking of group that existed. You have met them personally.

A Oh great old friends, I used to go and stay with them. They used to visit us. Oh yes, I used to go and stay - Basil Wright lived in the country which he still does. Ralph and I went there when I was living with Ralph - went there two or three times. Oh yes, often in their company in Elstree - well I told you I used to use his flat to teach myself typing. That was long before Ralph was a director, he was probably a humble assistant, you know. Oh yes, and Harry Watt and Lulu his first wife used to visit us and we used to often go out to this and that together and so on. Oh Yes. Knew them all well. I was surprised, there was never an obituary about Harry Watt in the Journal. There wasn't was there?

Q I really can't remember.

A Who was it that got a hold of Pat Jackson to do - oh I think he did one for Harry Watt. I know he was - John had a hell of a job to get hold of Pat Jackson to do an obituary for somebody and that wasn't too long ago.

Q Not ???

A No, oh no, ? was.

Q No, I mean, it wasn't he wrote about Ruther?

A Who, Pat Jackson? No that was three years ago now. But John and Michael Oram were his executors and they had been sweating on his, still are, well they look after his estate, whatever it was you know. I don't think Pat Jackson worked for Ruther. But I know John got Pat Jackson to do - he had a job to get hold of him.....

Q But anyway, you remember going to the - or chance or extra visits to the feature studios or you weren't really....

A .... organiser for them.

Q Did you go out or were called out ever to deal with things regarding documentary films or didn't that kind of thing arise much?

A Oh, loads of times, oh yes. Went to a lot, had to go to Ruther not more than once, you know, his films of fact, am I right. Oh yes, quite a lot - rain films, quite a few, but on the whole, well relations were very good on the whole, you know. Very often you could settle a thing by phone, you know, very often, not very serious. The guild, they were a bit dip because we were also friendly, you know everybody was so intimate, and a lot of the film producers guild knew assistants and they were all top people. Well, everybody, Bessie and Burlance and - we were all on first names - the bosses as well, you know. All very intimate. We had quite a few barnies with the film producers' guild here and there, but there was no sort of, you know, we'll have to black you or that, you know, all fairly friendly, fairly. And very often, you know, they tried to meet you without the shop steward and I would go and say 'well, I have got to have the shop steward' 'oh let's settle the thing between us' that sort of thing and I wouldn't have it. You know, that sort of thing. I have an idea once they did it because it was a lunch time when they sent for me and couldn't get hold of me. They told me - it was something to do with a few redundancies - and the shop steward got on to me afterwards. So I said 'I am terribly sorry, you weren't around when I was going to ring you to see if we could talk about it and see what you thought'. Anyway it was sorted out. But that was one case where I maybe should have said to wait until the shop steward was back but I went - I think they were trying to smooth it with me without the shop steward. Some of these. Because, I say, it was also friendly and matey.

Q But seldom I don't remember ever a documentary getting blacked and not getting on the screen eventually.

A Oh absolutely, absolutely. There are one or two slimy customers. Who was that tall man with the moustaches? - cutting looms in the passage? The chap who worked with him - Dudley Birch - he was the shop steward - he was one that tried to pull a fast one here and there, you know. We met in the pub and it was all matey. Mellor, a man called Mellor. On the whole, you know, it is a very corrupt industry, let's face it, particularly on the features. Some of the members tried to pull fast ones over too. You very often had to tell them, you know, you can't do this, this is

what you are entitled to and so on. They weren't all above board, you know what I mean, straightforward. No it is an airy, corrupt industry, you know on the whole. Do you find that? Maybe not so much on the documentary side but....

Q Well any industry where there is

A And I think it is fairly corrupt in commercial television, I would think, you know.

Q Any industry where there's so much money at stake.

A That's right. Then there is money that is so easily got, you know, and so on. I dealt with a lot of feature individuals who had claims with feature companies, didn't mean it to go to studios, it was all correspondence or meeting them at their plush offices, you know, to deal with. I remember one chap - Ronnie Kinnock - you see a lot of our members used to do things without having a proper agreement and they expected you to sort it out for them. And this Ronnie Kinnock - I think he had done scripts with no guarantee as to what he would get and so on. And it was something I fought for a long time but I didn't get anywhere with it, you know. That's why we make the stipulation, you know, if you're doing something, make sure you have got an agreement, you know, and if you have an agreement then you can do something.

Q You were telling me about John Fletcher, could you....

A Well, I was just saying that was the last time I saw Lasserly?. I never spoke to him but he did some talking about John Fletcher didn't he? Oh I adored John Fletcher, lovely chap, I was so sad when he died. I was in on all his personal affairs, you know, when his marriage broke up and all that, lovely chap, and his wife was there. She is in Canada now, she came up to me very warmly, you know, and spoke to me and so on. They do. Lasserly this little tinpot unit, I mean it was sixteen mls - somewhere in West London - and he came to see me Lasserly saying that he wanted to join the union, he was in this small, I think it was two or three of them, ambitious, I got his measure once he got into the union because he was a flyer immediately wasn't he - pretty well. Well I got his two or three people in and there were odd things like that - other small people - one person rang me up saying we would like to get in with the working at Tinpot even if it is not serving the agreement and could I do something, they would like something, they would like to see them organised - and these little things, I would get them in the union and get them to observe the agreement, little tinpot places. But they left as soon as they got membership to get into the wide film world, you know. But he has done very well, hasn't he Lasserly? I suppose he still gets - he works abroad a lot now doesn't he?

Q In Greece. Yes he has done a lot...

A In Greece? Really?

Q I think one of the places - Max Anderson.

A Lovely chap, marvellous bloke. Well, I knew him before he was in the industry. His girl friend at Cambridge - I knew her as a school friend, we are still friends - years younger than me. She was a high flyer too and her - not in films but you know in the big world outside. She takes me to her hairdresser in her car and we are still buddies and I got to know Max through her and he wanted to get into films. Well, he got into films, nothing to do with me because I wasn't in films then, you know, when I knew him. But once he got - marvellous bloke, one in a million, one in a million. He was the Chairman of the documentary - oh, broken hearted when he died - I saw him two weeks before he died. Oh, one in a million. And when his affair with Muriel broke up Max was on my doorstep - he was going to kill himself, you know, and...... That's all outside the industry, you know. But the girl he married, I was responsible, she was my lodger and I had a party - that was when I was in the big flat in Parliament - not living with Ralph - everybody was there - Anstey and everybody, it was a party that Margaret Thomson and I arranged between us and we knew the same people and, of course, Max was invited and Peggy was my lodger, that's when that started. So Peggy was already married and I had to be the bloody witness at the divorce and I was responsible for Brenda meeting John Rowden, you know. Brenda, she was by protégée a lovely girl and I was very friendly John - John Rowden. I was responsible for that set-up too.

Q There is another director who is largely forgotten now - Max Munden.

A Oh, nice chap, oh very - marvellous union chap and he was the boss, you know, super bloke, died young. I was in on all his personal affairs, you know, broken marriage, jewellery and that - very nice bloke - very, very good member. Did you know - was he around when you were there?

That tape was only on part of one side.

Tape 3 of 3 - Side A (Side I of tape)

This is an interview with Bessie Bond - the date is 29 August 1989. It's her second interview because Stephen Peat talked to her about her life in the film industry but now we

are going to see if we can record some of her very interesting early life in Glasgow. It is Margaret Thomson doing the interviewing.

Q OK Bessie.

A I was born in Glasgow on 26 June 1901 of Jewish parents. My father came from the Ukraine and my mother from Lithuania and I gather the reason my father came to Glasgow was to escape being recruited into the army because he was a Jew.

Q Why did your mother come? Do you know that at all?

A She just came. She wasn't an immigrant, put it that way.

Q Did she come on her own?

A She came completely on her own.

Q And she had no relatives then in Glasgow?

A She may have had a brother in Glasgow then. So I think that is very possible because he had a jeweller's shop, eventually round the corner from we lived.

Q Oh well, they must have...

A But I think her brother must have been in Glasgow.

Q But not any older people of the family?

A No, no.

Q Do you know how old she was when she came?

A No.

Q Or your father?

A Well, my father was 28 when he died.

Q So, he would be a young man, wouldn't he? So, what you were saying, he had come to escape the army. Do you know what he did for a living?

A When he was in Glasgow?

Q Yes.

A Oh yes, he was what was described as a commercial traveller, in other words, he would be a credit draper, you know, sort of going round the country, which I gather was a common thing for Jewish men to earn a living.

Q How would he carry his goods round do you think?

A Well, he may have had a case or a bag or - I just don't know, just don't know at all.

Q Of course, you would be too little to know anything about.... Did your mother talk about him much?

A Not an awful lot, not an awful lot, no. I think later on she talked more to Sadie - my sister. There were three children survived of the marriage - my elder sister who was called Hannah and later changed her name to Hilda, Sadie my middle sister was called Sarah and changed her name to Sadie and myself Bessie who was called Bessie.

Q Which is very unusual isn't it to be called that. It is usually a shortness for Elizabeth isn't it?

A Oh no, Bessie, it is Bessie on my birth certificate. And my one memory of my father, because I was two when he died, is that I remember the man being very, very tall, I would say about six feet or over, who had red hair and a ginger moustache and, for some reason, he threw a slipper at Sadie, my second sister, and that's all I remember of him.

Q Do you know what he died of?

A Galloping Consumption.

Q Did he really?

A Which...

Q Tell me now, was your mother and all your family very conscious of the fact that this might be a catching disease and that....

A Not at all.

Q Really?

A Not at all.

Q Of course, that was the case.....

A ...in those days it was called Galloping Consumption and later on when I grew up there was, on my father's side of the family, quite a lot of TB.

Q So you did get to know your father's side of the family then?

A Well, relations, they were distant relations, you know, like cousins, second cousins, you know.

Q And they lived in Glasgow?

A They lived in Glasgow, that's right. We didn't live in the Jewish neighbourhood, we lived in a district called Dennistoun which, I think, would be called a slum but to me it was a clean slum compared to where I stayed later on in life when we had to move. And then I remember we had,

what was called, a saleroom - a shop. I never remember a penny or anything that anyone bought in the shop - it was fantastic - it was sort called a saleroom.

Q What sort of goods were they?

A Oh, I remember masses of books, they may have been valuable now, I don't know. But masses of books and old....

Q Would they be in English?

A Oh, all English.

Q I mean not Jewish?

A Oh no, well we didn't live in a Jewish neighbourhood.

Q I see. And your mother spoke English quite well did she?

A Broken Scots, my mother spoke broken Scots. Oh no, far from it.

Q ....trait that you go into if you are a foreigner.

A Even up until I left Glasgow she was still speaking broken Scots, you know.

Q Don't you think it was rather a strange trade to go into if you were foreign and not speaking very much English?

A Well, it was very common for Jews to have gone into that sort of business, you know. For instance, families that I remember when we grew up started that way and they became sort of very, very wealthy business people, you know, in the furniture trade or something like that, you know. Quite common. But this wasn't a Jewish area at all and, in fact, it was quite - when I say it would have been considered a slum - to me it wasn't a slum because of where I lived later on. And in those days, as I say, I never remember a penny coming into the shop at all and we were actually having Parish Relief, living on what was called Parish Relief.

Q Do you know the sums that were involved at all?

A Well, I just remember, and it is always a grim memory to me, going there once a year to these offices or building, where we sat on a hard seat and I remember boots being given to me which I loathed, they were just like clogs, they were so heavy. And they had a mark in them - an imprint - to show that they weren't mine that they belonged to the Parish Council. Well, anyway time went on. Oh, we lived in one room, lovely kitchen, I have always liked kitchens because Scottish kitchens are really lovely, they are places that we lived in. We lived in the one room and the lovely thing in the room was a glowing fire, lovely grate in the room, and on the mantelpiece were little brass ornaments and brass candlesticks which came down every Friday night when my

mother lit them to bring in the Sabbath on a Friday night. And on the Friday night she gathered us all together - there were three of us - and she had a dish with warm water in it and sort of wooden chips and a hairbrush and these chips were called 'causier'(?) chips. They are quite well known but how my mother ever knew of them I don't know. And she used to brush our hair with dipping the brush into this dish of water and brush our hair thoroughly with a tooth comb to make sure our heads were clean and that was a ritual every Friday night. So, anyway the time came..

Q Bessie, before you leave your lovely kitchen - you described to me once before - your old bed and the hangings and the beautiful way your mother kept it.

A Shall I do that now?

Q Yes, if you like to.

A Well, the kitchen, as I say, was absolutely lovely to me. As I say I have always adored kitchens. The bed was the traditional Scottish tenement bed - it was sort of described as a hole in the wall and that was a square and you had to have bed boards- I think you had to buy twelve bed boards to fit the bed - and then there would be a mattress and a sheet, but no blankets because my mother, which I think she must have brought from Lithuania, was today described as a duvet but it wasn't fancy. I mean, there was no stitching or quilting or anything, it was just a large, large, large covering, bed covering, you know with feathers and stuff.

Q Sort of like a large eiderdown?

A Large eiderdown.

Q Bessie, just to get it straight. I always thought that a wall bed must be in the depths of the wall but you obviously couldn't all sleep in the depth of an ordinary wall.

A Yes, we did.

Q Well, a wall's only a foot wide, isn't it?

A No, well it was about the width of the window and four of us slept in that bed. The neighbours next door, for instance, had about nine children and they all slept in the bed.

Q Well, it was built into the room was it?

A It was in the room, actually in the room, actually in the room.

Q Like a platform?

A No. If I describe how it was furnished you'll know. Right?

Q Well, I hope so.

A Then there was a lovely white bedspread which I think you call honeycombed you know, white. And pillows, there were about six or seven pillows, a huge one - white, a smaller one and a smaller one, smaller one built up into the bed. And there were lace curtains hanging, you know, with a thing, you know, clipped together somehow. And in front of the bed - that's where you put all your spare things like the tin bath that we bathed in, in front of the fire, another, for instance, the Passover you had to use different dishes for the Passover and there was a separate bath there full of the crockery that we would use for the Passover and all our crockery that they used every day would go into this tin bath and put under the bed.

Q Under the bed?

A Under the bed. And in front of the bed was what we called a white frill. It was cotton or linen, sort of beautifully starched, then it was like frilled in, you know, like when you hang a curtain up you have got a rod, you know, like that, straight across. And that was always very, very handsome to me, it was lovely, beautiful. So anyway, the time came when we had to do a moonlight flit. And this was the middle of the night. She gathered us all together and said 'we have got to move' and she produced a barrow from somewhere, piled up this barrow - how she got everything on the barrow, I'll never know. And we walked through the streets to where my uncle lived, that's right, where my uncle lived, I think it was a road called London Road, and we called on him and we slept on the floor that particular night because he didn't have much accommodation.

Q Can you remember how old you would be then?

A Well, I was certainly at school. What I omitted to tell you - is it all right to say that? - what I omitted to tell you - when we were very young in this district that we lived in, this uncle came to see us now and again, and occasionally would give my mother some money and he once appeared with three sailor suits which he bought us which were beautiful and this was really wonderful, with a sailor collar you know - and studded boots to throw away those bloody clogs, you know, pardon my French. And there were studded boots ...

Q What boots?

A Studded. You know they were very fashionable - they were up to about here - and you laced them and there were studs - you'll see them in the variety girls and so on, the old time music hall. And that was one time when we really looked well off, you know, so beautifully dressed. Then as I told you we had to do this moonlight flit and we slept on the floor of this uncle

for the night. And the next day obviously my mother disappeared to find us another place to live and this is when we really went downhill and lived in a real slum. It was one of the worst streets in Glasgow.

Q Can you remember the name of it?

A Maitland Street - 14 Maitland Street.

Q And the district?

A Cowcaddens. Cowcaddens wasn't all slum, you know, but we were in that particular part and it was opposite the Police Station. We didn't even look on to the main street, we looked on the back, over a midden, and opposite us was a worse slum that ours - it was called the rat pit. And if you remember a book written by Patrick McGill, an Irish writer who was writing a social history of Irish people coming to Glasgow and so on, a lot of them went to this street - it was called Mews(?) Lane and as I say, our street was a slum but this was really - in fact, I don't remember ever going down it myself, you know, it was considered taboo. And apparently when Patrick McGill wrote this book, The Ratpit, it was prostitutes who lived in it, it was famous for prostitutes at that particular time.

Q When you said there was a midden, I suppose - would you have running water in these...

A Oh yes, in the first one?

Q In the first one?

A Oh yes.

Q And the second one?

A And the second one.

Q And proper loos?

A Oh no! No, a loo was another thing. The loo was on what we called the stairhead and there were one, two, three, four flats and I would say trying to count all the people, we were the smallest family, four of us. The woman next door - Mrs Sawyer - I think she had about nine children, eight or nine children and they had the same accommodation and the people next door - McAuley their name was - one of the girls became a nun. We were never inside those houses at all although we were friendly as it were. And the fourth one was a big family and that was a Highland family, very sort of rough, rough, rough family. And there was this lavatory on the stairhead so there were about between thirty and forty of us using it. And there was on...

Q And that wasn't a water closet?

A Well, it had a chain.

Q It was a water closet?

A Oh it had a chain. And, of course, we had to take our turns to clean this....

Q How dreadful.

A ..which I will never forget. And we had to do the stairs which were always filthy. There was a lavatory opposite and the people that used that they had the paper shop - general paper shop - they were what we considered very well off. Mrs Biggs her name was. Do you want to hear about the family?

Q Mm.

A One of the girls was a beauty and she won a beauty prize and the commotion in the street with reporters and all that caused as great, great sensation. And the other one Jessie, who was kept really in chains as it were, and I'll never forget, I went to Rothesay for the day and got the steamer for sixpence from Glasgow to Rothesay - this was a great treat. And I met this Jessie Biggs with a very handsome naval officer.

Q This is the beauty is it?

A Oh no, this is the older one. Isa must have got married but I can't remember what happened to the beauty one. But Jessie I thought was a beauty as well, a very, very nice woman. So as I said, 'I am only here for the day' 'oh' she says 'well, come out on the boat with us' and she took me in a rowing boat. Very, very handsome naval officer. And I was perhaps too young to see how she escaped from her mother's clutches. Because I was still at school, you know. So that was that. My mother had another attempt at trying a shop again. Where she got the stuff from I have no idea but that was in a very slum street.

Q How did she live in between times Bessie? How did you all live in between times?

A Well, she never had any money, to tell you the truth. But when we got there she got this shop, I suppose immediately, and where she got the stuff from I have no idea. Just don't remember that. And it was opposite what we call a sweetie work, you know, they made sweets and hundreds of girls worked there. It was an enormous factory. Go into a very nice school there. I didn't tell you about the school when we lived in Denniestoun, that was a lovely school. ...considered in a rather posh district - Denniestoun - and this school we went to was a very, very good school. It was called the Normal School and they trained teachers at this school as well. So we very often had what we call a pupil teacher to give us lessons sometimes, you know, a

very, very good school indeed. Sadie and I, we were quite clever at the school because we stayed in for about three years in the top class. So time went on. My mother then eventually packed up the shop and then she started to go out doing this credit draper thing - she had a bundle. I don't remember a bag or anything, but she had a bundle and she just had some clothes. Mind you, I was wondering if my uncle, this brother of hers, may have given her money to buy some clothes to hawk around.

Q How do you think you lived then really, how did the money...?

A Well, we lived, as I say, my mother always owned - she ? ? ? ? ? ? . That was her motto.

Q Would you get the money sort of like dole money type of thing?

A Oh, we weren't working then, we were still at school.

Q No, but do you know what I mean?....

A No, no, nothing like that.

Q When you said relief, was that only clothes?

A That was when we were in Denniestoun after we did the moonlight flit. We had Parish Relief there but not...

Q But something must have fed you, somehow must have fed you.

A As I say, we didn't starve.

Q Yes, but where did the money come from?

A Well, anyway, she used to, there was a grocer's round the corner - Lows - where she used to get tick, that was that. And I remember once we used to go to the Jewish quarter about once a week to do shopping in the Gorbals and I remember once my mother gave me a note to take to one of the shops that she used to buy groceries in and they refused to give us any groceries. I remember my mother looked and said 'I just don't know'. That was that. So then I left school on a Friday - do you want to hear any more about the youth?

Q Oh just if you can think of it. I am curious to know how you actually lived if ...

A I'll tell you one thing. We each got a farthing every day to spend and my mother said 'if I give you a farthing every day you will never steal money'. I remember her saying that. 'You'll never steal if you have, you know, a farthing to spend.' You could get four striped balls, you know, or black striped balls or liquorice stick or something like that, you know, for a farthing. And this we had every day, the farthing. Well, anyway she did go out with a bundle and even then she did obviously come home with some money but there was credit, a lot of it was credit and very

often on a Friday, after I left school, it was funny, she must have thought she could trust me more than the other two. Hilda was - she always felt she had to protect Hilda. Sadie, she was always bright and all that but Sadie was never asked to do these errands, it was always me. And on a Friday, after I came home from school, I would go to the suburbs where she used to go with her bundle, a place called Ballieston or Uddingston, these were two of the places I know she went to, and she would describe where the houses were that she went - oh and she used to go to Riddrie - and there was a loch there called Hogganfield Loch, and there was a very nice woman who lived in a cottage called Mrs Mitchell and she did buy from my mother regularly. And we used to go out there on a Sunday for a day, you know out for a trip, the three of us, we would always call her Mrs Mitchell and she would give tea and all that, cup of tea and so on. And that was the one woman I remember that my mother got money from, you know, when she was doing this with the pack. And I used to go ...

Q I think that's - all right.

A I used to go on the tram, we called it a car in those days, the tram to Ballieston or Uddingston, she would describe where there were tenement houses there. She would describe where the house was to see if I could - you know the people that had bought stuff from her - they owed her money - and see if I could collect any money. I think there would be one occasion I would bring back sixpence. That's about all I remember, you know. So then, leaving school, I left on a Friday, went to work in a tailoring place, one room, not as big as the two rooms together but nearly. And then I learned tailoring, really learned it, first class tailoring from the beginning. I never used a machine but I did all the hand work from the very beginning, you know, of the garments, you know ladies and gents work and so on. And I got five shillings a week, I used to walk to work - it was probably about 10 minutes walk, it was nothing. And I remember we always got an hour and a quarter for our - well we called it our dinner in those days, you know, not lunch like they say down here, it was our dinner - and we would go home for our dinner, our mother wasn't always there she was very often, you know, doing the rounds, we had a key to get in. And I stayed there until I was sixteen. When I was fourteen - two years - I got sixteen shillings a week when they thought I got to try and earn more money. I was very highly skilled and I went to a very high class, they were advertising, it was only about five minutes walk from us, it was in Sauchiehall Street, which was **the** street in Glasgow and I got a job there and that was very high

class tailoring work and I got thirty shillings a week which was marvellous because I was only sixteen.

Q ????

A And then I was so good at tailoring I used to take in work for people, I made clothes for people, well I only had a little coterie of people - about four or five people - and I used to make suits for them, skirts and these people came back to me regularly, you know, when they wanted a garment made. And by this time - that was the first time I joined a union in that shop -

Q What's the name of that one?

A Tailoring and Garment Workers Union. I joined it, I mean I didn't know anything about it, but I joined it, I felt it was what one had to do. I joined the union. I can't pretend that I was active then. Sixteen, joined the union and by this time Sadie would be - she was nineteen months older than me - and just round the corner from us was a socialist bookshop that had pamphlets and books and on Marxism in the window and every time we passed that shop Sadie and I used to stand and look and Sadie went in there one day and she bought the pamphlet by Marx - the famous first one that everyone used, you know, the cum-class conscious, she bought this pamphlet and this was given to me and we both took to it like a duck to water. And Sadie, who became very brilliant, she eventually got so interested and hooked on it that she studied it, she very often sat up till four o clock in the morning reading books.

Q What did Sadie do for a job?

A Sadie then, now what did she do, wait a minute. I know the older sister, I remember the first job she had. But somehow she doesn't come into our ken as much as Sadie because she was - although we were all friendly, the three of us, you know, somehow she hadn't the interests that we had, she was a great flirt, she could get anything out of a man, you know, and she thought Sadie and I were silly spending our time reading and going to meetings, you know. She thought we were silly doing that. She would come home with a pair of gloves that she got from a young man, you know, shops were open till all hours in Glasgow. She could get anything out of a man, very beautiful, absolute beauty. I made all her clothes. She was blond, very blond. And Sadie was sort of brownish, you know, not dark. I was black, really black haired then. Sadie, now she flitted about from job to job a hell of a lot. Oh the war was on, of course. The war was on 1914, the war. And Sadie worked in munitions for a while and then she eventually became a kilt maker, she made kilts. And that factory was dead opposite our slum house, that bit was quite

? ? ? factory and there was a very good fish shop that my mother used to buy kippers and that - three pairs for sixpence, you know.

Q You haven't told us what you used to eat when you were little.

A We had Jewish food. We had stews, a lot of stew. We never had a roast, I never knew what a roast was. Did you have a roast when you were young? Never knew what a roast was. Oh we ate potatoes, of course, the only vegetables were cabbage and maybe carrots, oh and turnips when my mother made stews and soups and all that. Carrots, turnips. But cabbage and potatods would be our, you know, our dinner. And every Monday did the washing and we had a pulley in the kitchen and when we went home for our dinner all the clothes were hanging on the pulley, dripping and there was a bath there with the washboard, on two chairs, and our favourite meal was egg and chips and a rice pudding which was out of this world. And that was our favourite meal. It was really gorgeous.

Q That was the Monday meal was it?

A That was every Monday.

Q Bessie, you haven't - if anybody can tell us - anything about how your mother really must have felt and got on as an immigrant in those days with a brother only that you have mentioned. Was the Jewish community helpful to her?

A Oh, there was the Board of Guardians there and occasionally I used to go there on a Sunday to pay sixpence so that we could draw some money out now and again. So I did that on an occasional Sunday, drew maybe five bob out or something. But the Jewish community didn't help us at all.

Q But you were brought up Jewish?

A Brought up Jewish, we didn't live among Jews, never. My mother knew Jews in the Gorbals and we used to visit and so on. We used to visit them regularly.

Q Do you think she had a rotten life or do you think she was.....

A Oh dreadful life - a born loser. Whatever she got her hand to, nothing came of it, nothing at all. By this time she had given up working, you know, when we started work, she gave up working.

Q So you kept her?

A Oh we kept her yes.

Q And how long did she live?

A Well, Sadie had left Glasgow by this time - well we both had left Glasgow by this time. We have a long way to go I think before then.

Q I just wondered, you know, ...

A Oh, dreadful life, absolutely ghastly.

Q It sounds as if it were a very lonely life.

A Ghastly, and a born loser. Absolute born loser. And she was a lovely woman, absolutely lovely, warm woman. And marvellous neighbour, you know. She was able to read cards for instance. And where we lived in the first place we had a great friend. A young girl, very, very handsome, sort of lustful girl, used to come to my mother to read cards. And this was during the war when her husband - her husband was a coalman and he was in the army and she had an affair with - I don't know whether you want to record all this - but....

Q OK

A Her husband was a coalman and he went into the army and she became a street sweeper - this Lizzie Whitelaw - and she met up with another street sweeper and they had a very violent affair - I don't mean violent - a very passionate affair. And she used to come to my mother's every week because my mother read cards and she used to come to have the cards read about her future with the street sweeper. Then the war ended and when Jimmy, her husband, came back from the war, he heard all about her goings on and, of course, he treated her like a dog, absolutely hit her and bullied her and she had children every year after that. She used to come to my mother regularly, every week, sort of crying about how she was being treated. And if she didn't come, her children came to tell my mother how the mother was very unhappy and so on. So that went on for years, quite a long, long, time. Then we lost trace of them, you know. So that episode ended.

Q I was interested in what you were saying when we were just chatting a little earlier about possibly your mother had a diary and possibly that's what kept her going in the early days. On the good days.

A It may have been. As I say we never actually starved - we were short of food, short of money and my mother was able to get tick, you know, in the grocer's round the corner, but not many Jewish shops. So maybe the funds were running, you know. And that, of course, was when we were very young, I was still at school, you know. Very possible.

Q Very possible. You were also saying what a really shrewd and clever woman your mother was although not good with money, but you were saying she could have been ....

A If she had been educated I think she would have been, you know, well she was articulate in a certain way, articulate in a sense that she was shrewd about people. But if she had been educated she would have been able to maybe do more for herself and so on. You know what I mean?

Q Yes. And the other thing Bessie you were saying as well, how bitterly really you think of your childhood, that it was a very sad time although you had a warm happy family atmosphere.

A Oh absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, couldn't have been cosy, you know.

Q But to think of your childhood upsets you a lot doesn't it?

A Aye, but just because of the struggle my mother had, you know. And she always said to us, which I think is a very Jewish thing 'Oh, you'll be a doctor, you know, or you'll be a lawyer' this very Jewish thing, you know, you wouldn't be a factory worker anyway, you know, you would make the grade, you know. That's a very Jewish thing. Oh absolutely, yes. You know, you would get on.

Q And I gather that you thought that, as you remembered it, that you and Sadie, the three sisters kept your mother in the latter days when she gave up working.

A She gave up working, well you see it was during the war and I was earning quite well, Sadie was earning quite well and the rent was negligible.

Q You still lived in this very slummy part?

A Oh absolutely. Oh yes.

Q Now, I wonder if you can remember how old you were and how old Sadie was when you first started getting interested in politics.

A Well, it was Sadie who would have been nineteen and I would have been - she was nineteen months older than me - so I would have been seventeen but late seventeen - and we were actually more interested in, although not hundred percent interested in the politics, we both had become atheists actually and we were reading the Rationalist Press at the time - Chapman Cone and people like that who, you know, were free thinkers. We were reading literature like that and we progressed from that to becoming active socialists. So then...

Q Were you in a group with friends or were you just the two of you...

A Well, Sadie by this time had gone into the shop to find out.

Q Oh this is the shop you mentioned?

A Yes, the literature shop.

Q It sold socialist literature?

A And we got to know a few people and we met sort of as a group and talked and, of course, at that time, I used to go rambling and camping and so on, did a lot of that even before we were in, but I didn't tell you, and then the party was formed I think in 1920.

Q And Sadie was already a speaker by this time?

A She was already a speaker by then, became quite fairly well known practically all over Scotland. She used to go round mining villages, speaking and so on. So we got to know a lot of mining communities and I sometimes went with her, you know. We got to know mining families and we were accepted there and often invited back to stay with them and so on. Then at that period we got really interested in trade unionism and I got Sadie into the place I was working in which was a very high class ladies tailoring place. And we had arranged - we got in touch with the union, the Tailoring and Garment Workers Union - although I was the member I was the sleeping member, you know, not active or anything and quite frankly I don't remember paying up my dues a lot at that time. But we got really keen and we got in touch with the Tailoring and Garment Workers Union and arranged for an organiser to come into the factory and talk to a few...

Tape 3 - Side B

Q You were talking about how you got an organiser into the shop.

A Well, the organiser didn't appear, someone must have squealed on us and Sadie and I were called to the boss who said 'out you go' so we were..

Q Were you really?

A Oh absolutely. So we were out. That's right. Both. And then, anyway,

Q You got other jobs.

A Yes, eventually.

Q Would the war still be on or..

A Oh no, oh no, the war was ended by then. Oh the war was ended by then. And I first got a job in this place - it was all gent's work and it was....

Q This was another job now?

A Another job. Still being very highly skilled and I was doing all the top work where it was piece work and then I got Sadie in, she wasn't skilled, she was what was called a felling hand, you know, she only did ordinary sewing. But it had to be of good standard. And it was this time I was bent on coming to London, at this period, and my plans were to get to London when I could. So I stayed on there and I knew I couldn't get to London while my mother was there on her own. The eldest sister who had got married by this time, she lived in Manchester and all of a sudden, whatever business he was in, I can't remember what it was, folded up and decided to come to Glasgow and I disliked my brother in law intensely, disliked him, they had nowhere to go, so they came to our slum house where we had this extra room, you know. And the thing is you had no privacy there at all, there were two of them, because the room went off, it was like one big apartment with a door in between, you know what I mean. And I thought this is my cue to get away. And I arranged through the party, we had a great friend who used to visit us, and he was on the executive of the party, to come. I had arranged a date when I would go because you could go to London on a day ticket for twenty-six shillings. And I arranged for him, when I was in the executive meeting to take my - you couldn't take a suitcase if you went on this day thing to London, you know you could only have a hand thing, you know, otherwise they knew you were going to stay there - so I got him to take my luggage down to London and I would probably come in two weeks time so that I could make my arrangements, you know. So he deposited my luggage at the party headquarters and I arranged to go I think about two weeks later.

Q You haven't talked very much about the party in Glasgow or the people you knew there.

A Oh, of course, that's where I got all my political education, naturally.

Q Yes, so do tell us about that.

A Well as I say, we were in the thick of it - Sadie, you know, very much in the thick of it. All the people we met, mostly men.

Q Famous some of them? Famous now?

A Oh, they are all dead now.

Q Yes, but the names?

A Well you wouldn't know, the names wouldn't mean anything to people.

Q You mentioned Willie Gallagher a minute ago.

A Well, he was in Scotland, yes.

Q I mean in Scotland Bessie. Before you left Scotland you haven't talked about ....

A Very friendly with him and when he was speaking in Glasgow he always came to our house.

Q Oh, I see, he..

A He came from Paisley which was about six miles outside. We used to visit him and then there was another chap called George Aitken who eventually became a big shot in the international brigade, you know. George Aitken - his son is now one of the top journalists on The Guardian.

Q Oh well, he's famous isn't he? Ian Aitken?

A Ian Aitken, yes. Oh I knew him as I used to take him on the heath and play with him and so on when they came to London. We used to go to classes on Marxism, small classes and then...

Q The traffic's so loud now Bessie I think you will have to speak up a little bit. It is heavy outside.

A Ah yes, because of commuter time. So we went to classes on Marxism and did canvassing and all that work. Sadie later on - well we went to classes as all my political education was in Glasgow and they were all ordinary railwaymen, engineers, electricians, street cleaners, every type and all philosophers and really intellectual people, not just interested in politics but literature...

Q Well, that's Scotland for you isn't it? I mean..

A Window, complete window open, literature everything.

Q How wonderful Bessie, how marvellous.

A Then Sadie was taken up. They suggested that she went to the first party congress, that's right, in 1922.

Q Where was that held?

A In - was it Manchester? Sorry, I don't know, I wasn't at it. Anyway she was taken up by all the top people, you know, like Paige Arnot and they were all associated with the labour research department which was a department that provided information to the movement, the labour movement, you know, on profits made by industries and so on, you know, provided facts, you know for trade unions and political parties and so on. So this was much later on. They invited her to go to London for a month and work in the department. By this time, you know, I had pretty well organised myself to go to London and I knew if I went if there was somebody staying

with my mother they would pay my mother at least something towards food and I committed myself to sending money every week, irrespective. So when I got to London Sadie was there but I had nowhere to stay and the Gallaghers were living in London - Willie Gallagher - he was living in London at the time as executive of the party, but still going round the country speaking and so on. So I slept on their floor for a week. By this time I wrote to my union - Tailoring and Garment Workers Union - saying that I was coming to London and if they could help me find a job I would appreciate it. And I had been in London a week and I heard from them and quite frankly Tommy - I cannot remember or whether I telephoned - but anyway I got a job and it was through the union.

Q How splendid.

A It was an - very, very, high class work - evening menswear.

Q Where abouts was that?

A It was off Brewer Street - Pultney(?) Street. Right in the West End. I was tickled pink. It was all evening work - silk facings and tails and, of course, I was marvellous at all that work, hundred percent. And, of course, I wasn't long there until I got roped in to be the shop steward. And I had been there quite a few months and by this time we had a weekly party paper and I used to take the party paper in and sell it, sell what I could to the people, you know, the factory people. All of a sudden they asked me to be shop steward which was very short lived. I had only been shop steward for about a week or two when I was given the sack.

Q Were you really?

A Well, I have left out something but I will come back to it. I got my union on the thing, I didn't get any notice, I was sacked on the spot, and they fought for me to get a week's pay which I did, I got a week's pay. Anyway by this time, which I omitted to tell you, Sadie was resident in London and there was a very rich - we got a room together eventually just down the road from where the Gallaghers lived in Junction Road, in Kentish Town. It was the top of Kentish Town Road, the very top. Corner of Breaknought(?) Road. It was overrun with mice, I remember that and I think we paid twelve shillings a week. Sadie was very friendly with a woman called Marjorie Craig who was married to H G Wells' son - the scientist - J P Wells, very well known. And she said to Sadie 'I have got a friend called Mary Moorhouse who is living abroad and she has a flat in Raymen(?) Buildings in Gray's Inn and she would like someone to occupy it, no rent to pay, telephone, everything, and this was in Gray's Inn. So she recommended Sadie and I to have this flat. So we installed ourselves in this very prestigious existence where there was a janitor had to

let you in and so on. It was No. 2 Raymen Buildings. So anyway we were installed there, we had a marvellous time, everybody came there, we had lovely parties and so on, super time, very commodious, about four rooms, you know, telephone. Well, I knew what a telephone was but not used one. And we were there for a few months when the General Strike happened and I was working at this time in a very, very high class place, off Bond Street in South Molden Street, tiny, tiny place but very high class work, everything done by hand, suited me down to the - I loved it. Anyway the General Strike took place and our flat, being very central - nobody could get home, you know, no buses, I walked to work when I was working, Sadie was speaking all over the place - and people came and kipped down there for the night. And, of course, the place was haunted by detectives outside.

Q Because of your known Communist sympathies..?

A Well, exactly..

Q Or trade union..?

A Exactly, well party and so on and Sadie speaking. Of course, I was friendly with Ralph by then.

Q Now, what was Ralph doing then?

A Ralph was working at party headquarters, what we call a Party Functionary, you know, he was being paid by then, I think he was in charge of industrial work and that's how I met him, because he was put on to me with so few factory workers, I was a factory worker and, of course, I was treated like a Goddess, you know, at the time. So he came and, of course, he sort of fell for me straight away and we - didn't live together or anything - but we, you know, were going out together and so on, he was living with his parents. So anyway, I came home from work one day and on the stairs I met Jean Gallagher - Willie Gallagher's wife - she said to me ' Bessie, I don't think you should go into the flat, there are about nine detectives there and they are looking for you and looking for Sadie'. So I said ' why should I run away, I mean, I'll be caught anyway, so I might as well go in and face it'. So she went off and I went in. Quite true - there were I think about nine or ten people and the duty inspector - Chief Inspector Frost - I'll never forget him. And they were looking because the party was publishing a paper which was illegal...

Q Why was it illegal?

A Well, they were appealing to - yes the party was publishing a paper - but that wasn't illegal. They wanted to know where it was published. Now I'll tell you the development later on.

So anyway, this Chief Inspector Frost could tell me the day I came to London, where I had lived, when I joined the Communist Party and so on and they were looking for me and looking for my sister, particularly. So there was one room in this flat, the door was locked, we didn't know what was in it at all. And they had knocked this door down to get in - it was full - typewriter, desks, nothing else, desks. The party did publish a paper because we used to go out and sell it at night, you know, round Kings Cross. I'll never forget that, it was just a mass of people, you couldn't move, you know, it was so crowded with people, you know with the strike being on and so on. We used to go around trying to sell the paper. Anyway, the telephone rang and it was one of these old fashioned telephones with the hook. So it was a woman called Kay Beecham - a very well known woman in the party - and he picked up the piece on the hook and she said 'this is Kate, what is happening'. 'Well', I said, I can't talk to you now Kate, you know, it is not convenient'. He said ' talk and talk'. I said 'I can't talk to you now Kay' and I hung up the receiver. So she obviously got the hint there was obviously some people there. So eventually I was told that I would be taken to Canon Row Police Station. I had no money on me, nothing, just - it was a very hot day and I just had a jumper and skirt and so on - it was summery. And I went down and there was a Rolls Royce waiting there and a very handsome chap driver and he said 'I am taking you to Canon Row - is there anything I can do for you?' Chatted me up. I said 'no thank you' you know, very haughty, and he said 'if there is anything I can do would you let me know, I have followed you around and I like you'. Obviously he had seen me at meetings and so on and whether he was genuine or not, anyway I didn't want to know because he was a detective. So I was kept at Canon Row Police Station and there was somebody like a judge you know on a platform. He asked my name and he said 'a nice girl like you being caught up in all this.'

Q Did he really?

A Absolutely. So I was there about an hour or so and who appears but Sadie, they had caught up with her. Of course, Sadie looked very smart as well. We were nicely dressed, we weren't bad looking and so on. So she appeared and they questioned her and said 'nice girl like you being caught up, you and your sister, terrible. I tell you what I'll do. I am not supposed to do this. I'll put you in the same cell tonight but in the morning we will have to separate you because people come round'. So we were in the same cell for the night and the Jailer woman that came clanking the - you know who was in the cell - Matahari. Absolutely. So in the morning....

Q What was she like?

A Oh she looked like a jailer, you know, tough looking, you know, and she had masses of keys.

Q Matahari?

A Oh, sorry - I don't know what Matahari was like but she said that Matahari had been in that cell. Matahari had been polished off years ago. So we were separated in the morning and we were taken to Bleasdon Police Station which was next door to our very posh block of flats - Gray's Inn - you know at the corner of ? Road and Gray's Inn Road. And there we were charged for having in our possession literature likely to effect the civil and armed forces. Well, cause we had nothing like that but, while the strike was on, you know, it was open house, everybody lived there, the young Communist league had gone in with a Gestener and had run off something. And Ralph got wind of this and he went there at once and made them get rid of the Gestetner and to clear out because the place was overrun by detectives. But they found the stencil that they had dropped on the floor. So that was the charge. So we went back to our flat and it was barred and bolted, couldn't get in - 'Any enquirers please apply to the Treasurer of the Inn'. So I went to the Treasurer of the Inn, we had nothing but what we stood up in. We said to him.

Q This was the next day was it? You were only in prison overnight?

A Overnight because our case would be coming up. So we went to the Treasurer, told him who we were, that we had occupied 2 Rayman Buildings and he said 'oh we can't let you in until we get in touch with Scotland Yard'. So we had to wait ages and he eventually came and took all the things off and we were just given our purse. They took things away and I can't remember what they were to tell you the truth, took things from our handbag away. I don't think we had a handbag in those days, did we? Anyway, so they said - when the detectives were there, that's right, they made a note of everything we took, that was it. And they said 'where will we contact you', you know, we were homeless pretty well. 'Oh' they said ' we know, we'll go to 38 Maitlandburgh Square. No 38 Maitlandburgh Square was occupied by the top intellectuals of the party - they were active workers, I mean, but they were the crème de la crème, you know, sort of thing. And Jean Gallagher was the housekeeper, Willie was staying there, Willie Gallagher, because he was an MP by then. That's right, he got in then. He took Willie Hamilton's seat you know. 'Oh we'll get in touch with 38 Maitlandburgh Square and we'll let you know when to turn up in court'. So they did that and we turned up - oh the lovely man who vetted for us - he was a well, well known man - W H Thomson - wonderful man who used to defend trade unionists and

political people who got into trouble and so on. And he was married - I mentioned Kate Beecham who rang when we were at the flat - her sister was married to him. So he defended us. So we turned up at Bow Street, that's right, Bow Street. There was Marjorie Pollet, Bob Stewart, there were five of us, and there was a chap called George Myles. I can't remember the other people. Because Bob Stewart, you know, the party headquarters were raided during the strike and Bob Stewart was one of the executors. Anyway, the case came up and we were charged with having in our possession literature likely to cause disaffection among the armed forces and we were let off to keep the peace for twelve months. But the General Strike had been called off by then, because if it hadn't been called off we would have been in prison.

Q Of course, you would yes.

A So that was that. Do you want to go on from there?

Q I'd like a little pause. OK. Off we go then. Where were you working by this time - in the same job or .....?

A No, oh no, couldn't go back to that job. So I had to look for another job.

Q Of course, you had got the sack hadn't you?

A Well, I didn't get the sack but I knew that I couldn't turn up to it more or less. Well, I hadn't turned up, you know, so I couldn't go back to it. Now what did I do after that? Where did I work? I worked, I think, in little sway pens (sweat ?) after that.

Q Now Ralph was around?

A Oh yes, Ralph was around.

Q But you weren't married yet?

A No. No.

Q Ralph was working for the party.

A He was the Party Functionary and we decided to take up house together and we found a flat in the street where Dickens lived in Bloomsbury, oh dear, Bessie, come on, pull yourself together.

Q I don't know.

A Downsy(?) Street. Very expensive.

Q And I suppose Ralph was getting decent money?

A Oh no. Far from it. Not at all. I was in a factory and I was earning as much as him. So that was 1926, that would be the strike was May wasn't it, May 1st, so it would be the end of June

we moved there. And I said it was a ridiculous payment, you know, thinking of the Glasgow rents and the rent there - it was a furnished flat, of course, furnished. And we were there, I suppose about six months and we decided to look for an unfurnished place after that. Ralph, he hadn't told his parents - he was living with his parents - I'm sorry, he was living with his parents when he started up with me and then he told them - I don't think I had met them by then - that he was going to get married, we didn't get married but he told them we were going to get married and that we were looking for a flat, which we did, and we got a flat in Croftdown Road off Highgate Road - 24 Croftdown Road - and I remember they got us a carpet for the sitting room.

Q Do you remember how much you paid for the flat?

A Oh definitely. Even thought that was a fortune. Twenty-five shillings a week which was in retrospect, you know, very cheap.

Q Well, I don't know.

A To me rents - speaking in Glasgow standards, you know thinking of Glasgow standards, because don't forget Sadie and I lived in this room twelve shillings to start with. Then we got this free place in Gray's Inn so we didn't have experience. Then we got this furnished for two pounds ten a week which I thought was a fortune.

Q Well, Bessie, I think it was quite a lot of money because when I got an unfurnished flat, my first unfurnished flat in London in 1938, I paid eighteen shillings a week for three rooms in Swiss Cottage. But mind you it was sharing a bathroom.

A Was that unfurnished?

Q Yes. And this was a gas stove on a landing. Anyhow, that's only by the way. I think it is very interesting to know how things...... You don't remember how much you would be earning or Ralph would be earning?

A I would be earning about two pounds ten a week.

Q Well, that would be good pay.

A And Ralph would be earning about two pounds.

Q That would be good pay?

A Oh yes, in those days. Well, we always had a holiday. Ralph was a saver. I wasn't. So he was the one who saved so we always could have a holiday which we had. So that would be late 1926 and we stayed in this flat for eight years 1934 and he reduced the rent, our landlord, Ralph used to speak on Parliament Hill and the landlord was always listening - I saw him while I

was going there, you know, and distributing leaflets and so on, you know - and he was always there, you know. He reduced our rent to eighteen shillings a week.

Q That's marvellous. Would you like to talk anything about Ralph's sort of rise in - not exactly in the party - but I know he trained himself to speak by speaking in the open air, didn't he?

A Oh, it was all open air.

Q Well, in latter days it wasn't. It was at the ACT meetings and things but that was his training ground....

A Oh, party propaganda, oh absolutely, absolutely. During that period, now this - he had left the party headquarters and he started up the Workers Film Society.

Q Oh, did he?

A And that's where he met Grierson.

Q Was that a sort of amateur thing?

A No, no, it showed all the classics, the Russian classics.

Q Oh, what I really meant was - it wasn't a production company?

A Oh, no, no. It was a film society. ....? ? ? to the Scala in Charlotte Street.

Q Oh, yes, I remember.

A Every Sunday and all the Russian classics. He met Grierson then. You know Grierson always takes up people, you know, he was interested in Ralph and they used to meet a lot and he came every Sunday to the Scala. Oh, and Ralph joined the, you know the New Gallery, they had a film society and Ralph, every film he saw as a young boy, he had a review of it in a book. 'I saw it. You know, I saw such and such a film and this is what I thought of it.' You know, when I met him. He joined the films at the New Gallery and every Sunday the New Gallery had a film show and, of course, I felt terribly out of it then, very shy, you know.

Q Did you not go?

A Oh I went but very shy you know in amongst all those top people, sort of very high brow people and so on. And after the film show we used to go to Valerie's in Old Compton Street for coffee and so on and all the chat that went on and so on. And I felt very shy, really....

Q Do you remember what other film people would be around then?

A Well, there was Grierson, Margaret, I think Ralph knew Ivor Montague because he was very active in the party. I could have told you a little incident about Ivor Montague during the General Strike. Is it worth mentioning?

Q Oh, I should think so. Can you hold on a sec? How's that now? Yes, off you go. We were having a little digression to Ivor Montague.

A Well Ivor Montague joined the party when he was very young and Ralph and I occasionally visited him and Hill, you know his wife, who were living somewhere outside Watford, as far as I remember. I remember going there one weekend and we met Walter Greenwood? there, who wrote 'Love on the Dole'. I think we stayed the weekend that weekend. I was still very shy, you know with them and Hill (Helen?) and we used to - who else did we meet when we went to the film society? - Adrian Breunel and I can't remember the other people, quite honestly. We used to go there every Sunday.

Q This is the New Gallery?

A At the New Gallery in Regent Street. And then set up this Workers Film Society and Grierson used to come there, and Margaret and they became great friends. I remember them coming to our flat in Croftdown Road and Ralph talking to them and so on and having great discussions and all that. And I think through that association Ralph got to work with the Empire Marketing Board down at Blackheath.

Q So he was into the very early days of documentary films?

A Absolutely. We used to go home, we had a free moment and we have very few free moments, slaving for the party, you know. And always the cinema, you know, any cinema and then when we lived in Croftdown Road we used to go to the Kentish Town cinema in Kentish Town Road. It's not there now, you know. We used to go there regularly. He had this passion for films, there was no doubt about it, dedicated. So after that, we stayed in that flat for 1934.

Q And you told me you had worked with the Russian.

A Russian All Products

Q For some years.

A For six years.

Q Did you enjoy it?

A Oh, very much. I was very well paid, very well paid. In fact, phenomenally well paid compared with, you know, my jobs in the factories. That finished in 1934 and then I went back to tailoring again and then I thought 'well, why not try and get some clerical type of job and see if I could get away from the factories, you know, that would 34. Then ACT was formed and my then husband was very active with helping to organise and when he worked with the Empire Marketing

Board he organised the unit there at Blackheath and that about 1934 I was asked if I could come in now and again to give them some help with circularisation. George Elman was the General Secretary.

Q Sorry, I broke you up then Bessie. Would you like to start when you first went to the ACT?

A So George Elman was the General Secretary and he had a secretary but on occasions there was some circularisation to do and George asked if I would come in and help them to do this circularisation and I only got a pittance for my fares or something. This was during the war.

Q Oh, but you skipped from 1934 to the war now.

A Oh,

Q So you must have had other jobs did you because you wouldn't be earning enough from the ACT would you at that time?

A Oh no, Anyway I only went there - I didn't work there full time, far from it. That's quite true. That was when I went back to tailoring and then I decided to try and get some clerical jobs and occasionally I did get odd jobs - telephone operating here and there - and I remember getting one job at Canada House which was a huge organisation and a much bigger board than I was ever used to. But anyway I would get that job maybe for holiday relief and I remember being asked again to go there, you know, here and there. And maybe get an odd job. It was mostly telephone operating as far as I remember, you know, a little office. I remember working in a solicitor's office in the city - Touche - I remember working there and I was asked back there for relief work. And that went on, you see, for some time. So I didn't do a lot of tailoring, I think, in between I would do these sort of odd clerical jobs, office jobs.

Q So you were really building up quite a skill?

A Yes, I was becoming a skilled telephone operator anyway, you know.

Q And all the time, of course, as far as your political work was concerned you were very active.

A Oh yes, day and night. Oh absolutely. Leafleting and...

Q That was Hitler's Germany and all these things going on.

A And we had a tram depot near where we lived, and I used to go there at midnight, for our paper, to sell it, and the last tram came in about after midnight and I would be there say about

eleven o clock, half past eleven and try and sell the party paper. And when the last tram came in I finished then, you know. I maybe sold two papers and was chuffed, chuffed.

Q Bessie, to give that under a broader question now, how much do you think being a member of the Communist Party has been prejudicial to you for working purposes. It would be when you were organising shops, I am sure, but ....

A Oh, no. I was in the factory.

Q As a Socialist rather than a Communist wouldn't we, in a sense a trade unionist rather than a Communist.

A Oh, trade union, being an active trade union.

Q Do you get my point? How much do you think being an **actual** Communist has hindered you through prejudice in a working life?

A Can't say it has.

Q You don't think so? People knew you were a Communist?

A The Communist thing was that thing when Sadie and I were kicked out of that factory in Glasgow when the organiser was coming, although we were politically active, but that was a trade union thing.

Q I was terrifically impressed when you told me, very much later, after you retired from the ACT, and you got a job with the - I should know - the Royal Commission ...

A Well, I told the Royal Commission everything.

Q I know you did and they were happy to have you.

A Absolutely, they didn't turn a hair. I worked in Russia, worked in Russia and I was an organiser for the trade union and Mr Starch(?) a lovely man, said 'oh my son has been to the Soviet Union' he was very impressed.

Q That's marvellous. - **End of tape**