

ORAL HISTORY – QUEENSLAND COMMUNIST PARTY

TRANSCRIBED RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH LYLE SMITH

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Interviewer: Ross Gwyther

[This transcript has been slightly modified by the interviewee to add explanatory notes when necessary. These notes or words are in "italics"]

LYLE: I was born in '31, up in Townsville here, a Townsville-ite. I had a sister called Elaine. She's still alive today. She's still going, old Elaine. She never got married. She's single. I was apprenticed to my father as a carpenter in 1945. I was 14 years of age. He was a carpenter and at the end of the War it was very hard to get labour because the blokes from the Army hadn't all come back until the end of '46 it was, before they came back so, you know, I wasn't doing too extra hot at school and that – I was fair, but that's all I was – I wasn't brilliant – with the result that he said to me, 'Look, I'm battling to get off-siders to help me building,' and he was in his '50s, so he said to me, 'How about coming in on an apprenticeship?' so I said, 'All right,' and I took on the apprenticeship.

I only lasted with him two years. The poor bugger took a stroke and died, so I left the position then and had to find alternative employment. The fellow next-door to me, he was a Railway worker, he was a conductor on the trains. He said to me, 'Look,' he said, 'why don't you write to the Commissioner for Queensland Railways explaining your position, your father just died, and you're looking for an apprenticeship?' So I did, and they said, 'Yes, we'll put you on straight away.'

ROSS: As apprentice carpenter?

LYLE: As an apprentice – no, he said as an apprentice wood-worker, so I said, 'Yeah, righto.' There were carpenters in the Railway who were maintenance, there were wagon-builders in the Railway and they only were carpenters, and there is carriage builders, so there's three sort of sections. I was lucky. They put me in the carriage section, building carriages. It's all an allied trade, you know, it's all working with wood and that basically.

I finished my time in 1949, I think it was – yes, I think it was '49.

ROSS: And then you worked in the Railways?

LYLE: I remained in the Railways. I had ideas of going out contracting like my father did, but when I sat back and added up all the problems, like, he died at an early age, the reason being the poor bugger could hardly get work outside as a carpenter because, you know, things were tight in the building trade, with the result, you know, he would be sitting up half the night working out quotes and prices for jobs, and you wouldn't get the job – someone else would beat you.

So after awhile I thought, bugger it, why do that? I got a job here – admittedly it's not the same wage, but it was a continuous wage, whereas he had bust and booms. I can remember when I was a kid, like, one time he'd be away up here: next time, he'd be away

down there, because once work got short he'd be worrying where his next bob was coming from.

ROSS: So you worked in the Railways right through?

LYLE: Right through until I retired, and I retired in 1991, I retired – no, '92, I retired, June '92. I was 61.

ROSS: So can we talk about the sort of political influences on you when you were a young person?

LYLE: Yes. I suppose what influenced me was it was strange going from working for the father who was a contractor, and then going into a unionised area, which was the Railway. The old fellow, although he was a contractor, he was pretty labour-orientated, because all his history had been all tradesmen, see, and all trade-oriented, with the result that he sort of leant towards the left.

Then when I got in the Railway, my mate who I used to know as a young boy lived down the road from me. His father also worked in the Railway, Jack Girard – he was a member of the Party, and Jack's influence on me, along with another fellow we used to meet at work, a fellow who used to be a wood-machinist in the wood-machine shop, Tommy Culler. Well, he used to influence me, because he was a real Leftist. A great reader, he was.

Then I run into Craddy Evans, who was a member of the Party, and he influenced me, too, and so I had the influence of old Jack Girard, and old Jack was terribly good to me. He brought me up like one of his own boys, because I was a friend of his son, a mate of his son, and he worked in the Railway and he used to make sure he took me to work the first two or three times and showed me where to go and all that.

ROSS: So what was it about those people that influenced you positively, like, why did you take their sort of politics?

LYLE: I suppose my own father was a battler. He battled and when you heard stories about the problems associated with workers, how they get raw deals and things like that, and you see it, I suppose that influenced me greatly.

ROSS: Yes, but those blokes you talked about, though, you must have had some sort of respect for them?

LYLE: I did. I had a respect for Jack, for Tommy, for Culler, and for Karl Crad Evans. I had a big respect for Craddy. Old Crad used to take us of a dinner hour, we'd go over and see him, a mate of mine at work, and Craddy, we'd sit down and he'd take us through different classes on Mao's work and stuff like that, you know. Craddy - he'd done a course in Economics and he used to do all the Party books up and Union books up and things like that, so he was pretty well up in Economics. He influenced me a fair bit, the way he used to talk about Economics of the different political systems, you know.

ROSS: Yes. So at what stage would you have joined the Party? How old were you then?

LYLE: Well, I suppose I would have been about 51 or 52, when I would have joined the Party, but in the meantime I was a member of the Union and I became the Union Rep, and I sort of

played a sort of positive role on the job, you know. All that influences you, I suppose. All of those things influence you.

ROSS: Yes. Were you involved in the Eureka Youth League?

LYLE: Yes, I was in the Eureka – not for long, I joined the Eureka Youth League, but I'll tell you who I met in the Eureka Youth League, was Josie Calmain. I met her in the Eureka Youth League, old Josie, yes. In fact, I took Josie out a couple of times.

ROSS: So what sort of things did you do in the Eureka Youth League? Would that have been when you were in your late teens?

LYLE: Yes, I was in my late teens/early '20s then, you know. We had a lot of classes in relation to Economics and stuff like that, and also, we used to have sort of days out going to the Island, because at the time the Party had a hut at the Island and we used to go over to the hut on the Island, and we'd spend time there, as young people do, go swimming and things like that.

Quite interesting, it was. Anyway, I suppose the Trade Union Movement would have been the one that pushed me to the extreme Left, because you used to see so many problems associated with workers, struggling for improvement in their jobs. Especially in the Railway at that time, there were big struggles going on in the Running – as you said yesterday, about the Running Section – well, what Jack said was true. The Running Section was a very militant section, but at the same time it wasn't as militant as the Workshops, because they were scattered far and wide. You know what I'm getting at?

Like, in the Workshops you've got everybody together, and it's very easy to call a meeting and have meetings in the job; whereby with the Running Section, you might be a driver and you might know Joe Blow over there, but you mightn't see him for a month because you mightn't see him because you were doing different shifts, that sort of stuff.

I think shift work does have a tendency to knock people about. You know what I'm getting at? Like, as Jack raised the other day. I didn't like sitting on a signal out at Stuart or somewhere like that if there was a stoppage on. I could sort of see their point of view, because if you do shiftwork – it's a bastard of a job, I reckon, shiftwork is, I really do, you know – I can't understand the Trade Union Movement today where we're doing 12 hour shifts. This is where I can't understand it. I reckon we're becoming Americanised - that's exactly what America does – long shifts, low paid wages for, you might say, the masses, and the only ones that get the high pay are CEOs and people like that.

ROSS: Yes. So for quite a while when you were working, your main sort of political involvement was through the Union/.

LYLE: Through the Union, mainly, and I suppose that moved me towards the Left, to where I joined the party. I was in the Party long before I got married. I got married in 1957, so I would have joined the Party in '51 or '52.

ROSS: So you would have been doing, still in your apprenticeship, when the big Railways Strike was on?

LYLE: Yes, I can remember the Rail Strike, yes. I can remember what happened here in Townsville, a big march up the street and I can remember poor old Fred Patterson led the march down in Brisbane. They belted Christ out of him, the coppers did.

ROSS: And what happened in that strike in the workshops when you were there? Can you tell me a bit about it?

LYLE: Well, we were apprentices and we were on the job, but we never done anything. We couldn't do anything that would have, say, helped the production of a vehicle or something going into traffic. What we used to do, I'd do jobs such as, like making something that you'd use plenty of, and you'd make them, stack them and store them. I used to make, in the Guards' vans they used to put cupboards and we'd make these cupboards, and we'd have them stacked up. Things like that we did, but really, basically we didn't do very much, really.

ROSS: And how solid was the strike here? How many people would have worked as against--

LYLE: The vast majority of them would have gone out on strike. It was only the odd one or two that didn't strike, the odd one or two.

ROSS: But the apprentices weren't able to go on strike?

LYLE: No, because they're sort of indentured to the employer, and when the strike's on, what happens is generally one or two upper bosses remain on the job. They're generally in the the Salaried Officers Union, and they generally just control the apprentices, don't worry too much about them, just so long as they don't get into trouble, that's what it basically was. But it was a big strike, eight bloody weeks, a bloody long strike. As Jackie said, all the poor buggers got was about 50 cents or something like that.

ROSS: And even though you weren't in the Party then, do you remember the involvement of these Party people that you talked about in that strike?

LYLE: Yes, I remember old Jack Girard being involved. He used to tell me about different things, like, he used to tell me about the march down the street and things like that, old Jack did. I didn't know Craddy Evans at that time, because Craddy was, I met him later on in my time in the Railway, but in '48 – I only went in in '47, into the Railway, April '47 – well, old Jack was the bloke that I knew because I used to go out to his son. His son and I were the best of mates, and he was very good to me, old Jack, very good. He was a Party member.

ROSS: So you joined the Party in, say, 1951? How did that change your life?

LYLE: Well, of course, I got opposition from my mother and people like that, my sister, people like that. They didn't like it, but overall they weren't vicious on me, nothing like that, not nasty or anything like that. You know, I suppose you sort of got involved more in the Trade Union Movement and had to, I suppose, guide the Union to what you felt was a better line, like, after the '48 strike, because there were a lot of people, the 50 cents, it took them a while to get over it.

After the '48 strike, the workers on the job, especially a lot of the blokes that were inclined to be timid, like, in the carriage shop, the carriage shop hadn't one very militant section. I

wouldn't say an anti-section, but it wasn't a militant section. It was inclined to be a little bit go-along-with-the-boys, and after that a lot of them were very unhappy about the strike.

But I didn't have any trouble. When I became a Union Rep and I organised meetings on the job and things like that, I got a good reception from everybody there. Nobody sort of hated you. There were a few that were very anti, especially the blokes that were great Catholics. They were pretty anti all of you, but outside of that, they weren't too bad. As time moved on, you sort of developed being a Union Rep, the action on the job, and our shop, the carriage shop, had three unions in them – the BWIU (which is the Building Workers), which had a few of the carriage ones in it; the Vehicular Builders Union, which had a good few carriage fellows in it; and the ARU, which I was a member of.

The reason I joined the ARU was I was sort of taken up with the slogan on the *Advocate*, which is the Union paper, which was, "One industry, one Union." See? I was taken up with that. I thought, well, it is a Railway and even though we're in workshops, we are basically Railway, and I was sort of taken up with that slogan and that's what sort of made me join the ARU. Whether I done right or wrong, time will tell.

ROSS: Was there any discussion within the Party about which would have been the better Union to join, as against another one?

LYLE: Well, I joined that Union before I was a member of the Party, see? I joined the ARU I suppose in about '47/'48, maybe the latter part of '48 I would have joined the ARU, see? The inference, I suppose, the talk by some of them in the shop, some of them were talking about should we have just one Union, the same as the Wharfies and the same as the Meatworkers, only one Union for the industry, you know. I sort of felt like it would have been a good idea, but it just didn't work out. It doesn't work out today, even.

ROSS: Would most people have been in some Union, one of the Unions?

LYLE: Yes. In the carriage shop it was mainly Vehicle Builders Union, which was a right wing Union, but nevertheless, they went out in the '48 strike, they did. The only Unions that didn't go out in the '48 strike, or they did go out for a while, was the Maintenance Union within the Railway. The Maintenance Union used to cater mainly for those people working on the maintenance gang, as well as the AWU catered for them, too. A few of them were a bit wishy-washy, and I think they came back after about three or four weeks of strike or something like that, they came back to work. Even then, they still didn't do anything to actually create any production or anything like that. They were pretty good like that. I'll say that about them.

ROSS: So can you tell me a bit more about when you were in the Party, how things functioned for you as a Party member?

LYLE: Well, we used to have a problem raising money, and at the time Craddy Evans was running, it was like a horse sweep. You'd buy one of these little packets off him, always with a bit of paper folded over, and you'd have a horse on it, you know. If the horse won the prize it was about ten bucks or something like that, you know. So he was running that, and he had quite a good few people taking it, and we were having great difficulty raising money in the Railway.

I know my section had great difficulty raising money for the Party, and one of the football clubs had a lucky number. They brought a lucky number in, and this lucky number was a one to say, a hundred, or one to a thousand, and there were two or three prizes in it. Charged about ten cents or 20 cents for a ticket, and when you opened it, you knew what number you got, whether you'd won it or not, because they had the numbers up on the board: "There are the winning numbers: 12, 15 and 20," or something. So you knew if you won it.

So I thought, "Jesus, this is not a bad move." The sporting club had this, so I just decided we'd get one going in the Rail Branch, and we did. I ended up buying one of those number stamps – if you stamp the number, it moved on to the next numeral. I bought one of them and I bought a stapling machine to staple them. Old Craddy used to glue them, but rather than gluing them, it was much easier to just bank the staple. So I bought a staple machine. So we went to town and I started this going.

Oh, she took off like wildfire – Jesus Christ! The only time the Rail Branch ever bloody kept ahead of what they were supposed to raise. They'd set us a target, and we'd be ahead of our target to buggery, you know. That's how good it was. But eventually, like everything else, blokes sort of get tired after a while and, it started to drop off, with the result that we done wonders – I suppose it would have run for a couple of years.

ROSS: So who set the targets, the main Party Branch in Townsville?

LYLE: No, the Rail Branch of the Party.

ROSS: What did you use that money for, that you raised?

LYLE: That was given to the Party as a whole. So they'd put a target on us, maybe \$150 or \$200 or something like that, and at that time it was pounds, you know. Anyway, we'd never ever get near it. We'd always be down a bit, or each and every one of us would contribute, but we'd run raffles and things like that every so often to try and help it. But when I kicked this off, this did make us bring in heaps of money, you know.

As I said, it lasted about three or four years, and a lot of the sporting associations got sour on me, those blokes that were sporting, because I was sort of running it myself, controlling it. A lot of us would turn up and help staple and everything, but I was sort of organising it and running the actual – it was mainly done in the Carriage Shop and South Yard, very few in the North Yard, a little bit, but not much. Mostly it was South Yard.

ROSS: You mean you'd sell them mostly amongst your workmates?

LYLE: Yes, amongst the workmates, yes, with the result that, because I copied off the sporting ones, but because I was sort of controlling it, I could put my prizes more than theirs. Their prize was about five dollars. I could go to ten, and with the result that I sold more tickets than they did, because I had a better prize, you know. That's how it went for maybe two or three years, quite a good time, anyway. We raised a hell of a lot of money like that.

The North Yard blokes weren't as deeply involved in it as what the South Yard blokes were. I had blokes over there like Les Lewis, quite a few, Teddy Clarke and people like that, people in the Party in the South Yard, and I used to go out of my to try and sell them. I wouldn't say the South Yard was any more gambling orientated than the North Yard. You

couldn't say that, because the North Yard had quite a bit of gamblers over there, too, but that's just how it went, and it was very successful for the years we ran it, very successful.

ROSS: And what other sorts of activities would you have done at work with the Party?

LYLE: Well, we used to hand out the *Red Express*. Craddy used to do most of the writing for the *Red Express*---

ROSS: Sorry, who used to do the writing?

LYLE: Craddy Evans used to do most of the writing for it, and we'd call on all sections, like, when we'd meet at our Party Branch, we'd call on our members to try to contribute something towards the *Red Express*, and we managed to keep it going, but old Crad would have been the back-bone of it, he would have been the one that if anything had happened to him, it wouldn't have went on, you know. That's what eventually did happen, because eventually when Craddy died, he was going on holidays and he took a heart attack in the train heading to Sydney he was, poor bugger, and he died more or less in the train. He was only 50-odd, I suppose.

I suppose I would have been in the Party 10 or 15 years when that would have happened. He was a hell of a big loss, because he used to take us to classes, and he was well up in the Economics and Party material – well into it, he was.

ROSS: How often would your Branch meet, the Branch in the Railways?

LYLE: I suppose just about every week, once a week, you know.

ROSS: What did you do at those Branch meetings?

LYLE: Discuss the problems within the Railway, and ways to raise money and that within the Railway, the various sections, call on people to contribute to the *Red Express* or even the *Guardian*, things like that, whatever we could.

ROSS: Yes. What about working with the ALP, like, strong ALP people or even a DLP group of people? How did that work out?

LYLE: Pretty good, like, at Union meetings we used to have problems. Two ran the AWU for awhile and it was pretty good, like, when we were very active it wasn't bad at all, but as time moved on, like myself, I took on the job of marking out, which is slightly above that of a casual; then I took on the job as sub-foreman. Once I started to move into those jobs, you started to notice there was a bit of a decline, mainly from the point of view you were more involved in those sorts of works, you know.

When you were marking out, you never really had that much time to have much discussion on the job with blokes, because a carriage came in and it was all pulled down, and you had to re-build it, and you were responsible for re-building it. You had to mark all the timber out, go and get the timber and mark it all out, then get it milled, and from the mill it had to come back to the blokes in the Carriage Shop who put it all together, see – with the result that you were under a bit of responsibility, so you sort of couldn't devote the time to the Party work.

ROSS: So the discussion amongst the workers on the job, that was an important part of the Party-

LYLE: Yes, it was, discussion with blokes on the job, yes.

ROSS: Would that be at lunch times, or would it be through the day when you were at work?

LYLE: At lunch times, but mainly through working hours. You'd be doing a job somewhere and you'd have to go to somewhere to get something, and when you were picking this up which you had to pick up, be what it may, a bloke might say something to you about he was finding it difficult to get this done because they never had the right equipment or something like that, you know.

That's a thing I could never understand about the bosses who were there in my time. They didn't want to advance with machinery – you know what I'm getting at? They were still tied to the old way they done it, and as far as I was concerned, whether you like it or not you can't beat machinery. You can't compete with it. You can't beat it. You just can't.

Anyhow, I'd be fighting with them over getting some gear, 'What about getting some better gear, better advanced equipment?' you know. We used to have to screw a carriage, and a carriage used to have 300 or 400 boards – they'd be that wide [38mm] – going the full length of the carriage, and the carriage was 50ft long. You can just imagine how many boards it would be.

ROSS: An inch and a half or so wide?

LYLE: Yes, an inch and a half wide and you'd have one screw in the bottom, all the way along, and you'd have to go and screw it by bloody hand, you know. I'd say to them, 'Jesus Christ, there must be a better way of doing it than this,' and you couldn't get it through to them. The blokes that were there – they were good tradesmen, don't get me wrong, some of the best tradesmen I've seen – but you couldn't get it through to them that there must be a better way of doing this, mate.

Your bloody wrist – let's be honest, you'd do about 10 or 15 boards and you'd have to have a bit of a blow. Your bloody arms would be sore. Then we got the Yankee drivers to push them in. Well, they weren't too bad, but, no, we had to buy that ourselves, the Yankees. You'd think even the Department themselves, they weren't very, as I say, conscious. The engineers weren't very conscious of the need to advance to modern technology.

ROSS: Would this have been something that a few of you who were Party members, you were sort of talking about modernising things?

LYLE: Yes.

ROSS: And that was one of the ways that you'd talk to your workmates there?

LYLE: Yes, that was one of the ways you'd talk to the blokes on the job, you know. There'd have to be a better way of doing that. You'd got to be careful, because we had a paint section, and eventually I got them just about all ARU members, the painters mostly all members of the ARU, which was in my Union. They were very toey on the fact of bringing in sprays, spray guns, because one bloke with a spray can do a lot, you now.

At the same time, even though I agreed with that, I think there were ways round it – you know what I'm getting at – I feel that if they could have, the increased production would have been enormous but, the painters were toey. They didn't want you to interfere with painting it by brush, you know.

To me – I don't know, I had a different idea, but my idea was that if you made work as easy for a person as possible, you're going to get more done. Only common sense, that is, and what blokes used to say, the bosses said to me, 'Oh, I'll give you these power tools, and you blokes will be still talking in the corner there.' And I'd say, 'Yeah, mate, but we'd have twice as much done.'

That's how they saw it, you know. They were very backward in that they didn't sort of see workers, they just saw workers purely and simply as being a bit on the lazy side, you know. Yet they themselves, when they were on the bench – because I worked with most of them who were my mates – they were no different to the rest of us. They'd have their blows. They wouldn't bust their g-strings. They'd just poke along, which is all you ask anybody to do.

Once I moved up in a foreman's position, that's when I decided to push for these tools, and the old engineer we had, old Jock Lettice, he was an arsehole, he was. He would not improve anything at all much, at all, and he was one of the engineers I would say that black-balled the likes of Kev McElligott, and the likes of anybody that left the Railway who was a militant Unionist. He black-balled them, all right. He made sure they were never to be employed. That's what he wrote on their *[history sheet]*.

ROSS: What was his politics?

LYLE: I would say extreme Right Wing. He wouldn't be agreeable, because he was a Scotsman, but I'd say he would have been a member of the Liberal Party or Country Party, one of them, you know. That's the feeling I had about him. He wasn't a very progressive type of bloke.

When the new engineer came, a bloke by the name of Devereaux, he was a much more *[progressive]*, you could talk to him more, and he was the one that Jack was talking about yesterday, that the bloke told him to go and bite his arse – remember Freddy Thompson, took out his teeth and said "this is what I want to know..." – but you could get agreement, you could get to a level where you could get something out of him. The other bastard, you'd get buggerall out of him, you know.

I brought in tools - an electric screwdriver, that they used to use for screwing ceilings up. The carpenters had them outside, and they were beauties, a coiled belt of screws, and it fed through this machine, and as you pushed one screw in, the screw-driver came back and the next screw would move over. I asked him would he get it, and he said, 'Yeah, I'll get them.' At the time it was pretty expensive, worth to close to a thousand bucks or something like that, but he got it for me, and it made a difference, you know. Everybody wanted to use it, because, Christ, you could screw the side of a coach off in about half a day, no trouble. Terrific, it was.

That's where you get workers on side or you got them off side, you know. You just had to – in most cases blokes wanted to make the job easier, and then we got power tools, rip-

snorters and things like that, we got drills. They never even had a drill when I went and started work. They used to have to do anything with a bloody hand-drill, you know. Jesus, that's going too far back.

ROSS: Now, can we talk a bit about outside of work? Were you involved in any sort of political activity apart from work?

LYLE: I don't think I was, no.

ROSS: So you saw your Party work as being done through going to work?

LYLE: Yes, mainly through the Railway, yes, and I'd say most of the Rail Branch saw it like that, too. What we done at work, you know. See, in Townsville we had a Rail Branch, we had a Wharfie Branch, and Branch for the Meatworks, and the Locality Branch.

Well, the Locality Branch used to deal with a lot of localised, like, stuff that Council people would want, new street laying with asphalt, things like that. They would deal with that, more so than any of the other three Branches. That was the Locality Branch. I don't know how it worked in Brisbane or other places, but that's how it was here.

ROSS: And what do you think when you look back on the sort of philosophy that you took out of the Communist Party, now with the sort of leadership that you had with sort of study sessions and so on, what was the sort of philosophy of how you did your political work amongst workers?

LYLE: Well, I think one thing you learnt was how to bloody organise, you know. How to make sure – if you had a meeting and you moved a motion, you had to make sure you had the bloody numbers there to do it. If you never had the numbers, you wouldn't push it, you wouldn't mention it, you know. Gee, you learnt that! You learnt to, every time you took a fight on, you'd win. that's for sure.

The groupers weren't that bad in the ARU in my era, they weren't too bad at all, because mainly there were a few, but overall they were pretty good, the members of the Union.

ROSS: So there weren't too many groupers in the Railway yards there?

LYLE: No, in the Railway yards, see, they were mainly – most of the groupers were in the Vehicle Building Union. See, they clambered into that Union. That was where most of the groupers ended up. In the AEU it was different, because the AEU and the Boilermakers Union, you had to be a boilermaker to be a member of the Boilermakers Union, see, so therefore you got a variety of blokes, and our trade, because with carriage building, you could be one of three Unions – you could be ARU, Vehicle Builders or bloody BWIU.

ROSS: Yes, okay.

LYLE: See, the BWIU used to work very well with the ARU. The ARU and the BWIU used to work in the South Yard, because they were the two Unions that controlled most of the South Yard, the BWIU and the ARU, and if we went out on anything, of course, if the other Unions didn't want to be in it, it didn't make much difference because you'd close the whole joint down. That's the thing that we numerically had, but we used to try to get the Vehicle

Builders on it, but they were very hard. They didn't want to take any action at all. They didn't want to upset the boss whatsoever.

ROSS: Can we go back to the period when you joined the Party? That would have been when all the anti-Communist stuff was happening with banning the Party and so on.

LYLE: Yes, that was later on. Like, when I joined the Party the War was just over, you might say. Well, the War was over in '45 and the Soviet Union, the role that they played in defeating Hitler pushed it right back, so with the result that the Party got a bit of a boost from that, you know. Right up to the time, I'd say, the Hungary turnout came in, when they sent the troops into Hungary, the Russians?

ROSS: Yes.

LYLE: Up till then it was reasonably, relatively good, but after that it started to get a bit rocky, you know.

ROSS: What about that Anti-Communist Referendum, when Menzies tried to ban it? Was there much activity around that in Townsville?

LYLE: There was a lot of activity in the Party, the Party had to get rid of all the stuff they owned and were put out to different places.

ROSS: Did you do that yourself?

LYLE: Yes, well, in my case, we took a lot of stuff of the Party and we had it at my place, because I could say it was mine, see. No-one would know any different. I might have been a Party member, but still, it doesn't say that you couldn't own most of the bloody gear. Most of the gear was forms and stuff like that, it was chairs and things like that, which didn't relate to any political party – you know what I'm getting at? things like----

ROSS: So the Party was worried that the Government would confiscate their material?

LYLE: Yes, and with the result they sort of got rid of everything, and the touchy things, such as Gestetners and things like that, well, you heard the story about one other----

ROSS: Yes, can you tell me that again?

LYLE: Well, I'm not too sure because I don't know very much about it, because I think it would have only been the inner circles of the Party that would have known exactly where that was, see? So I'm not too familiar with it. I just didn't know. All I knew as it was up here, but I didn't know where, you know. As I said, the likes of chairs and furniture and stuff like that, they sent them out to various members of the Party. Well, of course, who could say who owned them?

ROSS: Yes.

LYLE: But when you had a Gestetner, something like that, that would be a different story, or something that you could print, that would be a different story.

ROSS: Yes. Okay. Now, what effect did your involvement in the Party have on your family life and your kids?

LYLE: Well, to be honest, it was all right until I got married. Once I got married, I made no bones about it, I told my wife – or the girl I wanted to marry – I told her what I was, I was a Communist. She was a great Catholic, and her mother and father were great Catholics but, she introduced me to them all, and I don't know whether she told them what I was, but I would say this, both her mother and father, they welcomed me with open arms because I was a worker. I built this house. Every spare moment I got I worked on the house, you know.

I feel it's just how people see people, and if they do the right thing by your fellow man, I think, you know – I didn't try to make out I was someone I wasn't. I knew what I was and that was all about it.

It did play a part, when I used to go to meetings. My wife used to get upset because I used to have to leave her to go of a night-time, and you've got to understand – I can understand it now, but back in them days I don't suppose I could – but, see, I never had windows or doors or nothing in this house when I moved into it. All I had on it was a canvas on the back door there, and no front steps, no nothing – no doors, no nothing. I just had corrugated iron up on all the bloody windows because at that time I couldn't afford to buy the window and, leaving a wife – and we had four kids, you know – it used to upset her a bit, no two ways about that. It does interfere with family life but, these are things that you do, I suppose. If you're convinced it's for the betterment of mankind, you're convinced.

ROSS: What about your overall philosophy of being a Communist? Have you got some sort of comments on that?

LYLE: Well, I do feel there are some people who are Communists, but I feel they set a bad example to other Party members and to people outside the Party. They were people who were womanisers. They'd be involved with two or three women as well as their wife at home, and that sets a bad example. I don't give a stuff what anyone says. I don't want to be a prude but, gee, I think you've got to draw the line somewhere. I think, especially if you've got a young family at home, I think it's very poor for a person to go chasing away from home when you've got a wife and kids at home. That's my personal opinion. I mean to say, I don't know what other people's are, but that's how I feel it, mate.

ROSS: What about your philosophy towards sort of doing political work amongst workmates? Have you got some overall theory about that?

LYLE: Well, I had no trouble with people, you know. They knew what I was and they used to disagree with me and all that, but overall they never sort of held it against me, you know. I feel that – and I don't give a damn whether you're a Communist or a great ALP-er or any politician, I feel it's bad to set a bad example.

You take what's going on now in New South Wales with that bloody McDonald and Obeid. Now, to me it spells corruption. It smells of it, and I'd say there is corruption there, and I think for any political party to have that evidence within its ranks, it's pretty poor. You know, people must lose faith in you. That's the way I see it, and I don't care who you are or what political faith you are, you can't do that sort of stuff and expect to get away with it. Yet people do, I know.

It's just like that Berlusconi in bloody Italy. Look what he does. Admittedly, he's a multi-millionaire, but just the same, there's no way in the world you could say that's all right for – I reckon that's half the trouble in politics today, I really do. Too many people who are in politics see it as a way of getting rich quick, at the people's expense. That's the way I see it.

(End of Recording)