



**BELIEF
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Name: Harry Black

Date: 1 March 2011

Place: Annandale

Interviewer: Sue Andersen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SA:** This is Sue Anderson interviewing Harry Black in Annandale on the 1st of March 2011 for the City of Sydney's Oral History Project, Belief.

So, Harry, thank you very much for doing the interview with me today. I'm wondering whether we could begin by you saying your full name and what year you were born in.

HB: My name is Harry ***** Black.

SA: And what year were you born in, Harry?

HB: I was born in 1919, ***** 1919.

SA: Gosh, you're doing very well.

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: So what's the maths on that? I'm not very good at maths, so that makes you - - -

HB: Ninety one.

SA: Ninety one.

HB: Yes.

SA: Goodness. So were you born in Sydney?

HB: No, I was born in *****, New South Wales, which is a very old town which most people haven't heard of but the town itself is a lovely little town and I have a warm place in my heart always for it because that's where I was born and that's where I grew up until I was twenty years of age.

SA: Whereabouts in the state is that?

HB: Well, it's about thirty five miles this side of Mudgee.

SA: O.K, so you were out west?

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: And what were your parents doing?

HB: Well, my father was a butcher and he had a butcher shop and I had brothers and sisters and my elder brothers, they worked in the shop and assisted my father with looking after the beef and the shop generally, yes.

2.11 **SA: And is that where you went to work?**

HB: No, no, I didn't go to work until I was fourteen and when I went to work I went to work in Bisley's shop and I went there and it was a grocer's shop, a general grocery store, and it was an old type grocery store and I was there for six years and I worked there and all my parents and my brothers and sisters all went to Sydney and I was there as a fourteen year old, working in this shop and staying with various people whom I knew there very well and who assisted me greatly and I therefore then in 1940, in July of 1940 I joined the army. And I joined the army and went into the 2/6th Field Regiment which is an artillery regiment and in November of that year I went off to the Middle East as a member of that regiment.

3.59 And I was very proud – and I've always been very proud of my regiment, of course, because it was a very fine regiment and gave great service to the army and to the people, we hope, of Australia.

SA: Right. O.K, so you stayed in that country town near Mudgee for quite some time until you went to the army?

HB: Yes, yes, twenty years I stayed there.

SA: Right.

HB: Yes.

SA: And your parents left that town when you were fourteen?

HB: Yes, for Sydney, yes, yes.

SA: Now, were your parents involved in sort of union activities?

HB: No, my parents weren't engaged in union activities, neither was I. As a matter of fact, if you'd have spoken to me about union activities I wouldn't have known what you were talking about because there was no such thing 'round the Rylstone town that I knew where people had anything to do with unions.

SA: That's very intriguing, Harry, because you've had a very active - -

HB: Yes.

SA: - - - life, both within the union movement and - - -

HB: Yes.

SA: - - - then also politically as well.

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: So how did you get to become involved?

HB: Well, when I came out of the army I worked in various jobs. I worked, selling, I worked in shops and I also worked in various other jobs like as a truck driver and eventually in 1950 I joined the wharves and I become a member of the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation.

6.14 Now, before that, of course, I used to go down to the Sydney Domain every Sunday and listen to the speakers and the speakers that intrigued me more than anything else were the communist speakers and I listened to them very carefully and they were very good, they spoke very well and they spoke with authority and so when I went into the union, the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation, I was well aware of the fact that the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation was a very active trade union and I wasn't in the union very long before I joined the Communist Party in 1953.

SA: So what was it about the Communist Party that you felt so drawn to?

HB: Well, you know, the work on the wharves was hard, it was difficult, it was dirty and the bosses wanted their pound of flesh and they constantly urged us to greater efforts in regards to work and so, like many others at that time, I joined the Communist Party, yes.

SA: So within the Waterside Workers' Union - - -

HB: Yes.

SA: - - - there was a big contingent?

8.01 HB: They had a big number of members of the Communist Party in the union when I joined it, yes, and I joined it and it was the 1950s which was a great year or a great decade in Australia because the Menzies government – as you might recall, or that many will recall – was elected at the end of 1949, was elected to office. The Chifley government was defeated, and so I was, like so many others, was faced with the fact that the Menzies government immediately said “We’ve got to prepare for a war” and he also made a number of statements after he’d come back from overseas and he also then set about that the Communist Party would be banned. And the Communist Party took it up with Dr Evatt, that it was illegal and so when they went to the court Dr Evatt prevailed and so they could not ban the Communist Party like that. So he said then “We will have a national” – I forget now what they called it - - -

10.22 **SA: A referendum?**

HB: - - - a referendum to see whether the Communist Party can be banned. Well, the Communist Party, the people said “The Communist Party is not to be banned” and so – they didn’t win by very much, by the way, the Communist Party, and so it was a very exciting time, I can assure you.

SA: So there was a lot of activity and lobbying going on?

HB: A lot of activity. Yes, there were many, many times we went out and demonstrated our rights because Menzies had also called on the fact that no communist trade union official could hold any jobs as an official. Well, of course, that was banned too; the Menzies government wasn’t successful in any shape or form like that. Well, we went on and we engaged in a number of activities, very strong activities.

SA: Like, what kind of activities, Harry?

11.56 HB: Well, at that time or just in the middle of – I think it was in the middle of the '50s that the fight against the Vietnamese War started and we demonstrated all along with members of the Labor Party and other organisations to defeat that and in doing so we went to the court and the court, we had a big demonstration in the court. And in that demonstration I was arrested and I was put into the local gaol there and then that day we were transferred down to Central Court and all of us were fined I think something like [phone rings – recording interrupted] - - -

SA: O.K, so you were talking about the demonstration and you got arrested.

HB: Yes, yes, a number of us got arrested and we were charged and anyway we had to pay a hefty fine for it.

SA: Harry, this was in the '70s when Whitlam was - - -

HB: No, no. No, no, it was in the - - -

SA: In the '50s?

HB: In the '50s, yes, yes.

SA: Right.

14.01 HB: Yes, and so the '50s was a time of great activity. Our union did some wonderful things, not only from the point of view of those incidents but engaged in cultural activities which were very successful. And so we went on and the union continued to prosper and it was a great union and it's still a great union, the Waterside Workers' are now with the Seamen's Union [amalgamated to form the Maritime Union of Australia] and other sections of the union and we have built over the years a very fine union which has got a lot of support from other sections of the community and other union members.

SA: Because it was a very, very strong, powerful union.

HB: It was.

SA: Yes.

HB: Yes, and we were very proud of the union - - -

SA: Yes.

HB: - - - the part it played and the way it did it, we did it on a basis that was proper and constructive and really worthwhile and we gained a lot of support by carrying out those activities in the way that we did.

SA: And what was the response - I guess this is really two questions – maybe we'll continue with your union activity - - -

16.01 HB: Yes.

SA: - - - but what was the response from the community at that stage, you know, in those early years – did you have a lot of community support?

HB: We did. We had quite a lot of community support because the people, many sections of the people were totally opposed to the Menzies government and the Menzies government, you know, went through the '50s and into the '60s and in that way we were able to get a lot of support from the people and our propagandists, if you like to say that, or our activists who went out to the highways and the byways and spoke to the people and spoke to other trade unions and trade unionists and we were able to get their support. So it was a very exciting time for us.

SA: And did you hold an official post?

HB: Yes, I became the senior vice president of the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation and I held that position for a long time before I retired.

SA: Right.

HB: Yes.

SA: And so were you married?

HB: I was married in the 1960s and I was divorced in the 1960s also and I haven't been married since.

SA: You've been too busy being an activist.

HB: Yes, I have, that's right, you're quite right, yes.

18.02 **SA: And so with the communists, your involvement in the Communist Party, because you were also very, very involved with that party - - -**

HB: Yes, I was. I was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, I was the secretary of the maritime part of the party branch and for a long, long time, for many years and we had a very fine selection of and people that were very capable and this tended to strengthen not only the party but it strengthened also the union considerably.

SA: And so in the '50s and '60s what was the membership like?

HB: The membership of the Communist Party? Well, we had a pretty valuable membership. We had very good branches, not only in Sydney but in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia and we had party branches down there which also played a very important role in the activities and really the defeat of the Menzies government eventually.

SA: Yes, because there was a lot of anti-communist sentiment around at that time.

HB: There was, yes, yes.

SA: So how did you deal with that?

20.02 HB: Well, we had to deal with the Groupers, what they called the Groupers. They were a very extreme right wing organisation which you may have heard of and they didn't cause us much trouble in our union but in other unions it caused the other unions a great deal of problems with their extreme right wing activities and they caused a lot of concern to the trade union movement.

SA: Why? What were they standing against or for?

HB: Well, mainly they were part and parcel of the church, of the Catholic Church and – what was the name of the fellow in Victoria? Gee, I forget his name now, I shouldn't forget his name – and he had a big influence over many people all associated with the church and very strongly opposed to the communists. And not only our party and our branch of communists had to deal with the Groupers and their very negative activities and policies that we gave - it took us off, it took us away from really building our own organisations because of the negativity of the Groupers.

22.30 **SA: So there was a lot of effort going into kind of defending yourself against them?**

HB: Yes, that's right, that's the Groupers, yes.

SA: And just generally too, I guess, you know in the community there was a lot of fear - - -

HB: Yes.

SA: - - - wasn't there, about communists?

HB: Oh, there was a lot of fear. It was generated by, you know, lies and distortions and the many sections of the - - -

SA: Community at large?

HB: - - - no, no, the press had a very big influence on many people in regards to this. There were some very good and progressive people as members of the – who were in the press but there was many sections of the press who were completely opposed to the Communist Party and of course we had to fight against them too, we had to struggle against them, we had to try to overcome the lies and distortions of those people from the press, you know, such as the Daily Telegraph – as one of our members said, they referred to it as the ‘Smellygraph’, yes.

24.32 **SA: So, Harry, I’m just interested to talk about, I guess, were you brought up in a religious environment?**

HB: Yes, yes, in my early years I went to Sunday school on a Sunday and then went to church. My mother was very keen on us going to church and I went to church.

SA: Catholic?

HB: No, no, I was a Methodist.

SA: Methodist.

HB: Yes, so you couldn’t get much worse than that, could you, I mean to say, being a Methodist? But we went and anyway the more I saw of the church and the church, not only the Catholic church but other sections of the church also were very conservative, and of course that meant they were very much opposed to the Communist Party and so consequently we had to fight on many sides.

26.05 **SA: I guess the question also too, wondering can you be religious and be part of the Communist Party – is that possible?**

HB: Yes. Well, I didn’t take very long before I come very – you know, I didn’t go to church any more, didn’t want to go to church because I didn’t think much of the churches and religion generally and so for many years now I have been a non-active, you know, that I’ve been – what do you call it? – I’m not a Christian at all, I’m purely and simply a person who wants to do the right thing by this great country of ours, by our great union and our general attitude towards decent working class men and women; that’s what I aim for, yes.

SA: And was it those values - - -

HB: Yes.

SA: - - - that attracted you to join the Communist Party?

HB: Well, I don't think I was quite – I was in the Communist Party and I think I developed very good values while I was in the Communist Party and the more I was in the Communist Party the greater the values that I believe that I had, or I hoped I had, yes.

28.02 **SA: So right at that very beginning when you were going to the Domain - - -**

HB: Yes.

SA: - - - and listening to the speakers there - - -

HB: Yes.

SA: - - - were there particular values that really struck a chord with you with the speakers?

HB: Yes, as a matter of fact I become a pretty regular speaker in the Domain myself.

SA: Did you?

HB: Yes, and we were very – and we attracted a great many people to the Domain on a Sunday afternoon. See, there was no TV at that time and the TV came in later on and as soon as the TV came in that was the finish of the speakers in the Domain, yes. But before that I spoke in the Domain on every Sunday for a long time.

SA: Before you were part of the Communist Party?

HB: Oh, no, no, not before. No, I was a member of the Communist Party then. I didn't speak at any time – I developed my speaking, which I'll use myself, my ability as a speaker in that time and this assisted me on the job because as a job delegate, representing the union on the jobs, on the waterfront, I had many meetings of workers and influenced them, I hope – and I'm sure I did – because of the fact that I remained the senior vice president for a long time, which indicated that the members were supporting me very strongly.

30.15 And it was because I went to the jobs and spoke to them about what was happening and gave them advice and I hope I gave them good advice, and I spoke to them about the work of the union and what the union stood for and what the union was doing in regards to its activities, not only on the waterfront but outside the union too.

SA: Yes, because they were very active in a lot of

HB: Yes, I was very active, I was very active in those times, in the '50s and the '60s and the '70s.

SA: And, Harry, how important was it to your role as a union delegate to be part of the Communist Party? Like, did that really help you with your work within the union or - -

HB: It helped me considerably with my work in the union, my word it did, because the senior members of the Communist Party gave me and gave many members of the Communist Party very good advice and advice which we followed, continued to follow. But, of course, in all of these things at different times we're not as pure as we might like to think we are sometimes.

32.00 **SA: How do you mean?**

HB: Because sometimes we enter into a decision or a campaign which is no good anyway, and we make mistakes and so we have to correct those mistakes, or we try to correct those mistakes. And I think we did it – we did make mistakes, there's no doubt about that.

SA: Within the union or with the

HB: Within the union and within the Communist Party itself but we also did many very positive things within the union and within the Communist Party itself.

SA: So, can you tell me some stand-out events that you took part in?

HB: Well, I took part in, you know, the struggle against the Menzies government.

SA: Yes.

HB: And I told you previously about our activities in defending one of our members when we were arrested and spent the afternoon, the morning and afternoon in one of the local gaols in Paddington. And also we endeavoured to give advice to our members who often asked us anyway about particular problems that they had and we tried by all ways and means to assist them in their problems and they were well aware of this.

34.01 And those problems oftentimes consisted not only of problems on the job but problems that they were having at home sometimes, yes, and we assisted them in every way we possibly could and advised them every way we possibly could for their benefit. And so I took part in a big campaign against the war in Vietnam and I moved at an overflow meeting in the Sydney Town Hall that we ban (knock at door) the use of – “Come in”. [break in recording]

SA: O.K, we've just had quite a long break because Harry had some visitors.

HB: I'm sorry about that.

SA: And then both of us can't remember what we were talking about before but while we were switching on the tape the question that I asked Harry was "Did you have to be a communist to be an active waterside worker?" and your response to that was -?

35.56 **HB:** Oh, no, we didn't have to be. No, no, there was many – there were many good activists who weren't members of the Communist Party. And that made the union a very strong union because we had the Communist Party and then many activists who supported the party and supported the union and supported the policies of the union and that strengthened the trade union that we were in.

SA: So how did they feel about the communists then?

HB: Well, they felt all right. Our unity, which we placed a lot of emphasis upon, we were able to get very good relationships with those who were not members of the Communist Party but who were members of the union and many of them strongly supported the Communist Party despite the fact many of them were members of the Labor Party, yes.

SA: Right, O.K.

HB: Yes.

SA: Now, Harry, I was also going to ask you to talk a little bit more about the times when you were talking in the Domain as a communist.

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: Can you remember the first time that you ever spoke there?

HB: Yes, I can.

SA: Can you tell me about that?

HB: Yes. I knew Rupert Lockwood very well. You know, he was a journalist and he was a writer of some considerable ability and he was a brilliant speaker in the Domain.

38.06 And I was always interested in coming to the Domain and probably speaking one day and Rupert said "You come down to the Domain one Sunday afternoon" and he said "I will put you up on – I will get up on the platform" and he said "I'll get a good crowd for you and then you get up" he said "and all of them'll walk away". And I said "Yes, all right". So I got up and I must have spoke on that occasion very nervously for about ten minutes or fifteen minutes and then Rupert got up and they all come back again and, you know, it was, we laughed about it for so long because what he said – he was rather a

cynical kind of a bloke, a very good bloke but he was a cynical kind of a bloke and what he said, though, was perfectly true and the reaction of the people that were there were exactly as he said it would be. But I persevered and I eventually become the chairman of the Communist Party, the main platform, and for a long time I used to chair the meeting of an afternoon. One of the features of being the chairman at that time was that we always had two speakers from the – what were they? – they were speakers – they weren't supporters of ours, they were supporters of the government and I forget now what they call it – I'm sorry, I've forgotten.

40.20 **SA: That's O.K. Are you talking about in the Domain?**

HB: In the Domain. And they used to come down and they used to take shorthand every afternoon and before I got up they used to say to me "Harry, who's speaking today?" and I used to say "Rupert Lockwood's going to speak and Stan Moran's going to speak and of course I'll be speaking too". And so I used to say to them "Don't forget to put me in, that I was speaking also". But we regarded them as most undemocratic because all they were doing was reporting to the government of what the communists were saying in the Domain by the work they were doing.

SA: Were you ever worried about that kind of - - -

HB: No, I wasn't.

SA: - - - investigation?

HB: No, never, never. They didn't – I can assure you they never worried us. We were opposed to them because we thought it was most undemocratic that we were subjected to this kind of thing but they were there and we went about our business as though they weren't there, yes.

SA: So you were never intimidated by them?

HB: No, no, not in any shape or form, no. We wouldn't take intimidation from anybody, no.

SA: So you were a fairly tough

42.00 HB: Oh yes, and we had some tough characters who fully supported us and - - -

SA: Did you?

HB: - - - if we had some characters that were causing us trouble in the Domain or anywhere else, some of these blokes'd come along and

support us and they'd make sure that those blokes that were causing the concerns were dealt with, yes, and in no uncertain way, yes.

SA: Right.

HB: Yes.

SA: So they were kind of like bodyguards or something?

HB: Yes, they were bodyguards, yes, and there were times we needed them because a number of our members, they had a fight their way because someone attacked them because they were communists and most of our blokes could look after themselves pretty well, yes.

SA: During those, you know, sort of '50s, '60s, '70s - - -

HB: Yes.

SA: - - - at the height of the party's popularity, I guess - - -

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: - - - were the many women involved in - - -

HB: Oh, yes, there were quite a few women, quite a lot of women. Well, you know, Ina [Heidtman] was one of the examples, Ina's mother, and there was Frieda Brown. She became very well known throughout various parts of the world because she spoke in the Domain on many occasions and she was a great activist and she spoke in many parts of the world as a representative of the world women's organisations.

SA: As a communist?

43.59 HB: As a communist, yes, and her husband, Bill Brown, was a journalist, and who was a very fine journalist and played a very good part in those activities. And today, of course, their daughter is in the Greens, a leading member in the Greens.

SA: Were you going to say Fiona Byrne?

HB: No, no.

SA: No.

HB: No, it was – dear, oh, dear. Look, I know her better than I know me own sister.

SA: That's O.K, Harry.

HB: Yes. Well, she's been a leading member of the Greens for some – well, she was the daughter of Bill Brown and Frieda Brown. [Reference is to Lee Rhiannon, federal senator and former NSW upper house MP]

SA: I see, yes, I see what - - -

HB: Yes, you see what I'm - - -

SA: Yes. And I don't actually – I can't remember her name either.

HB: Look, it's terrible, I know her – no.

SA: Anyway, I'm sure it'll come back to you afterwards.

HB: Yes.

SA: Now, before you talked a little bit about some different characters within the organisation - - -

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: - - - within the Communist Party.

HB: Yes.

SA: Who are some of the memorable characters?

HB: Oh, well, there were some wonderful characters in the Waterside Workers' and a few of them were members of the Communist Party and a good few of them were big supporters of the Communist Party but they were wonderful characters in the fact, you know, that they, you know, the way they went on, what they said.

46.05 Now, don't ask me to repeat some of the things they said because I'm not in any – I can't remember anything, which was a great pity but they were wonderful characters. They'd lived a lot of the years in Surry Hills and that's where they grew up in or down at Millers Point or over in the other part, which was not far from the waterfront. But there were some wonderful characters, memorable characters that we completely lose sight of and we completely lose their – and many of them, when I'm saying this – and they were so witty, many of them too, their wit was wonderful.

SA: So was that what made them quite memorable, was it - - -

HB: Oh, yes, it was.

SA: - - - because they were so witty?

HB: Yes, yeah.

SA: And were they good orators as well?

HB: Well, some of them were, yes, but we had quite a number of very good orators on the waterfront, of course, and we had some very memorable ones on the waterfront as a matter of fact.

SA: Any names stand out?

HB: Well, Stan Moran was, you know, he was very famous as a speaker in the Domain because hundreds and hundreds used to go and speak every Sunday and listen to him speak; the same with Rupert Lockwood, hundreds would go and listen to them speak because they were very good.

48.12 And Stan, I always remember one of Stan's stories. It was just prior to the Melbourne Cup and before he got down off the – he said "Now, don't forget, next Tuesday don't forget that I told you that Russia would win the Melbourne Cup and you can bet your money on it. So when you think about betting – you want to go and back him" and he said. So, Russia did win the Melbourne Cup at about sixteen to one, which was a good price and I always remember, you know, the person who was giving a description of the Cup. He said "Derby Munro has sent Russia to the front and he's going to make them all sprint to the line" and of course he sprinted better than anybody else. And the next Sunday after that Stan Moran must've collected about five hundred dollars from people throwing money in that they won.

49.40 By the way, we couldn't ask for money there, it was illegal, and Stan had a great, he developed a great method. He'd get up to start his speech and he'd say "I'm not going to say anything. I'm just going to be dumb but you know what to do, don't you?" and they would throw money in in support of him. And, of course, he was able to overcome the question of not being allowed to make a – yes, in the Domain we weren't allowed to make an appeal for money.

SA: So did that money then go to the – the collection, did that go to the Communist Party?

HB: It did, it did. Yes, of course they were members of the Communist Party, they used to collect, then they'd take it along and give it to the Communist Party. Yes, and the people, of course, that were giving it to them knew perfectly well that was what it was for: it was for the Communist Party, yes.

SA: Right. It sounds like it was a very lively Sunday morning down in the Domain.

HB: No, Sunday afternoon.

SA: Sunday afternoon.

HB: Oh, it was, it was, yes. And there were a lot of interjections at different times and we had a deal with the interjections and I remember I was speaking on another section of the party and it was during the war in Vietnam and everybody wanted to talk about it. Well, I used to speak and I spoke and spoke and I must have spoken for about an hour and I'd get down and my chest felt as though about fifty horses ran over the top of me chest, you know, because we weren't allowed either to use loud speakers or anything like that. They did everything to stop us from speaking, yes.

52.11 **SA: And so was it mainly Communist Party philosophy or ideals that you were talking about?**

HB: Oh, yes, my word, yes, yes, we spoke about national and international affairs. You know, there were some great times, many times there were big things happened in some part of the world and people'd want to hear about it, what did the communists think about it? And we had to give them what we thought about it, whether they agreed, but oftimes they did agree, oftimes they didn't agree, yes.

SA: So, Harry, what like branch of communism do you come from then, what kind of ideals do you - - -

HB: Well, what does that mean?

SA: A Trotskyite or are you - - -

HB: No, no, I'm not a Trotskyite, no, no, that's got nothing to do with our party at all, the Trotskyites, got nothing to do with our party and we didn't belong to any other, only the Communist Party of Australia, yes.

SA: O.K, so there wasn't kind of like a philosophy or an ideal, there wasn't any one particular that you followed, particular type of communism that you followed?

53.47 HB: Oh, no, no, no. Well, we were big supporters, of course, in those days of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and we were influenced by them. As it turned out, I think that we were influenced too much in many respects but nevertheless we were influenced.

SA: In what way?

HB: Well, we made some decisions I think then that it would be better if we hadn't have made those decisions and nevertheless I spent some time in the Soviet Union, in Moscow. I went over there and I was there for six months because we'd been invited to go over and have a look at Moscow and Leningrad and other Soviet cities to see what

they were like and to speak to these Soviet people and that's how I come to go over there.

SA: When did you go over, Harry?

HB: It was in 1974 and it was in the middle of winter and wasn't it cold? Oh, my God, it was cold, yes.

SA: And what was the experience like?

HB: Oh, the experience was a wonderful experience, yes, yes. I was there for six months, as I said, and I enjoyed it, I enjoyed it, despite - -

SA: You were studying?

55.48 HB: Yes, yes, we studied, I studied as much as I could and found out and had discussions with a number of people, you know, to find out as much as I could about the Soviet people, their history, their culture and so forth. I had some memorable times going to the Bolshoi, yes, my word I did.

SA: Tell me a little bit about that.

HB: Well, usually I was with three or four other people and I was the leader of that section and so I got the best - in the Bolshoi I got a very good seats and, you know, there were some of, you know, the great Soviet dancers that I went and saw a number of times like - can I remember some of them? Yes, because they were very famous; they weren't only famous in their own country, they were famous outside their country too. Wonderful, they were.

SA: And how did that influence I guess your belief and, you know, your commitment to the Communist Party?

HB: Oh, well, I think that tended to strengthen it, yes, because obviously - by the way, have you got enough - look, I'll turn the light on for you if you like.

SA: No, no, it's fine.

HB: Are you sure?

SA: Yes. Are you doing all right?

HB: Oh, yes, I am, yes.

SA: You're not getting too tired?

HB: No, no, no. No, what time is it? Ten past four.

SA: Yes.

58.00 HB: Oh, yes, we've got plenty of time.

SA: A little bit more time?

HB: Oh, yes, yes, we've got time, yes, of course.

SA: Now, I was talking to Denis [Doherty] about you as well.

HB: Yes.

SA: And Denis was saying that you had done a lot of actions over your time and one of many of them was stopping a supply troop, refusing to load ships.

HB: Yes, I made a big name for myself because the union, even the union, you know, which I was devoted to I went against them and the union officials and it was the time when the Americans were doing some terrible things to the people and - - -

SA: Which people?

HB: The people of Vietnam. You know, they were putting poisons on them from planes and they were doing some terrible things, really, and I remember one of the things. And they'd given us or they'd proposed, the union officials proposed that we continued to load the Jeparit – that was the name of the ship, the Jeparit – and they had a resolution which I thought was a terrible resolution and I opposed it completely. And I proposed another resolution and it was put to the membership and my resolution won easy, yes.

60.08 And so the ship was barred, it couldn't go any further then because the union had voted against it and we were opposed to it completely. And I always remember one of the things that had happened just at this time and I always remember to this day and these people were being attacked by some Americans and this little girl was running down a road and she was completely nude and she came across these people – there was a mass of them, you know, who were on the ground, they were dead, obviously, but she thought, she saw this thing sticking out of the – she thought it was her mother and she stopped and grasped the mother's hand or what she thought to be her mother's hand – which of course it wasn't her mother's hand – and just down from where she did this an American knelt down and took careful aim and blew her head off. And, you know, that didn't come from a Communist or a left wing thing, it came from – I had this American magazine there and that's what this bloke, this American reported, and I said "You can do that. I will not have anything to do with them". And my resolution won the ... and I got a great support from many, many people for it, for that incident.

62.28 **SA: Because you really believed that it was the right thing to do?**

HB: To do, yes, and many of the union they were up in arms against me because I took opposition to them and I thought it was the right thing to do and I did it and I got big support from it. Nearly everybody voted for my resolution, yes.

SA: And were there aftereffects of that decision?

HB: Oh, no, there was no aftereffects. The thing was banned and it stayed banned except for the fact, of course, that the naval personnel took it over to Vietnam on a couple of occasions, yes, but not long after that, you know, the Americans were thrown out of Vietnam – you knew that, didn't you?

SA: Yes, yes.

HB: Yes, and they were thrown out of Vietnam and so the Vietnamese resumed their own activities then, yes, but thousands and thousands of them had died, yes. And you know that there was fifty seven thousand Americans died in that thing, fifty seven thousand Americans died in it.

64.12 **SA: Yes, it was an appalling war.**

HB: Oh, appalling, it was appalling and the Americans did some appalling things.

SA: And, Harry, the Communist Party was very supportive of your act or they were actually also very sort of anti Vietnam War as well.

HB: Oh, they were, they were, very – all the Communist Party was opposed to the Vietnam War.

SA: And also too in the '60s and '70s there were also some issues about land rights and also Whitlam's dismissal and the East Timor situation as well.

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: So, were you involved in those actions?

HB: Well, I wasn't involved that much in those particular activities but certainly the Communist Party generally were very much involved in those kinds of activities, yes.

SA: And also sort of as well as sort of fighting on a political front as well it sounds as though they were very culturally and artistically active as well.

HB: They were, they were, yes.

SA: Can you remember any of the - - -

65.35 **HB:** Yes. Well, you know, that one of the things that even today gets publicity – we had some very talented people there who developed a set of things that – I’m trying to find proper words.

SA: Paintings?

HB: No. Well, later on of course they developed some paintings too, which become rather famous too, but they developed some activities which depicted members of our people active in their own activities and - - -

SA: Murals?

HB: Yes, mural. We’ve got a famous mural. The mural today is in, you know, the – what’s the name of that thing? – they were over at the – yes, you can go over to, you know, that’s across from – what’s the - -

SA: Is it Walsh Bay?

HB: No, not Walsh Bay, it’s got nothing to do with Walsh Bay, it was on the other side.

SA: The Rocks?

HB: No, no, no, no, not that way, it was, you know, around – what’s the name of the place now? It’s a big upmarket place now, of course.

SA: We can find that out after.

67.55 **HB:** Anyway, and today you often see they use, the ABC uses some of our work that they did at that time, they still use them in some of their – when they want to emphasise a particular thing some of our things appeared and as one bloke said “Yes, and they’ve never paid us anything for it either”, yes.

SA: Now, also Denis told me that you were active with the Bangaroo or against the Bangaroo development when the Premier was - - -

HB: Yes, yes, because we wanted to preserve the Hungry Mile because we had, you know, the people who walked down the Hungry Mile and who went to work down the Hungry Mile and they were great characters, as I said, and we wanted to preserve the Hungry Mile,

which has been preserved, by the way. And you can see now when you go down there the Hungry Mile, it's up in – and I was active in that campaign and I remember the Premier, who was – oh, geez, which Premier was it?

SA: Was it lemma?

HB: Who?

SA: Premier lemma?

HB: lemma, not Emma, that's not his name, is it, Emma's not his name. Yes, well that's the bloke, that's the bloke.

SA: lemma.

69.53 HB: Yes, and he said to me – we were up, right up near Millers Point and he said "Harry, you can't" – because by that time I was getting pretty old, if you like to say that, and he said "Harry, you can't walk all the way down there with us". He says "You go and get in my car and he'll drive you around so you won't have to walk". And, yes, it was on TV, I got on TV quite a few times as a matter of fact, yes.

SA: As with the union?

HB: As an activist with the union, yes. And how I did this was I was the secretary of the Retired Union Members in the union rooms. I was talking about them today as a matter of fact, when you might have heard me and I went in to see them today because – and saw them because I was in hospital and so forth. But anyway I also got some publicity with the Lord Mayor or the Lord Mayoress – or the Lord Mayor I suppose you'd call her, wouldn't you – has she got anything to do with you?

SA: Well, this oral history is part of the City of Sydney - - -

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: - - - and she's the Mayor of the City of Sydney.

71.46 HB: Yes, yes. Well, she came down with the Premier, you know, the Premier of New South Wales before the Premier, this Premier that's in there now, and down near Millers Point there's a lovely little park and I had to go in there and I had to say something to the children because a number of children had come down to take part in our activities and the Lord Mayor came and the Premier came too and that was one of the times I was on TV.

SA: So you're quite an identity, Harry, aren't you?

HB: Yes, yes. Well, it was purely and simply by luck, it wasn't by any great thing on my part, I don't think.

SA: I don't know about that.

HB: No.

SA: So what is it, what's been your motivation then, why were you so strongly an activist and work so hard for the Communist Party?

HB: Now, you shouldn't say "Why were you such a" – I'm still an activist, by the way, I'm still active or I like to think I am but I certainly don't do anything hardly these days at all.

SA: O.K. So what's been your inspiration?

HB: Well, the Communist Party has been a great inspiration to me and the union itself has been a great – you know, the Waterside Workers' was a great inspiration for me also and the present union, the MUA [Maritime Union of Australia], has been a great inspiration for me because they were great organisations who fought and were very successful in defending their workers' rights.

74.08 And, you know, the big dispute which took part about just on twelve years ago when the Prime Minister and the people who were in charge of the Waterside Workers' Federation sacked all his members and said "We don't want you any more" and it started a big, big, big fight and they took us to the High Court and in the High Court we were able to defeat them on four occasions when they went to the High Court. They were able to get this bloke who was very active today – he's a leading barrister and a very clever one apparently too – and they went along to him and said "We want you to defend us against this thing that all of our members have been sacked" and that meant that they were finished on the waterfront and they had scabs, by the way, in Dubai – Dubai, is it, Dubai?

SA: Dubai.

HB: Eh?

SA: Yes, you're right, yep.

75.42 HB: And they had scabs there, training them, to take our places and now one of our officials and somebody else went and seen the – not the Premier of Dubai and said "If you don't send those scabs back, your ships will be banned in nearly every part of the world" because one of the things we had done, we had built up very good relationships with international members of the unions, various unions. And in America on the west coast they were faced with unloading a ship that had come from there and had been loaded by scabs and they kept it there

for seventeen days and it was sent back to Australia, they sent it back to Australia, and the Australians had to unload it and then load it up again and as you know we won the dispute. All of our members went back to work, yes.

SA: Yes, it was a very tumultuous time, that time.

HB: My word it was, yes, yes, and we won the dispute, there's no question about that.

SA: So lots of very proud occasions, Harry, by the sounds of it.

HB: Yes.

SA: And what about the kind of friendships that you've forged with people within the union and also within the CPA?

77.38 HB: Oh, yes, I forged, I think I forged some very good relationships with people in the Communist Party and the people that work for the union and many other people that I've come into contact I've developed very good relationships with them, yes.

SA: And lasting relationships by the sound of it.

HB: And lasting relationships, yes, yes, yes.

SA: Now, is there anything else that you would like to talk about in relation to your involvement with the Communist Party and also too the kind of values and beliefs that attracted you?

HB: Yes. Well, you know, I think my values and beliefs developed over many years. I was a great reader, always, always read, you know, I was a ferocious reader and, you know, a few years ago I had a illness and, you know, I can't read now, I can't read at all. As a matter of fact, this is what they were looking at today. They've got the things there that I'm going to listen to and one of the things, one of my great favourites is the Grapes of Wrath, yes, and I'm going to listen to it once more because I've read the book but I'd like to read it again but I can't read it, I can't read.

SA: That's a great shame for you reading

HB: Oh, it is. Yes, they were talking today about my books. I have great heaps of books, I had more books in the place than I had food or anything else; books were more important to me than anything.

80.00 **SA: Did you live around the city area?**

HB: I lived in Glebe, yes, and down the end of Glebe Point; very nice area too, it was. Well, I lived there for over forty years, yes, and it was a beautiful place.

SA: Actually, I've just got one question and it's a very kind of simple question but I was just wondering how your parents felt about you becoming a Communist.

HB: Well, of course my father died in 1938 and so I wasn't a communist then by any means but I don't know whether – my mother and I were always on very good terms because I come from a big family, you see, and my sisters, you know, one of them, she's – I've got four sisters still alive and they all say "Oh, yes, he was mummy's boy", yes, and they make a big joke about me being a mummy's boy and I think in many respects, of course, it was pretty right. But why I was mummy's boy, I don't know.

SA: What did she think about you being in the Communist Party?

HB: Well, I'm not sure about that, I never asked her about that what she thought about it. I don't think she would be very pleased with me, you know, I think that she'd be not pleased at all.

SA: And the rest of your family?

81.55 HB: Oh, yes. Look, the rest of my family, my sisters that live in Sydney, they were big supporters of mine, yes. They weren't members of the Communist Party themselves but they usually supported me in all those activities.

SA: O.K, Harry. And I'll just say thank you very much for a wonderful interview.

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: It was very, very interesting to hear about your life as an activist.

HB: Yes, yes. But, of course, you know, when I went to the Middle East, you know, I went there as a soldier with my regiment and then I come back to New Guinea and I was in New Guinea for seventeen months and it was a very bad place to be in because of, you know, I got malaria out of it and different other things. And then I went to Borneo with another regiment which I went illegally with because a mate of mine and I thought that our regiment wasn't going to Borneo and we wanted to go and so we got on the barges that they eventually, you know, assaulted parts of – and I went and my mate and we went with them and when we did I was badly wounded on the tenth day of that.

84.10 You know, we went ashore, attacked from the shore and then we went ashore and then we went but I only lasted ten days before I got a great – I got from a Japanese hand grenade, yes.

SA: And then you were brought back to Australia?

HB: Oh, yes. Well, and then I went out of the army then, yes. And so the time I spent in the army which was, you know, about five and a half years, they were very important years for me and we did a lot, my regiment did a lot and then the 2/31st, I was with them, they were, you know, they were rather a famous seventh division, unit, and I went with them to Borneo, yes.

SA: A very interesting life, Harry, that you've led.

HB: Yes, yes.

SA: Thank you for sharing it today with us.

HB: It was all right, was it?

SA: It's fantastic.

HB: But I'm sorry, you know, these days - - -

Interview ends