

ORAL HISTORY – QUEENSLAND COMMUNIST PARTY

TRANSCRIBED RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH DIGGER MURPHY

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Interviewer: Ross Gwyther

DIGGER: I was born at Bundamba, actually, just a couple of miles away from here. My first indication of life, if I could put it that way, was sort of, my father was a miner and he'd decided in his early life to go to Collinsville, where the State had just opened up a new coal mine. The only way to get there was to go by ship, because there was no rail link in those days. That was about 1922, round about then.

I just have a faint recollection of walking up some stairs and getting to the top and there was a big storm on. This ship was rolling all over the sea. All I could see was going backwards and forwards. Well, I'd be three at that time, and of course I shouldn't have been there at all. Anyway, one of the seamen must have grabbed me and took me back down to wherever I came from. That was my first recollection of life.

I started school in Collinsville, and I sort of grew up until I was about 10/11, when my brother and I came back to Ipswich, but I had my early schooling there, and early experiences there, which were a bit different to the way they lived when they came down here. Naturally, I got myself into a bit of bloody bother. I was a pretty wild young fellow, apparently, in Collinsville.

Well, you know, just down the road from us there was a tribe of Aborigines. That was their home territory. They lived there, and they went on their walkabouts from there and that sort of thing. Of course, I knocked around with the Aboriginal kids, you know. We were in the bush and we lived in bag humpies, actually, before they were able to get a house when we lived in Collinsville, so I suppose consequently I was a bit wild in my early years. Anyhow, that was my first introduction to life in Collinsville, really.

We came down here [*Ipswich*], of course, and got to the school. Well, I left school when I was 13 in the Depression days, round the late 1929/30, got a job back in the sawmill when I was 13. The greatest bloody case of exploitation of youth I'd ever experienced, I think, and anybody else had ever experienced, was there. I was working six days – well, half a day on Saturday – for ten and sixpence a week, and that was one dollar and five cents in today's money, so you can work out how much – you're working nine hours a day. That was my first experience.

Well, of course, being a little bit rebellious, it sort of got up my nose, and I finished up getting the bloody sack. The boss decided to sack me. I said, 'The bloody best thing you could do' – a cheeky little bugger, you know. 'I'll go and get a bloody job where I can get a decent wage. I won't have to work for you bastards anymore.' Oh, he was going to boot my arse and everything. I said, 'Well, come on!' I had a big pick handle in my hand at the time, but he didn't come near me, so off I went home.

ROSS: So how old were you then?

DIGGER: I was thirteen – no, I was fourteen, actually, yes. Anyhow, my grandfather, Charles Kilpatrick, he was President of the Miners Union. He was the first full-time elected President of the Union, actually. Anyway, Mum must have went and had a word with him, I didn't have a job and, you know, so he sent for me to go and see Mr Walker. See, all the elders went through the Union to get their leave back in those days, too – in the mines they did, anyway.

So I went to see Mr Walker. He lived just up the road from where we were. I knew him, you know. 'Yes, we've got a job for you. Start on Monday.' So that's how I came into the Miners Union and into the mining industry. I worked on the surface for a couple of years, and then went underground. I worked for about 20 years underground, and was always interested in the Union, of course, because I thought my grandfather was the most important man in the world because he was President of the Miners Union, you know. I used to brag to my friends about it.

He was also, he became a Member of the Upper House in Queensland when it was still alive, and he was one of those – I think they called them the Suicide Squad. He was one of those that was elected into the Upper House to bring about its abolition, and they did, of course. That was after the first War, '22, getting rid of the Upper House. So he was Member of the Legislative Council, too, so he was a pretty active bloke himself.

ROSS: What about during those early years? What were the sort of political influences that you would have had on you as you were growing up, before you had started work, and then when you first started work? Was your family sort of interested in politics?

DIGGER: No, not particularly. Well, Dad was, or I don't think he was ever a member, or he could have been in the early days, a member of the Labor Party. Of course, old Charlie, he was pretty influential in the Labor Party himself. He was a so-called committee member of years, before he became a politician. No, Dad wasn't – he never spoke a lot about politics. I didn't know much about politics and I used to listen to people, you know, particularly when elections were coming up and that sort of thing. I suppose I was about 17/18 maybe, and I was on my way out to my girlfriend's one night, riding the pushbike, you know – no other way to get around; we never had enough bloody money to go any other way, anyhow – and a bloke was speaking on the street corner down at Bundamba, not far from where I lived, and I stopped to listen to him, you know. I said, 'Jesus, that's the sort of thing we ought to be doing,' you know, 'He's got the right idea.' That was my humble opinion, he'd got the right idea. One of the blokes came over – he had two or three blokes with him, you know – one of them came over and said, 'Are you interested in politics?' I said, 'Well, I don't know about interested, but I'd like to get interested.' I found out this bloke was a member of the Communist Party, that was speaking. His name was (?0:09:35.1) Welsby, and he was only about my age, a pretty young bloke at the time, you know.

So that happened, and sort of no further contact. He didn't ask me to join the Communist Party or anything like that, you know. Anyhow, at work – this was about the same time as this happened, round about – it was the Branch Election for Officers of the Union to that particular Branch. I was nominated for President and I said, 'Come on, I'm just a boy!' These were all older blokes. I was the only youth there, you know.

Oh, no, thought, 'No, you can be President. We'll help you.' And they never helped me at all. I had to do it all on my own, anyhow. So anyhow, I was 17 when I was elected President

of the Branch of the Union, and I was an officer in the Union from that day till the day I retired.

ROSS: When you say 'the Branch of the Union,' did they call it a Lodge?

DIGGER: Yes. Well, they called it a Lodge in New South Wales. We called it a Branch here, but later on after my time it became a Lodge here, the same as New South Wales, yes.

ROSS: So it was a Branch that was based on one of the mines, the mine where you were working?

DIGGER: The mine I worked at, yes. We had Committee, Chairman, Secretary. Some Lodges had a Treasurer and Scrutineers, a group of about six or seven people who looked after the affairs of the Union in that particular Lodge, yes.

Anyhow, I got to the stage along the line that I wanted to go further in the Union, of course, had that ambition. I'd joined the Party in the meantime, over the years – 1942, actually.

ROSS: Can you tell me about how you came to join the Party?

DIGGER: Yes. A bloke named – I suppose you've heard of Tom Miller, Bluey Miller? He was elected President during the year after Martin Miller retired. Martin Miller followed my grandfather, who died in 1935. In fact, my grandfather died the day before I started. I was to start in the mine on the Monday, and he died on the Sunday. Martin Miller became the President, then he retired, and Bluey Miller won the ballot for President. Well, he came down here, because we knew him, and my father played in the band in Collinsville.

We lived across the road from them in the bush, if you could call it a road – a little bloody track, it was – so they were there and we were on the other side in bag humpies, and of course we were young kids and the Millers were teenage kids, getting along. They were working in the mine by then, the Miller brothers. There was three of them – no, there were four brothers, and they just treated us like real family, you know.

Anyhow, when Blue came down we got talking one day, and he said, 'You know, Digger, you should be getting yourself involved in politics.' I said, 'Yeah, I've been thinking about it for ages, but no bugger's ever asked me,' you know. 'Well,' he said, 'I'm asking you to join the Communist Party.' I said, 'Yeah, right, I will.' So that's how I started, they recruited me.

I was my family and Mum was short, you know, 'What would your grandfather think?' I said, 'Well, Mum, by now Grandfather might have joined the Communist Party himself.'

Anyhow, they got over that and from then on nobody could say anything about me. You know, people might talk about Communists and that, and they'd say, 'Do you know that Digger's a Communist?' 'So he's not what you're saying here, they are.' She used to defend me, you know. So that's how I became a member.

ROSS: So that was 1942, during the War?

DIGGER: Yes.

ROSS: What sort of impact did the War have on your working time then? You were working in the mines then.

DIGGER: Well, I would have joined the Forces, but not being the age, 21, you know, I was only still a teenager. My mother said, 'You're not joining anything,' you know, because she was anti-War. You know, 'Young people shouldn't be going to War, getting killed because someone else said they should.' Anyhow, Mum wasn't up in politics, but she was pretty militant. No, actually, I tried to join the Navy but I was colour-blind. They found I was colour-blind. I knew I was, and they didn't know until they gave me these tests and they said, you know, 'We don't want you.'

So, anyhow, I was called up then for the – what did they call them – conscripted, that's it. Anyhow, I went up and they gave me this list of all I had to do, all about what was going to happen. I was to be back there at a certain date and I had to bring with me, you know, two or three pairs of socks, a pannikin and an enamel plate – all the bloody sorts of things that I had to take up with me, that I ended up there with.

Then, 'What's your name?' I said, 'Murphy.' They said, 'What's your first name?' I said, 'Charles McKenzie.' Yeah, looked it up and he said, 'You're a coal miner.' I said, 'Of course I'm a bloody coal miner. Half of Ipswich are coal miners. He said, 'Get back to bloody work. We want coal. We want men, too, but we want coal more.' He just wiped me like a bloody dirty arse. I could have said, 'Up you, mate,' and gone and joined, I suppose, but Mum wouldn't have it, so I remained in the pits, there you go, back to the pits.

ROSS: You said you worked in the mines for 20 years. What would you have done after that, because then you would have been about 34/35?

DIGGER: Yes.

ROSS: What did you do after that?

DIGGER: Well, as I say, I had ideas of becoming really involved in the Union. I wanted to be Union Officer, you know, so the election came up for Check Inspector, but before that I said to myself – I had no bloody education, you know – I took classes at the Ipswich Technical College on Mining. They used to run Mining classes there for Mine Managers and that sort of thing, but they also ran a class for Mine Deputies. First of all, I had to get a Deputy's certificate.

Anyhow, I went to college and studied. In fact, I went to college for six years altogether, and to be a Check Inspector, which I was going to – that was my aim, you know, to become a Check Inspector for the Union, but you had to have a Deputy's certificate, so I was nominated by my Branch of the union for the position of Check Inspector, and I won it and become a Check Inspector.

ROSS: So what did the Check Inspector do? What sort of job was that?

DIGGER: Well, now, I'll never forget this – I'll tell you something else about that after – but the Check Inspector went to mines, inspected them to make sure they were safe for the Union Members to work in, and the Branches themselves or the Lodges themselves, they elected their local heck Inspector in between Union Check Inspector, Union Check Inspectors, they could determine if there was some controversy about them being safe in the mornings.

They were the ones that handled it, so then they'd ring up and say, 'We want a Check Inspector out there.'

So we inspected it for safety right through, ventilation, if everything was safe underground as far as roof conditions and all that sort of thing, so it was a general – and there were Government Inspectors who used to go around, you know, periodically, have a cursory look at the pit and go up to the Mine Office and probably have a Scotch or two with the Mine Manager, and write his report in the book, you know.

Of course, our Check Inspectors, we went down, we took our local Branch Check Inspector with us, and inspected the mine, put our report in the book, and if there was anything wrong, either things had to be fixed immediately or there would be no work in the mine. Well, you know, you sort of gave them that. Those particular areas of the mine would be closed as far as our members are concerned. They won't go there until they're made so. That was the sort of thing the Check Inspector did.

In fact, one owner said to me, or one Manager said to me on one occasion, when I said, 'Well, I'm stopping your pit,' you know, 'until you get this fixed. Otherwise, you're not getting the coal out.' 'Oh,' he said, 'we'll get our Inspector out.' I said, 'Oh, you'll get your inspector out, will you? The bastard knew that he'd made a big blue, you know, 'Get our inspector out' – he's gone and got the Government Mines Inspector. All the Government Mines Inspector that I ever knew were my managers at one time, Mine Managers. They were workers in the pit, you know, well, they were workers in the pit, but they were Mine Managers. I suppose this is why this bloke said, 'Well, I'll get our Inspector.'

Then I was a Check Inspector for eight years, actually, and there were two of us, two Check Inspectors, and in those days I think there were about 12 working mines in Rosewood, and about 20 in Ipswich at that time, and the rest were scattered in places like up round Torbanlea and Maryborough, Blair Athol, Collinsville and Mt Mulligan, up to North West of Cairns, so they were pretty widespread.

ROSS: Then after you worked as a Check Inspector, what sort of work did you do after that? Did you study as a Union Official?

DIGGER: Yes, well, Bluey Miller retired in 1964 and the Party sort of decided that I should be the Party candidate for the position of President, you know, I said, 'Oh, I don't know whether I'm up for that or ready for it.' They said, 'Well, you should be by now. You've had 20 years, nearly, 20 odd bloody years in the industry, and eight years as a Check Inspector.' So anyhow, I thought, 'Okay.' I read and I thought, 'Well, why not?' I'm trying to think, and there was no other bugger that I know could do any better than me.

Yeah, there was a fair field that ran for it, so I won the position in 1974 when old Blue retired, and I was there until I retired, which was 15 years.

ROSS: So when you say Blue, he would have been from a Labor Party background, rather than from a Communist Party background?

DIGGER: No, he was a member of the Communist Party in Collinsville, when he was elected.

ROSS: Just go back to when you sort of got involved in the Party. Can you tell me a bit about that? Like, once you joined, what did that mean to your sort of daily life? You would have gone to Party Meetings and so on?

DIGGER: Yes.

ROSS: Tell me a little bit about being in the Party. How did that affect your sort of daily life and your life at work?

DIGGER: Yes, it affected me a fair amount, actually, and of course I was always the sort of bloke that, if I joined something, I was in it boots and all, you know. I didn't join it just for the sake of joining it. I wanted to be as active in it as I was able, so that I went to meetings. We used to have our meetings, I think, about fortnightly, at a Party Member's house somewhere.

ROSS: What would you do at those meeting?

DIGGER: Well, we used to discuss all sorts of, you know, current problems with the workers in our area and so, involve myself in Party decisions. We had, they used to run classes, political classes, you know. Our tutors, they were fairly knowledgeable and they used to – we'd have ~~(0:27:39.7) and they'd be those during the day somewhere, maybe~~ down on the river bank, make it a bit more pleasant than sitting around in a bloody smoke-filled room or whatever. Sometimes, of course, it was in a house. It wasn't always outside. Like, they ran classes on all the ins and outs of Communism, what it meant, and what a Communist's responsibilities are.

ROSS: Yes, so the Party would have given you some responsibility as a member, in particular, like, was each person's job – I'm just interested in how the Party actually operated then. Would you have been given some sort of responsibility?

DIGGER: Yeah, well, not as an individual, but as a group, yes. Well, we of course involved ourselves in elections. We from time to time had street meetings. Somebody would be speaker for that street meeting, going out, telling the people all about our Party work and what Communism would mean to, you know, the people of Australia.

In some instances, of course, we got a pretty noisy reception, but in other instances a fair amount of support for the Party speakers. We used to have them in town there in the main street in Ipswich, a prominent speaker from the Party there. We had Fred Paterson there on one or two occasions, some of the other State Party leaders at these meetings, particularly right in town, you know, where you had a fair audience.

ROSS: And what about at work, you know, in the Union Branch and so on? There would have been a few of you who were Members of the Party?

DIGGER: I was the only one at my Branch, where I worked. I did recruit a couple of the lads there over the years that I was there, that came there, got interested in politics. Well, all sorts of things happened over the years, you know. Issues would come up, protests were organised and necessary. We had many days off over the years, protesting about whatever the issue was.

ROSS: You said that there were quite a lot of mines here, like you said 12 in Rosewood and 20 in Ipswich. Would each of those mines have a Union Branch?

DIGGER: Yes.

ROSS: And so would there have been Communist Party Members in most of those Union Branches, do you think, or in some of them?

DIGGER: There were very few. Most of them, actually, we had a Branch of the Union and there was a few at one time, but they sort of dwindled. Blokes retired, blokes left there, went to somewhere else, that type of thing, and eventually we were flat out having enough to hold a meeting, so the Railway Workshops, they had a Branch of the Party over there, so we moved to the Railway Workshops, became the Ipswich Branch of the Communist Party.

ROSS: I'm interested in how the Party had a sort of strategy or policy of mass work, getting out amongst the masses. How did that translate into what you did in your sort of daily life with your fellow workers and so on?

DIGGER: Yes, well, anything local, you know, we were always there. If there were any big meetings, mass meetings, that kind of thing, we were handing out leaflets and all that sort of thing. Well, if I wasn't one of the main speakers at some of these meetings, well, I'd be there handing out leaflets and all that type of thing.

ROSS: Because I'm interested in how you were elected. You were saying in 1964 you were elected again as a known Communist Party Member to the Union leadership, so people obviously saw you as a valuable person to be leading the Union?

DIGGER: They must have, yes.

ROSS: And even though there weren't all that many Communists involved in the Union, so how do you think that came about?

DIGGER: Well, I think the Communist Party, people – I don't know, it appears to me that people realised that Communists were people that had the interests of the workers at heart. They did their best as far as their working conditions and all those sorts of things were concerned. They were the ones who were doing this, and followed some people who were Union leaders, not only in the Miners Union, but in most other Unions, who did nothing but collect their wages, you know. I think the Communist Party leadership got a name that it was good for their Union, and naturally of course, the Party itself, they had the people who maybe weren't members of the Communist Party but who were close to the Party, and because of their isolation in some of these other areas throughout Queensland, they were always supporting the Party and would be sort of Organisers themselves. Whilst not being a member of the Party, they were organising their own people there, and of course they became people who held Branch Officers positions for years.

ROSS: So there would have been quite a few people, quite a few Union Members who weren't in the Party, but who would have been supportive of the Party?

DIGGER: Supportive, yes.

ROSS: Could you take a guess at a proportion of – do you know if those miners who were in the Union, could you take a guess at the sort of proportions of people who might have supported the Party?

DIGGER: Well, Collinsville was an exception. They were a pretty big Branch of the Party up there, apparently. There was a lot of Party Members up there in the Union, you know, Union Members. In other parts, there were very few, but there were always those people who probably would have been Members of the Party had they been somewhere where there was a Branch of the Communist Party, and sort of being isolated on their own, they didn't have that opportunity.

ROSS: What about your Party work outside of your Miners Union work? Like, in the community, because the Party did try to get its members to be active in community organisations and so on – did you get involved in that sort of thing at all?

DIGGER: In a way, yes.

~~ROSS: Can you tell me a bit about that?~~

~~DIGGER: I don't know what the sort of thing, you know, -~~ Wwhatever was going at the time, whatever the issue might have been, whatever the problem might have been. We'd become involved in whatever way it was possible for us to be involved, and it is hard to put your finger on a particular thing, you know.

ROSS: What about your kids? ~~I'm not sure how many kids you've got, Cheryl and ----~~

~~DIGGER: Three daughters.~~

~~ROSS: H~~ How did it impact on them, you being a member of the Communist Party when they were young?

DIGGER: They copped it from some kids, some kids whose parents obviously were anti-Communist, and of course that's the only way they would have – you know, they came in for a bit of rough stuff, you know, donkeys around the place who thought they were being smart, you know.

ROSS: Because we'd be talking about this would be the 1950s when there was a big anti-Communist push on, wasn't there? You would have been involved in all the struggle around the Referendum and so on?

DIGGER: Yes. My wife would get on the bus, you go, go into town shopping and that sort of thing, and be sitting behind somebody or alongside somebody who didn't know who she was, and they'd be talking about 'these Communists,' you know. She used to cop all those sorts of things.

ROSS: Did she join the Party, too?

DIGGER: No, no, she never joined. The only one who was thinking of joining was Cheryl. Yes, she did, but the other two, while they weren't members of the Communist Party, they supported it and they specially supported me, if I could put it that way, too. Yes, they wouldn't cop it from whatever their friends or school-mates or whatever they were talking about, they wouldn't cop it there, either.

Even the teachers – my youngest daughter, she was going to High School and she came home one day and told us what this teacher was going on with, you know, obviously anti-Communist. She said, 'I got up and I told him. I told him straight that he didn't know what he was talking about. My father was a member of the Communist Party, and my father didn't do those sorts of things, and my father wasn't anything like what you're talking about. In fact,' she said, 'I told him I'd bring my father up here to school and you and him could have a debate in front of our class.' So that shut him up. He never ever came at anything like that after. I said, 'Good on you, love.' She was the shyest of the lot of them, you know. She was the youngest. But he wasn't going to get away with that.

ROSS: What about the Eureka Youth League? It wouldn't have been in existence when you were young, probably?

DIGGER: No, it started somewhere along the line. No, I was never in it. It wasn't something that was going, you know. But it was – I think Cheryl and Judy were in it for awhile, for a few years. Yes, they used to go to meetings down in Brisbane. Beth, no, she didn't. But neither of them joined the Party, but they were supporters of the Party. They were supporters of Dad, too.

ROSS: And could you summarise how being involved in the Party, how did that influence your sort of daily work with your fellow workers, like, was there a philosophy you took out of being in the Party that you could explain how you actually ----

DIGGER: Well, yes, it was, actually, and explain why people should be demonstrating. You should have the right to demonstrate, and you should be able to demonstrate if you're not satisfied with what the leaders of our country are doing and that type of thing, even work. If the boss was trying to put something on, well, this is not right, you know, we should be doing something about it. I suppose you always had to give a certain amount of leadership, too, to the blokes, to get them thinking about what the issues are and what they can do and what they should do.

Yes, I think that was the sort of philosophy that, you know, we tried to engender into our workmen.

ROSS: And when you say 'give some leadership' to your fellow workers, what would you see that leadership, how does that come out in practice, being a sort of leading person amongst your fellow workers? What does it involve to be a good leader?

DIGGER: I don't know. I don't know whether I was a good leader or not, but I was in the positions for a long time, so I must have been doing something right. In fact, you know, the blokes used to say to me, 'You're the best president we've ever had,' and I said, 'I'm doing the job that these other blokes ahead of me did.'

They're the ones that led the way. They're the ones that got us to where we are now, not me. I'm just carrying on where they left off.' That's about what it is, too. The early leaders of our Union, yes, they had tons of courage, you know, because they had the world against them, sort of thing, particularly Party Members who are Union leaders. They were always getting bashing by the bloody press. I know I was, all the time I was there. You used to get reporters, newspaper reporters, particularly, when you were up at all bloody hours of the night and day, and they gave you bloody heaps when the report came out in the paper the next day or the day after, whatever.

When elections came up, oh, yeah, that was happy hunting ground for them, the Communist leadership, you know. 'They're going to be opposed this year, and it's quite likely they'll be defeated,' you know, all this sort of caper. It didn't happen that way, but that's what they were hoping would happen, you know. Some of the reporters, particularly, were anti-Communist Party themselves, you know. I could have named a few of them. But there were others who were, well, that was their job, to report, and they reported what you told them.

Some of these other anti-Communist reporters would have some sort of innuendos in it that never happened and weren't even bloody even near the truth, you know. I know the ABC reporters, they were the best of the lot. They'd report the bloody thing as it happened, as you told them.

ROSS: And before, just keeping on about that sort of philosophy you had, before you actually became, you know, before you were elected to the Presidency, when you were sort of a rank and file miner, basically, but you were in the Party, what sort of philosophy did you take from being in the Party about your sort of political work with your fellow workers? Could you give me some idea of what you felt, how did the Party lead you to actually do political work with your fellow workers?

DIGGER: Yeah, well, I don't know, really. It just sort of happened. When I really got to know what the Party was all about, you know, that made the difference. I was able to go, for instance, I went to a mass meeting when I was a rank and filer, and I knew then what the Party was about. I was able to give what support I could in my humble way, uneducated way, but I knew all about it. I knew where we were going, you know, so I was able to give whatever support at could at all these types of events, because of their knowledge and my learning from their knowledge.

But as I say, it just sort of happened. It sort of grows on you, you know. You know in your own mind that you're right and what you're doing, and you do it to the best of your ability. I don't know whether the best of my ability was very much at all, but I always tried to be honest and I always tried to do my best as far as the workers were concerned, particularly the workers, the people of our country, but the workers in particular, of course, because as I always used to say, 'Well, there's no solution to the workers' problem this side of Communism.' Some of them used to laugh about it, of course.

ROSS: And you still believe that?

DIGGER: Yes, yes, I do. I know what's happened over the years, and I know how the people of the Soviet Union and others were sold down the drain, and I often think to myself, 'What must they be thinking now?' Their country has gone right down just about to the bottom of the ladder with the leadership they've got, you know, and what they had before.

I had two visits to the Soviet Union in my lifetime, and I never saw any beggars in the street. I never saw anybody, you know, in rags and tatters and that sort of caper. People used to give you the idea that this was happening, you know. I know they had some problems with shortages of goods that they used to queue up. There used to be fair queues in some of the shops and that sort of thing, you know, but I never saw anybody who was really down-trodden and neglected. I saw a few drunks, of course, but not many. That bloody Vodka, that was a pretty potent brew, I believe.

ROSS: Just to sort of summarise the sort of philosophy you've taken from working as a Communist for most of your life, I guess, what sort of thing would you be saying to young activists today? What's the lessons that you've learnt that they should take heed of, do you think, in their political work?

DIGGER: Well, I suppose you could say that we could all do better than what we are doing. I haven't been active, of course, in the Party for some years now, because there is no Party in Ipswich. Had there been, I would have still been active in it, and still tried to convince people that Communism would be a far better than what we're living under now ourselves, you know, particularly when you get people like Abbott the bloody Prime Minister of our country.

ROSS: But you would have quite a lot of young people today who probably would be interested in the ideas of Socialism, I'm sure?

DIGGER: Yes, quite likely could be.

ROSS: What lessons do you think they need to learn to build that movement more strongly?

DIGGER: I suppose, yeah, see, what learnt me a few lessons in the early part of my life was the fact that my mother and father went through a Depression with five kids. My father was out of work for nearly six years, and getting the dole. They got the dole for part of that six years. They got some rations, food rations. The first part of it – I just forget how much it was, but it certainly wasn't enough to feed kids, you know.

Then they started this, you'd get the dole, but you had to work for it. They worked bloody hard for it, most of them did. My father worked in a blue metal quarry two and a half days a week and he got two pounds and sixpence. That was to keep a family of seven – two pounds and sixpence. Well, naturally, they got into debt. They had no alternative. There was a grocer in Bundamba. He'd be probably one most exceptional businessman, because he never knocked anybody back for what they wanted. If they couldn't pay for it, they used to give him probably five shillings or whatever it was whenever they could get five shillings, and he saw them all through, never knocked any of them back. He was a wonderful man.

My Mum and Dad, when Dad got work, they started to pay his debt off. They paid it all off, every shilling of it, and I said to Mr Perrot one day when I was talking to him myself, I said, you know, about all the money that was owed. I said, 'But how did you – you had to pay for your groceries?' He said, 'Oh, yes, oh, we got through all right. I got enough to keep going.' I said, 'I suppose you still had a lot of debts that never got paid?' 'Don't believe it, son.' He said, 'Almost without exception, everybody came and paid their debt they owed me.'

You know, those are the sorts of things. I used to wonder to myself, why is it that there are people with plenty of money, more than they'll ever need, and there are people who haven't got money and are needing things and are not able to buy the things that they really need, you know. Why does this happen? This is what, you know, sort of made me say to myself, despite the fact that my grandfather was a big noise in the Labor Party and so on, that they're not doing any better. Why aren't they doing, you know, making sure that the people in this country get what they need, that they need to live? This is what it was all about.

Of course, the Tories, as we call them, you can expect that from them because they represent big business. So they are the sort of things that boiled up in me, you know, and sort of steered me towards a Party like the Communist Party, who had, you know, their philosophy was that people should have the needs, they want the needs to live.

So it was those sorts of things that influenced me. I wasn't going to be in any of those party where they did nothing for the working class. I wanted to be in some political party where they would, if they were able to, get into a position where they could do it.

ROSS: Are there some last things you'd like to say about it, just about what we've been talking about?

DIGGER: I'm not active much at all these days, being 94, or nearly 95, but luckily I've still got my marbles and that helps a bit. You know, I just say to people that you should think very carefully about the sort of things that you should be supporting, think carefully about what your family, what are they going to grow up into. See, it frightens me a little bit about what I've got grandkids that are going to grow up into, but they'll go along with the flow, sort of thing, as you say, and that's all they'll know.

I knew when I was a boy was poverty. I never had a pair of shoes in my life until I was about 14. Think carefully about the type of politics that you should be supporting, about the people who you like for elections, the one that, if there are any, that can do the job that you think they should be doing. There's all sorts of things that you can, you know, influence, and just make sure that you give it plenty of thought.

Can I tell you, before it just came to my mind about the Check Inspectors and the Mines Inspectors? We often had to deal with them, you know, when problems arose in some of the mines, and we always didn't see eye to eye, you'll gather that, with the Mines Inspectors. I knew them all, used to have to go to their office and discuss things with them and that sort of thing, go and see the Chief Inspector for Coal Mines, who had an office in Brisbane in the Mines Department, and have discussions with him about different things.

I remember having a discussion with the Chief Inspector one day, and I wasn't getting on too well with him. In fact, I was getting a bit annoyed, and talking about Check Inspectors, you know. Anyhow, it basically came up that the Check Inspectors' duties, you know, I'd say the Check Inspectors' duties are to go to a mine and inspect it, to check on Government Mines Inspectors. 'That's why they were called Check Inspectors, to check on your people.'

Oh, Christ, didn't he get up in the air! I said, 'Well, that's a fact. That's how it came about, whether you like it or not, you know. As I said to him, 'What else could they be? They were all bloody Mine Managers before they became Inspectors.' But that – he was the Government Inspector at the time, like Bill Roach, and he got the Act changed, see, Check Inspectors, it's an Act of Parliament because the Government paid a bit portion of the Check Inspectors' wages and we got free train travel, that sort of thing, you know – or car travel sometimes, if we had to – and he got the Act changed to eliminate the Check Inspectors and put in District Union Inspectors. That's how much----

ROSS: So he had the name changed?

DIGGER: Yes, that's how much I must have upset him. His Inspectors being checked by Union Inspectors! Oh, Christ, he wouldn't have that. But it was true. That's the only reason they had them. In fact, my grandfather, when he was elected to the position of President full-time, he became President Check Inspector, so he was actually the first Union Check Inspector, yes.

ROSS: You mentioned about the 1949 coal strike. So how did it impact on you blokes here? You were all out on strike, were you?

DIGGER: Oh, yes, six weeks we were off, out on strike.

ROSS: Because Chifley brought in the troops---

DIGGER: Yes, the bastard put the bloody troops into the coal mines.

ROSS: Did that happen here, to all the mines here?

DIGGER: No, it didn't happen here.

ROSS: So the mines here were actually closed for that six weeks?

DIGGER: Oh, yes, six weeks the strike lasted. Actually, the pit I worked at, they had, the same ownership had two other mines or three other mines, and we went back to work when the strike was over, and the Manager confronted us. 'There's no work for you, Murphy. No work for you, Campbell. No work for you, Stressor, no work for you, Pocock.' The four main leaders of the Branch Committee – me, the Communist, these other three, they weren't members of the Communist Party, but I was their influence of course, so no job for them.

And all the bloody workers, you know – so we held a meeting. I told the lads there was no work for Murphy, Campbell, Pocock or Stressor. Well, they said, 'Well, there's no bloody work for us, either! There's no work for us until you bastards get your jobs back.' So the same with the three other mines. So we went out for another three, four weeks, before they capitulated, yes.

ROSS: So they actually gave way and you got your jobs back?

DIGGER: Yes, went back to the bloody – I said to the Manager, 'Well, give me a bloody good reason why,' you know, 'You've got to have a reason, haven't you?' He didn't know what to bloody say. You said, 'Your board' – the particular part of the mine that you worked in, that was your board, your coalface, you know – 'your board's just finished.' I said, 'But there was nothing wrong with it when we went out. It's still bloody plenty of coal, the coalface is still there, still there in Stressor's and bloody Pocock's.' But it was finished, finished. That was their excuse. Our board was finished.

Anyhow, we went back, of course, and we had another three or four weeks, yes. One was up in (~~?Salign -- 05:09.3~~)Sellheim [??] and of course the scabs went in and there was bloody warfare, nearly gunshots up there. The Police avoided usit, - up-Up at (~~?)~~ SalignSellheim [??], and the other one was----

ROSS: So this wasn't Army people going out? They actually recruited some scabs to go and---

DIGGER: No, no, they were farmers. They were bloody farmers.

ROSS: And they recruited them during the main strike?

DIGGER: Well, no, not during the main strike. Well, it may have started when the – I wouldn't be too sure about that, it's so long ago now, of course – I think you might be right. I think they might have put the scabs in before the actual strike finished, yeah.

ROSS: And so the miners who were on strike actually took up some arms to try and fight them, did they?

DIGGER: That was the bloody farmers who had their bloody guns ready. No, it wasn't our fellows. There were a few bloody fist fights around the place, down the pub especially – I got a few grogs, the little fellows. One bloke, it was him that was the Under Manager at the pit, a big lump of a bloke, fancied he could fight a bit, you know, and he was down there half-pissed and one of our blokes, a bloke named Ashley Grey, a pretty tough looking customer, too, Ashley. He wasn't all that tall but he was, you know, well-built.

Anyhow, he gave Ashley a hiding because Ashley was pissed as a parrot. Anyhow, Ashley lined him up one day when he got down there. He only had a couple of drinks before this big bastard got in there, and he said, 'Righto, now, Beaumont, you arsehole, let's see if you can do the same as you did the other day when I was pissed.' 'Arrr, get out, I'd do you no trouble at all.' 'Well, now's your bloody chance to give me another hiding.' Well, he give fucking Beaumont a hiding, and he actually knocked him down and Beaumont said, 'That's enough. That's enough. I've had enough.' He said, 'You haven't had half enough yet. I'm coming down there with you.' So he lay down beside him and hammered him again.

Some bloody characters in the bloody mines, I tell you!

ROSS: How did you come by your name, "Digger"?

DIGGER: That's got a story attached to it. It actually was my parents that gave it to me. In fact, I never knew another name. My parents never ever called me anything else. My brothers and sisters never called me anything else. I had a few aunts that, when we came back from Collinsville and I got to know them, they were my aunties. There were a couple of them that called me Charles, you know, a couple of Dad's sisters that called me Charles.

But I was born in 1919 and that's when the soldiers were coming back from the First World War, and they were in uniform, you know, and of course I was starting to toddle around the place by then, starting to try to talk, and Mum used to say to me, 'You used to point your finger at the soldiers and say, "Digger",' and she said, 'That was the first word that you ever spoke that we could understand, was "Digger." So I was called Digger. That's how I got it. People never ever knew what my – in fact, I didn't know what my name was.

I thought that was my name, you know, until I came back down from Collinsville, and of course I had to go to Silkstone School. I remember going there and the Headmaster said, 'What's your name?' He was an old bastard, too. I said, 'Murphy.' 'What's your first name?' 'Digger.' 'Your first name's not Digger.' One of my brothers was with me, that's right, my elder brother. He said, 'His name's Charles.'

End of Recording