A TEI Project

Interview of Len De Caux

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1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (June 20, 1981)

AMSDEN

> --married when I was sixteen, so they're grown now. I'm actually a grandfather.

DE CAUX

> Yes. I'm due to be a great-grandfather by now.

AMSDEN

> Are you?

DE CAUX

> Oh, yes.

AMSDEN

> And I have some natural children, but, apart from that, my present wife and I don't have any kids. And you say you've raised a hundred, more or less.

DE CAUX

> Oh, I don't know. Just, you know, so many that they, they're always moving around here, you know, from the various apartments.

AMSDEN

You've been living here twenty years then, you said?

DE CAUX

Yes, twenty-two, actually, my wife [Caroline (Abrams) De Caux] and I. Oh, I had a whole houseful of children. First of all I had a niece here with four children around, raised them practically. They lived somewhere around here. They all got married and some had children by now. So it's just like raising your own kids.

AMSDEN

Oh, sure.

DE CAUX

Nephews and nieces.

AMSDEN

Did you have brothers and sisters?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes, allover the world. If you know anything about the English. [laughter] Do you?

AMSDEN

Me? Oh, sure.

DE CAUX

Are you English?

AMSDEN

No, I did my Ph.D. over there, so I lived in the country four, five years.

DE CAUX

Yes, the name is Amsden.

AMSDEN

Amsden. Yes, that's an English name.

DE CAUX

That's an English name, yes.

AMSDEN

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

DE CAUX

I had one brother and two sisters. One sister's still alive, eighty-six, eighty-seven. There is a picture.

AMSDEN

Where were you born? Were you born in New Zealand?

DE CAUX

New Zealand, yes.

AMSDEN

Could you give me the year also?

DE CAUX

1899. I'm a century man. Are you taking this yet, or are you-

AMSDEN

Yes, I am. I'm not big for real formal things, so-

DE CAUX

All right, just let's talk casually.

AMSDEN

I would start, actually, by just asking you to say, you know, the year and time of your birth and then explain to me how you got from there to Harrow [School].

DE CAUX

Oh, I see. Well, I'd much rather talk easily and informally.

AMSDEN

That's what I –

DE CAUX

That's what you want? That's what we'll do then.

AMSDEN

Love it, yes.

DE CAUX

No, I'm a century man. I was born as close to the end of the nineteenth century as I comfortably could be. You know it gets very hot around the end of the year in New Zealand. I've lived through all of the century so far, and with any luck I might even go on to the end of the century. At any rate, I tend to think in century terms. I'm not an ad hoc man, never have been, all through my life. If you do start to question me about my opinions, or why I did this, or why I joined that, or this or that or the other, you should consider it in a rather broad framework of certain convictions that I had, that have seemed to be borne out by all I've seen in this century. And most of the political or social decisions I've made have been within that framework. I came in on the tag end, as it were, of feudalism in England, and the hangovers were all around me. My mother [Helen Hammond nee Branfill] had a lot of the feudal attitudes, quite foreign to united States. So that when I tried to bring that out in the start of my book [Labor Radical: From the Wobblies to Cla], in the first few chapters [about] the "old country," most Americans don't even know what the hell I'm talking about. You know, [it] just doesn't make any sense to them. But if you're ever brought up in that milieu of Harrow and Oxford in those earlier years of this century, you would know what I mean. And of course it made profound, gave me profound reactions. But anyhow, so the concept, the historical concept--I don't know where it originated, I don't think it originated with Marx, with Marx necessarily--of all history being a history of class struggles made supreme sense to me because I could see it happening all around me. Even as a child I was well aware of it in England.

AMSDEN

New Zealand?

DE CAUX

No, New Zealand not so much. I was too young, then. I left there when I was thirteen. But after I came to England as a teenager (the whole family moved over to England), I could see the--even at Harrow--see the old feudal ideas still prevailing, a real hangover as it were, and all their attitudes, just like my mother's, of being pushed out constantly, as it were, by the rising capitalist class, if you like to call it that. And that, that was obsolete. Well, I had profound reactions against the feudal ideas. I came from New Zealand, after all, which was relatively democratic. And for a while, as a youngster (I'm talking teenage) before the First World War, I sort of looked to the liberal bourgeoisie, as it were, and finally concluded--I tried to bring this out, incidentally, at the start of the book, but I think it met with a lack of success--that they were as bad in their way as were the old feudal aristocracy, the old feudal elitism, and that, actually as well as historically, the working class in the broadest sense, namely the people who all through history have done the work of the world whether as slaves or as serfs or, since industrialism came, as workers, in this century were going to displace the old, the capitalist class rule. The rule of men of money in other words. And that seemed to make sense to me. And my whole life since has been guided by that conception (I'm not an academic or anything like that, when we get to discussing [that] the working class means this or that or the other, I use it only in the broadest, broadest sense) we get to discussing [that] the working class means this or that or the other, I use it only in the broadest, broadest sense), and I do think that has been happening. Because I saw in South Africa--even as a child, when the family moved you know, sailed all around the world to get to England on that freighter--to see how the black people were used just pretty much like slaves by both the money people and a feudal elite of the British Empire, in which some of my own relatives were members. I had one who was vice-governor of Natal, or something like that, you know. But they were all associated with that ruling element, a gradual process of emerging from feudalism to all outright capitalism which only money can produce.

AMSDEN

Did you stop in South Africa for a while on your way back-

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

--to England? What year would that have been, roughly?

DE CAUX

That would have been 1913, 1912 or ’13.

AMSDEN

So, twenty odd years after the Boer War, but before the big-

DE CAUX

Oh yes, the Boer War I heard all about, you know, formed my conclusions from. That’s right. And then in England, as I've said, I saw that process of a strong class movement. The Labour party and the unions cooperated, and so forth. A very easily observed phenomenon in the old country which becomes all fuzzed over in the united states, because the classes there [in England] were more rigid socially, and this idea of moving from one class to another was not--The class lines were fairly clear in England, but I could see the working class, as it were, the people who do it, were gradually gaining a gain. I noticed that all through my life. I come to America and, again, what do I find here [while] working around the country? I find the working people treated as, not slaves, but what the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] called the wage slaves. Had no rights, you know. Some of the craft unions had gained a little preferred position for themselves, but only to a minimum extent. All around in the United States, everywhere I went, associated--I became an IWW, of course. And I was a migratory laborer and worked at sea and various things like that. The unions were not--There was no organized working class strength, as in England. In England they did have organization and they had a certain philosophy, for better or worse. But here in the United States I saw--Just to talk in century terms, the changes between the status and the organization of the working people in America has advanced phenomenally, for whatever reason. Due to the votes, strikes, organization, mostly. Mostly a matter of struggle, so that I've confirmed in my opinion: This is the century of the rise of the working class, see. Now, what it's going to do to anything else, what it will do to society is another matter. I don't know. You may have your fingers crossed, but at any rate, that seems to be incontestable.

AMSDEN

Could I ask another biographical note?

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

Did you go straight to Harrow when you arrived in England from New Zealand?

DE CAUX

Coming from New Zealand--My father [Reverend Howard Percival De Caux] was a clergyman, we used to call them. And incidentally, to get again to this class concept, I said I didn't gain too much of it in New Zealand, I was too young, but I sure got it in the family, because my mother came from what is called in England a county family.

AMSDEN

Yes, I know what it is.

DE CAUX

And my father came from the petty bourgeoisie. His father was a little bank manager in the midlands of England.

AMSDEN

If I can interject, I thought that was pretty funny when you asked God some questions but he didn't give you the answers, so you gave them [the questions] to his walking delegate. [laughter]

DE CAUX

You did read the book, yes? [laughter]

AMSDEN

Oh, yes. [laughter] That’s very funny. Was your father that sort of a man?

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

Walking delegate of the deity?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. I go back to New Zealand forty-five years later, and a farmer there comes to see me. He remembers father when he was a clergyman, because he had restored his faith, see. People with doubts in religion were coming, would go to my father and he would--What he'd do, I don't know, but any rate, he said he restored his faith. So-

AMSDEN

You [were] in Belfast, for a while, with your father?

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

You described it on the top of the hill looking over the city.

DE CAUX

Yes, now to follow with my parents if you wish me to. He was--My mother, with the feudal ideas that I tried to abort, sort of regarded him as coming from the common people, you see, as against the gentry or the upper class. How feudal that is, you get practically none of it in America. So, I still left it in my book, I was going to cut it out the next edition because it makes so little sense to so many Americans that I know.

AMSDEN

I think it's very important though.

DE CAUX

But, to me, it's basic in my attitudes. Well, anyhow, he and my mother met in New Zealand, married there, raised a family, and some twenty years later or--I don't know how many, around, between twenty and thirty years later--they decided to go back to the old country, go "home," as the New Zealand colonials always refer to it. And so we did. We all went over, home. And when

we got home, there was, the two families again, the sort of class thing. My mother's family, they had money, they had property, all based on property, and they wanted to make ladies and gentlemen out of the children, see. So, immediately offered to send [me] to Harrow. And they would have helped my father 'get a living,' as it was called, but the old grandma was pretty shrewd and she didn't see a good investment anywhere in any of these livings. You know, they're all based on the church. This is Church of England understand. It's not the--This is the established church. They advertise all the livings, how much. Pretty expensive many of them are if the man, if the incumbent is growing old, or if he is sick, or something like that. [laughter] Oh, what a racket. But anyhow, he couldn't get a living, he didn't get a living. So he got employment with the Church Missionary Society and, I guess, he had that to the end of his life. And he was stationed in different places, not in the colonies, but around in different parts of England, and then in Belfast, Ireland.

AMSDEN

That's sort of a colony, isn't it.?

DE CAUX

Yes. But not in the remote colonies, I mean. Well, again, you see, that's foreign to Americans, the whole empire and the concept of the colonies and the church's role, and the missionary's role. I had all that. So there we were in Ireland, when I was being sent to an expensive sort of finishing school, preparatory to going to Harrow. She thought I wasn't good enough, I wasn't polished enough to go to Harrow, so I was to go to this school and I did that. That was in England, but on vacations I used to go over to Belfast, and I mentioned in the book the reactions I had to that. Never had seen poverty like that, or misery and so forth. I was just reaching puberty at that time, and it made a profound impression on me. Those, as I say, are ethical considerations, the ones that still guide me to this day. The idea of concept of the century, which is a very comforting way to look at things, because you don't get too upset about what happens from time to time and you do retain a very vivid, active interest in what is going on in the world. Everything you see fits into that concept, in general, of the lives of the working class and the gradual displacement, I hope, eventually of the money people, who do everything by money.

AMSDEN

Were you aware of the religious dimension of class conflict in Belfast?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes.

AMSDEN

Were they, the Protestants and the Catholics very much-

DE CAUX

Oh, very much so. Yes, you see, I was very religious as a child, in New Zealand there. I was, I even tried to learn the whole Bible by heart. My whole ambition in life, as a small child to the age of the kids here, was to be a missionary in China, because we were always having missionaries coming in from all parts of Africa, allover the far-flung British Empire. So I was under those influences and was extremely religious as a child, until Belfast. I do bring that out, I think, in the book. And that was the sort of turning point after which I became an agnostic for the rest of my life. So the conflict that was going on was apparently all religious. That puzzled and frustrated me, because I could have understood, even then, the idea of working people getting organized and rising against- The rich and the poor were very sharply defined classes, you might say, in Great Britain in my childhood, and you didn't go from one to the other. They were two classes, and I always expected the underclass to rise against the rich class. The poor people--Because it struck me as so grossly unjust that all these people [who] never earned their money, were just getting it from, you know, ownership or exploitation or rent, profit or interest or what not, should have it so high and mighty as a ruling class, whereas the poor people--Hell, hell, I can still get emotional about that, but that was all in the old country, a long time ago. So my father there, in his office, he had a clerk. He was all, of course, with the Protestants. And that clerk used to take me out to soccer games once in a while and things like that. I used to know him. But he used to disappear mysteriously over weekends or evenings or one thing and another. And nobody said what it was. But I found out after a while he was one of these Ulster military unit people, who were arming to fight down the papists and the Catholics. And those were the terms in which they thought, I found out.

AMSDEN

Military terms.

DE CAUX

They thought in religious terms. Papism was the great enemy, you know. And the papists were going to overrun you unless you armed and fought them down, and so on and so forth. Then, of course, the patriotic ideas about the British Empire and all the rest of it, were another phase of the-Those were the people I was brought up with, at the age of puberty there, thirteen, fourteen, in Belfast.

AMSDEN

Were you roughly that age when you went over to Harrow then?

DE CAUX

I was fourteen. I was a little late because had this year--In fact I went to Harrow almost exactly at the time when the First World War broke out. And I must have been fourteen, my birthday is in October and I think it was around the fourteenth birthday that--And my years are easy to remember, because they go by the century. [laughter] Everything goes by the century. So, 1914, October 14, then I would have been turning--wait a moment. No, I was fourteen, had to be turning fifteen, yes, just at the time when I went up to Harrow, which was rather late.

AMSDEN

Were you the object of upper class scorn and that sort of thing? I get a little sense of that in your book, that the swells, walking down the middle of the street gave you a bit of a rough time and stuff.

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. Well-

AMSDEN

Was there a physical side to that?

DE CAUX

You see, again, there are so many wheels within wheels when it comes to racism and everything else, I tried to get the broad outlines. But actually, coming as a New Zealander to the first school I went to, to prepare for Harrow, you know, to be polished up as it were, the kids all used to make fun of me. My accent they thought was so funny, you know, and I don't know--I vaguely remember all the taunts they used to give to me there. [laughter] It's almost a form of humor. But in Harrow less so, see, because by then I was pretty much anglicized. There it became another matter at Harrow. It became again- Are you really interested in all this personal sort of stuff?

AMSDEN

Well, yes, and I'll explain why.

DE CAUX

OK.

AMSDEN

I want to know why somebody from your class background becomes a life-long revolutionary.

DE CAUX

Right.

AMSDEN

And it doesn't seem to fit. There are a couple of guys like you and George Orwell, sort of similar background, who did similar sorts of things.

DE CAUX

I'm glad you do, because I like to talk about it. I'm more interested in the actual organizational work that was associated with them.

AMSDEN

It's not that I'm not interested in that, and the next time we meet, perhaps, I want to ask you a lot about what went on in Illinois.

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

But I have a personal question myself, because I'd like to know and I'd like people, you know, whoever listens to us, to know how someone comes from a particular class background and makes a stand with the working class.

DE CAUX

Well, to me it was very clear. I think I've indicated the general philosophical or intellectual reactions that I had and still have. As to the emotional and psychological, that too is fairly clear to me at this stage. When I came to Harrow, I found myself an outsider or an inferior in this sense. Not in a class sense, because Harrow didn't really go by classes. We had-People were aware that Carter Paterson boys, the big trucking firm, or some of the other capitalist kids who were coming there, didn't come from their class. You know, Winston Churchill was an old-timer, and [the] King of Jordan [King Hussein] was at Harrow, and all the Pahlavi family people from Iran, I guess.

AMSDEN

Sure.

DE CAUX

There were a number of Iranians there, Persians we called them then. One or two became friends. But they all, there were so many foreigners and so many people came from different classes, that the atmosphere, in that sense, was not bad. Where I found the atmosphere bad, strange as it may seem to an American schoolboy--just the opposite from my childhood there--is that games were all-important, you know. I don't know what they say about the playing fields of Eton [College] and so forth. Well, same idea at Harrow. The only thing that really counted, that gave you status, was cricket and Harrow football and rugger and all the games at which I was hopeless. [laughter] I went through more misery at Harrow than anyone can conceive because was not athletic. I was a bookish kid, bookish and thoughtful kid, and used to stay up half the night reading and studying and so forth. And I was a sort of weakling physically. That-And, of course, I was the butt of ridicule, you know. Oh, how I hated, hated all of them. At soccer, my great fear was that the ball would be passed to me when I was on the wing. I don't know if you know anything about soccer?

AMSDEN

Sure.

DE CAUX

That I would be left all by myself, with a clear field to the goal. What would happen to me, I was always afraid, was that I would stumble over the ball, or fall, and so forth. Oh God, the misery I could go through. The only game I liked was rugby, because I could get lost in the scrimmage, keep my eyes closed, and not know what the hell was going on. I had complete disinterest and distaste for all those games. In the course of time I had to become captain of my team, I think it was Harrow football or something, and get the insignia, but I was never good at it. And I've always remembered that. Now that was the thing that probably upset me most at Harrow, just from a purely personal and emotional point of view. And, as I say, when I was being--how [do] they say in America, they say "phasing?" What's the word for, it's not exactly bullied, but it is being put down by your peers.

AMSDEN

Hazed, sometimes.

DE CAUX

Hazed, yes, I used to get hazed by all these athletic characters who regarded me as a rabbit, as a groise and everything else, because I couldn't help enjoying reading and book work, which was absolutely not done at Harrow. You know, you had to be-

AMSDEN

Could I ask you what sorts of things you were reading then in your-

DE CAUX

I read everything. I read mostly the classics, because I was--All the education at Harrow--in those days they didn't have modern subjects--was in the classics. I had Latin and Greek from the age of about ten, even in New Zealand. So your reading had to be done largely in those languages. And anything that you enjoyed, like Dickens--I used to love Dickens when I was a child, I remember that, and I was always going to the library trying to get other books

out, you know, that would be something like Dickens. I can remember that. I don't know what all I read, but I read almost everything that came down the pike, and even the classics, which was the subject we were supposed to know about.

AMSDEN

Well, this is sort of an odd, you may find this sort of an odd question, but a lot of the classics do deal with democratic and aristocratic struggles, and the Rome republic and Greece. Did any of those influence you at that time?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. Because they influenced all of Harrow, in fact, you see, particularly as I got up into the higher grades there. I was a scholar, you see, I got--I won scholarships, competitive scholarships from Harrow into Oxford. But [studies] became more interesting when you came to seventeen or eighteen. I was eighteen and a half before I left Harrow. There they used to have discussions on all these political issues, which fitted in with the British Tory attitudes anyhow, the imperial attitudes. The slaves didn't count, you know. I mean, that was pretty obvious. And some of it kind of made me radical [laughter] when got up to Oxford, that even the nicest--great guys like Gilbert Murray, a great liberal, a humanist and everything else--took no account of the .slaves in ancient Greece, any more than they did at Harrow. Everything was in the high philosophical elements. But the ideas that came from Greece, after all most of the political ideas of aristocracy and monarchy and tyranny and all the different rules of government, even democracy and so forth, they were all--My ideas were all based on the classics there and the discussions we had originally on the thing. And they had, the more developed kids in the higher classes there discussed it with a great deal of eagerness. I was interested. But there again I started to feel myself as a minority, as a radical, because nobody sympathized with the idea of democracy at Harrow [laughter] with its background. Monarchy, of course, was taken for granted. Oligarchy was, of course, their main conception, that they should stay on top, they and the people like them, including the capitalists. The radicals, the most radical you got, were those who would include capitalists along with the aristocracy as the rulers who should run an empire. After all, at Harrow and Eton you were supposed to be trained to run an empire, a world-wide empire, and that's

what it was. Those people, most of them would be in actual training to rule in South Africa, to rule in every colony allover the world, with certain ideas of ethics and certain religious ideas, shall we say, that fitted in with the ruling of an empire. Namely, that you weren't just crude, like an American [laughter] capitalist would be about exploiting people. You did it for their own good, you know. And why did you do it? You had a philosophy that you were brought up for. And British justice, you know, was known allover the world. And, oh, the "white man's burden" and all the rest of that. So, there, oligarchy was just taken for granted.

AMSDEN

Well, how did these people react--let's go on a couple of years--when you were at Oxford? I believe you were there during the actual year of the Russian Revolution?

DE CAUX

Right.

AMSDEN

Now, how did this class of people, who you may have known, react to that event? And what was it like to sit there in your wainscotted college rooms and look at the next stage of history unfolding? Did you really understand it then, or did you understand--?

DE CAUX

By the time I went up to Oxford I was a radical already, definitely a radical. Not a Marxist in the sense that I didn't directly read Marx--I didn't read Das Kapital or any of the other Marx--but I had read enormously in all the emotional aspects of radicalism, you know, like [William] Morris and [George] Bernard Shaw and so on and so forth. I went up after the First World War was over, and I was in the British army. All my ideas were changed by the war a great deal. And, of course, everyone who went up to Oxford there was a veteran of the First World War practically all of them. And so their ideas were influenced considerably.

AMSDEN

Well, you were actually in the trenches, then, when October took place, were you?

DE CAUX

No, no. I was on Salisbury Plain, in the big encampment in England there. I was in the Royal Field Artillery and I was coming from Harrow. Just naturally you go right in to be an officer, you see. You're sent to an officer's--You've been in the OTC [Officer Training Corps] at Harrow, so when you go in, you go in with the rank and pay of a gunner, which is like a private, but you're immediately shunted into schools to prepare you to be an officer, see. So I was in various camps, culminating with Salisbury Plain in England. When I was in the army, from [age] eighteen and a half--It was only for about less than a year anyhow, and I was to be sent to the front only after nineteen. So when the armistice came, I had not been to the front at all, but I had just been commissioned an officer, second lieutenant, and so I was eligible to go out. I think I was, I think it was [that] I was under orders to go to the front and then came Armistice Day and the big revolt of the troops on Salisbury Plain.

AMSDEN

Oh.

DE CAUX

History has never-

AMSDEN

You've never mentioned that in your book.

DE CAUX

It's funny I didn't, because in writing--You know I've written a lot of supplementary stuff, not that I expect to publish it at all, on regard to my autobiography you may say, so it probably isn't in the book. But, at any rate, on Salisbury Plain, when the armistice came, I was drunk for the first time in my life, I guess. Everybody was drunk. We had liquor in our mess-You know, we were never out, we could only have wine or beer, but hard liquor was all around the place, and all these budding officers were drunk, including me. And I could hardly drag myself over to get into bed. I finally got away, but I was aware that while I was doing that there was firing coming from allover. I

didn't know what the hell it was all about. There were no cannon, but rifle firing was going on, flames were shooting up there allover Salisbury Plain, and all sorts of noises were going on. I thought, "Why in the hell are they [laughter] doing this when everybody is celebrating?" and so on. But I got to bed. No sooner had I gotten to bed, still drunk, when the officer came in and told me to "rise and shine." I said, "But look, I'm going on leave today, I can sleep in as long as 1--" He said, "Like hell you can." He said, "You're on guard duty now and all leaves cancelled." I was going up to London on leave that day, and I had to spend the rest of the night and the rest of the next day on guard duty, see, allover the center of Salisbury Plain. Our camp was a little far away from the center. And what did I see all around me? Nearly every store was burnt to the ground and had been ransacked, you know, stolen all they could. There was terrific resentment against the high prices in the stores, you know. That was the first thing that they did, many of them doubtless drunk. Those were burned down in most cases, and it was a sign of devastation all around. So that was all I actually saw, but all the stories we got were along these lines, of the complete reaction of the troops there, who, after all, had four and a half years of--A lot of those guys had been in the trenches and were just, you know, stationed back home and going out again, and all that sort of stuff. And they'd had their bellies full, believe me. So, when armistice came they really went on a rampage. They claimed that they broke into all the waac [women's Auxiliary Army Corps] quarters and raped the waacs (a lot of these stories are doubtless exaggerated); that officers were being shot right and left, or sergeants, you know, from behind; and that the Irish were in complete rebellion, which is quite believable because there were a lot of Irish troops there, you know. And they were-[laughter] They really went on a rampage as they're doing to this day in Ireland. You can't blame them. And that the Canadians had run up the red flag and were demanding to be sent home immediately. Those were all the stories. When the worst of the rioting was over, we went back to the camp there, and we started to get orientations from the War Office in London and from the officers, and so forth. And the lectures were all along this line: that nothing much had really happened, see, that just was high spirits and so forth and that we shouldn't spread idle rumors, and so on and so forth. And you know, I looked at the--Later I looked at the London papers around that time, not a one of them reported what had been really happening on Salisbury Plain, just headlines, "High Jinks on

Salisbury Plain," you know, that the high spirits they had, "Delighted to Get Out of This Damned War" and so forth.

AMSDEN

Do you think there was any political agitation prefatory to that, or any effect of, let's say, the Russian Revolution on some of the working-class men in the troops?

DE CAUX

Let's see, what was that, when was--The armistice was 19--What was it, 1918, 1919?

AMSDEN

Eighteen.

DE CAUX

Did it come before the Russian Revolution?

AMSDEN

After.

DE CAUX

It came after. Well, now that--I remember that only in this sense, that anyone who raised hell was called a bolshie. Bolshie was the word they had. And most of us didn't know what the hell a bolshie was. We knew that there'd been, you know, that there'd been riots and so on in Russia. It was so remote from our immediate concerns that I doubt how much they had been--I don't know for sure, they may have been in some organizations, but there was no radical party, as I remember it, in England at that time. There, you know, there'd been the shop steward--I don't know how much you know about British history.

AMSDEN

I do know about the shop steward movement.

DE CAUX

The shop steward movement there had been up on the Clyde [River]. But we knew about those things in a general way, you know. There had been, when I

was growing up as a child, there had been the Irish strikes. Jim Larkin, and he became almost a hero to me because of his prominence. He got terrific prominence all through the British press.

AMSDEN

Or Tom Mann, who I believe you later met-

DE CAUX

Or Tom Mann.

AMSDEN

--who was active in that period.

DE CAUX

But how much organization I really shouldn't say because I don't know, but I had the impression, of course, --My radicalism came after the war, you know, I just had general sympathies. And the Russian Revolution was something completely remote, you know. After all, there was war going on allover the world. There may have been others who were very much more conscious of it. But the Communist Party wasn't organized until a year or two later, after the war was over, so I don't know how much organization there was. But certain generalities had risen long before the Russian Revolution, in the sense that the red flag, for instance, had a definite connotation to most Britishers. And, in fact, to most people in the world it stood for, you know, the bolshies. That's what the word used to be, something in general: revolution or rising, the poor rising against the rich. So those, the red flag I mean, the idea of running up the red flag was a sort of normal reaction. You always expected that. I always expected that of exservice men. Good God, when they'd demonstrate, they'd always have a red flag. They demonstrated, you know, in London and in England after the World War demanding this, that, and the other, just like the bonus people in this country. But red flags were always part of the paraphernalia showing that you really meant it, that you were radicals.

AMSDEN

The Canadians had had their general strike, of course, in a city that you later visited-

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

--and [they] went back in 1917, so it must have been something to them.

DE CAUX

Yes, I think, as far as I can put together-without direct knowledge I shouldn't talk about things that I really don't know--I've always assumed that the fact that the Canadians were cited for their rebellion at this particular period, the red flag was incidental. It was very comparable to the American troops in the Philippines at the end of the [Second] World War, you know. And I was out there just, right in 1945 in the Philippines.

AMSDEN

So you went straight up to Oxford from Salisbury Plain?

DE CAUX

No, I didn't, no.

AMSDEN

Oh, no?

DE CAUX

No, then I was demobbed, as they used to say, demobilized pretty soon after the armistice, and granted scholarships, oh, every damn thing, you know. That's why a lot of [laughter] American veterans are so conservative, because they were granted, the bright ones were granted certain considerations that they never would have had. And they'd never served in the war any more than I had, never been out at the front. I had cousins and friends plenty who had been in the trenches for four years, so I knew about that, and that was part of the influences on me. So I immediately, I had, when I came out, when I was demobbed, I had nearly a year before I could go up to Oxford. I guess it was in the fall, or late in the summer that I was demobilized and I was to go up the following year to Oxford, you see. I mean, that would be the start of a new school year. So, I had about nine or ten months to fill in and I went to work

right away. Unlike the kids out here, who can't get jobs, I had no troubles getting jobs. I tutored. I tutored a lordling, a retarded lordling there. I might write about that elsewhere, I guess, not in here because it-

AMSDEN

You mentioned going to the Continent during that period actually.

DE CAUX

And then after that I got a job as a teacher in a school like the one I had been put through to prepare for Harrow, for younger boys, preparing them for the so-called public schools. I taught there for two terms, I guess. Then carne the summer vacation and I decided to go to Europe and that's when I went, two or three months before I actually went up to Oxford. Yes, I went to France to live with a French family and perfect my French, that was the excuse. Just, you know--[laughter] Do you ever go through--Do the Americans ever go through that stage of romanticism? Poetry, I used to try and write poetry, and I read poetry voluminously. It was largely poetry I read in that time. I remember Shelley and Keats and all the rest of them. My ideas were broadly, you know, religious, philosophical, entirely introverted you might say. I had no real associations with young radicals or other people reacting against the war. It seemed to me, just from inside me I get this terrific revulsion against the whole damn war. And then's when I really started to, to become a radical and think in terms of what had caused the war, who had profited from it. What sense did it make and-

AMSDEN

Were you aware of the extent of the deaths?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. You had to be.

AMSDEN

Were figures coming out?

DE CAUX

Oh, I don't know whether--I don't remember, I never read much in statistics. But all around you--You see, in England, of course, your friends, when they go

from Harrow, those who'd be about a year older than you, they'd be killed. The deaths were enormous. And, you know, you took it patriotically: "It's all part of the game." [laughter] "War is just a game like any other patriotic exercise."

AMSDEN

But rather more deadly, I think.

DE CAUX

Yes, deadly game, yes. So, that's what I agreed to, the idea. But my first reaction was, of course, for internationalism rather than socialism. I really--You know you're just an emotional kid at that age. It's a strange thing to go through.

AMSDEN

Well, you're only nineteen, twenty years old.

DE CAUX

Yes, nineteen. But I was very emotional and very romantic. I went out in the steets of London and cheered Woodrow Wilson when he came over. This idea of instead of every nation fighting each other all the time all through history, this idea that we were all citizens of the world, you know. What was it he had, twenty-one points and the League of Nations and all sorts of things and the "war to end war." I'd never believed any of that stuff in the British army, I never ran into any British soldiers that did. They just took it. "That's the way it's always been, the way it always will be, you know. You fight the Germans, next time maybe you're fighting the French, next time you'll be fighting other ones. You've got to win, that's all there is to it." [laughter] That's the way they used to lecture us in the army. They were. supposed to give us orientation on what the war was about. My particular officer didn't even bother about it. He just told us straight out, he says, "I'm supposed to talk to you about the rights of little nations and fighting for democracy." He says, "You won't, you know, that's all"--didn't say "bullshit," never forget the English, "tommyrot"--"tommyrot." And he says, "You know this. After all, we've been in this war for four-and-ahalf, four years now, and, by God, we've got to win. If we don't win, the Germans will win," and so forth. "That's that. Dismissed. Any questions?"

Nobody raised a question, we got off an hour early. That was about the only orientation I ever got.

AMSDEN

Do you think some of your internationalism came out of revulsion, reaction to that war?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. That was the first reaction, yes. Intense reaction. I still can't avoid that emotional reaction. And also finally saw through Woodrow Wilson. Also the League of Nations. That didn't take too long.

AMSDEN

How were the--?

DE CAUX

with the British liberals, I mean, that would have been my first party, because a lot, that was, I ran into that quite a lot. Norman Angell's The Great Illusion, and so forth, the idea that wars were caused essentially by the Victorian, feudal patriotisms and things like that. Whereas the rising capitalist class--which after all the liberals heralded that class coming into power--they wouldn't have any of those similar illusions. They'd just be out to make money, and the world could be organized on a basis that without any free trade and with industries going wherever they could make the most money, everything would be determined in a nice way by money-making. So that there would be no point to nations fighting each other. The liberals finally are getting a little bit of their way with the multinationals today, [laughter] much delayed and you see that that's not resulting in a world of peace either.

AMSDEN

Did your fellow undergraduates at Oxford, did you manage to find people that were closer to you in your view of the world than, say, at Harrow?

DE CAUX

Not really. No.

AMSDEN

Were they affected--How were they affected by the war?

DE CAUX

It shook everyone up. After all, these kids were the brighter ones, the more intelligent ones. The majority, as I remember it, was still of the sort of Eton, Harrow crowd. But there were, also, some of the kids from the industrial area, working class kids, got in on scholarships at that time. But they didn't, as far as I could see, make much impact. But the young fellows at Oxford--We, in my rooms, we used to talk about everything. And my friends were that way. None of them were really radical. There was a social democrat from Canada there. I think he's probably--I don't know what the hell he's doing these days. But he was the closest to being a radical.

AMSDEN

And what was his name?

DE CAUX

Kerr, Wilfred Brenton Kerr. He was very Scottish. He got a job as a professor over at one of these colleges, but I lost contact with him. He was the most advanced of them, but again, in a mold that was too much of a rut for me, you see. If you know the British-

AMSDEN

In the liberal, free-trade mold, you'd say?

DE CAUX

No, the British Labour party mold.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (June 20, 1981)

AMSDEN

[inaudible] He wanted to know had you known [Rajani] Palme Dutt at Oxford, because he knew almost immediately that you would have been there roughly at the same time.

DE CAUX

Roughly the same time, but that was going on [inaudible]

AMSDEN

I'm sorry, I missed a piece of-

DE CAUX

I tell you, the first person who took a taping of me, he lost one whole reel or he didn't have it plugged in at the time.

AMSDEN

Oh dear. You were saying that Palme Dutt kept to himself and did the private thing. I'm sorry, I didn't-

DE CAUX

Apparently it wasn't, because I hadn't heard it. associated with anyone, all the radicals I could find. That was always through the Labour Club. Then there was the old Tory Club, the Carlton Club and the Liberal Club. The Labour party organized the Labour Club. That was the center of our organized activity. I don't remember, I don't even know for sure if he was there. He may have been sometimes, but if he was, he never was at the Labour meetings, never spoke at the meetings. Radicals that I did run into were all at Ruskin College. That was the Labour college. They used to come religiously to the Labour Club meetings. We used to talk about one thing and another, but all the discussions were a la [James] Ramsay MacDonald. Right-wing Labour party sentiment considered Ruskin too far out. You didn't have the radicalism that you had in American colleges in the sixties. If they were there, they were a very small persecuted minority. The whole majority sentiment was either Tory or Liberal or Labour party of the right-wing stripe. A few bolshies, you know, who raised hell, but it was largely a matter of talk, wear red ties and so on.

AMSDEN

Did the Labour party debate the questions in the Oxford Union at that time?

DE CAUX

Yes, the Labour party was represented from the end of the World War on, I guess. I went religiously to most of the meetings. They have labor leaders up there. Ramsay MacDonald's son was a leading spirit, Malcolm MacDonald, who became colonial secretary and shot down all these people who used to

be for him. But he was a smart cookie. There were bolshies, as I say, and he didn't denounce them. They fought his ideas, but he tried to reason with them, invite them to tea in his rooms, you know, regularly talk to them and treat them as friends. And he would win half of them over. That's the history of the British Empire, really, of British politics, right? [laughter]

AMSDEN

Well, Malcolm MacDonald didn't go round Ruskin College, then, I take it.

DE CAUX

I don't remember him, no. It seems to me that I was the only one who did. I mean, who had all my friends, after a while, over there, because I was getting fairly [tired of] Oxford. I left very soon, very shortly. So, the friends I had were by no means radicals, I would say. There were a few Labour party-minded people and Christian Scientists and a guy who didn't believe in drinking coffee or stimulants, radicals in that sense, a few of them.

AMSDEN

Were all your material needs met by scholarship at this time?

DE CAUX

All my expenses were covered by scholarships. won an entrance scholarship, and--I had three scholarships. Then the Harrow scholarship there, from Harrow, and then also got money from the army, as a veteran. Every cent of pay was covered.

AMSDEN

Did you continue on with Greats and that sort of thing, or did your reading go off into other things?

DE CAUX

No, I had to take classics up until--what do you call it?--the mid business, not the Greats, but Moderation. You know about that. Oh, you went to school there?

AMSDEN

Yes. I was there five years and I visited Oxford many times.

DE CAUX

Oh, you visited there. Which college were you at?

AMSDEN

I was at London School of Economics.

DE CAUX

Oh, yes, that's the difference. That's very different from Oxford.

AMSDEN

It's a different bag. But I did spend a year over there as an undergraduate and became familiar with those things.

DE CAUX

Moderations, yes, I had to take the Moderations, and to hold my scholarships I had to not only take classics, but I had to pass with honors. Now, that was my only problem, was to take the honors because long before the exams came up in Moderations, I had lost all interest in the classics, I was reading only radical, socialist literature. I was going through little stores to get all the papers, find out what was happening with the Communist party. So I did, I scraped through, I got honors. I was about tenth down on the list or something. God knows how did it, because I don't remember studying any classics there. I used to go to Gilbert Murray's lectures and that was about it. The rest was all labor interest.

AMSDEN

Did you read Marx and Engels at this time at all?

DE CAUX

Uh-huh. I read plenty of expositions on them. read--who was it?--[Raymond] Postgate and various other-

AMSDEN

Cole, I think you mentioned.

DE CAUX

G. D. H. Cole, yes. Of course, that wasn't exactly an interpretation. There was a [Nikolai I.] Bukharin, I think, and others who interpreted Marxism and Russian Bolshevism for an English audience. But I may have--probably had--because I've had ever since Das Kapital and so forth, but I don't remember reading much in them, or going much to the source. However, I wanted to. I had realized by that time that Marxism had something to do with the Russian Revolution, which, of course, was the thing, the movement basically. So, that when I finished my Marx, I had already, I was thinking already of going to the United States, just cutting out from the whole goddamned shebang. I thought I'd give it another shot if I could take-So I to my tutor and I asked about--He says, "Oh, you're all right now," he says, "you don't have to bother about anything. You don't have to take any, you don't have to take classical Greats," whatever they call Greats. I forget that. That was all classics of philosophy and so forth. “You’re naturally expected to do that, but you don’t have to. If you’d rather take modern Greats, you can do that.” so, I looked into modern Greats. I looked through all the reading lists and I went to hear some of the professors, one thing and another. All I wanted to do was to have a nice comfortable year or so studying Marx, Marxism, and radicalism in general. I couldn't have done it through modern Greats there. They had Marx. One reading [about] Marx was [on] Marx and the industrial revolution, the parts showing the development. And then all the rest, pages, it seemed to me, of readings exploding Marxism, it seemed. What was it, [Alfred] Marshall's economic theories were the big, were the only--You know, Marxism was ruled out as something totally ridiculous and foreign. Might be for somebody to study it, but it was un-British. Just like the Labour people always took that attitude too, you know. They would mouth a few Marxist terms when they'd go to the Continent, knowing that everybody paid lip service to Marx there, but back in the country it wasn't approved at all, as I remember. I was in the Independent Labour Party before the Communist Party was started. If there had been a Communist party, I would have joined it. But the Ruskin guys were all in the ILP and that's where I--But there again, too, of course, Marxism was out, although we debated joining the Third International.

AMSDEN

I think Orwell--or Eric Blair--must have put into the ILP rather after you. George Orwell--or Eric Blair [to use his real name].

DE CAUX

I think [he was] after my time, yes.

AMSDEN

Yes, yes. While you were at the-

DE CAUX

Oh, yes, because [he was] in the Spanish Civil War, and that was much after my time. I was already with the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] in the thirties. Oh God, yes.

AMSDEN

I just wondered.

DE CAUX

And the early twenties. The end of the teens and the early twenties.

AMSDEN

It's sort of a silly point, I suppose, in a way, but both you and George Orwell come from similar sorts of backgrounds-

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

--and both joined the ILP at different periods in the history of that organization. I wondered what there was about the ILP to attract people? So, perhaps, in your period, was it mostly the fact that the Ruskin lads were all in it?

DE CAUX

No.

AMSDEN

Or was there something else about it?

DE CAUX

No, no, no. The ILP, as I remember it, at that period its appeal was--The British Labour party, we were getting a little, [laughter] the young men in a hurry were getting a little fed up with the British Labour party. After all, Ramsay MacDonald and all of that sort of stuff, and J. H. Thomas and all these Labour party--Then, in fact, the big basic fact was too that it had supported the World War, you know. That means a social democratic party, that's about the size of it. And we were not--I still can't quite stomach social democrats. But the ILP was supposed to be the, was in the Labour party, which was the only working-class party. After all, that was the idea. And inside that working-class party the ILP was supposed to be the ginger group, the group that advocated socialism, which the others might have said something like that, but the ILP was supposed to take socialism seriously. And then, after all, it was the party of [James] Keir Hardie, who in a way had a sort of reputation like [Eugene V.] Debs in this country and had come from the working class. Though again, "class struggle," class words like that were taboo in the ILP. And Marxism was taboo. Remember the debates on joining the Third International. Oh, then in the sort of semi-religious, ethical way, the concepts of Marxism were completely foreign to them. In the United states I ran into the same thing. I went to Brookwood Labor College there. There again, the moving spirits, their heroes were the British Labour party essentially. They were good there, a lot of them were very good and I think they did a swell job. But Marxism was taboo just as it was in England. I mean, we could go to our own private rooms and read a Marxian book or something like that. [laughter] I know I wasn't a great theoretician or anything like that, but I got emotional sympathies for the Marxists because of all this. [laughter] Very funny, because in nearly every other country in the world Marxism has been taken as a basic part of the radical and working-class movement. Not in England, not in my day.

AMSDEN

Well, the debates in the ILP about the Third International must have been going on just at about the time you were leaving for the United States, I think.

DE CAUX

Right.

AMSDEN

Any connection? Or did you, you'd been planning to come for a long time, I think.

DE CAUX

No. I had been thinking about it for quite a while and--I don't remember the chronology exactly there, but it didn't, the two were not interrelated. But even at Ruskin there and in the ILP, my buddy, the guy who really was my wet nurse, was from the engineers union. You know, I always had a [laughter] penchant for real workers.

AMSDEN

You mentioned him in this book, but I've forgotten his name.

DE CAUX

Yes. I called him Bob Johnson. I've forgotten what his real name was, I just gave them phony names because I didn't know what would come later. But he was the one who promoted it and I just seconded all his motions. You see, I was never a real activist, you know, or an aggressive person.

AMSDEN

He wasn't a Clydesider was he?

DE CAUX

What?

AMSDEN

Bob Johnson. He wasn't a Clydesider, was he?

DE CAUX

No. I don't know where he came from, but I don't think he came from the Clyde. It seems to me he was rather an English type, a very practical type, a type of English radical, essentially a trade unionist, definitely workingclass.

AMSDEN

He was a qualified engineer?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. Now what you call an engineer in the U.S. Here the word is machinist. He had had no academic background at all, and yet he had polished himself up through his union activities. He could have gone far, you know, even in England. He was logical, he was intelligent, but his basic loyalty was to the working 'class and to the trade-union movement, he was essentially a trade unionist. And as a trade unionist he might very well have become like the American trade unionists have become in this country, you know, gone along with the machine.

AMSDEN

Sure.

DE CAUX

But he essentially was a practical, organizational type.

AMSDEN

Did he end up in the Communist Party later?

DE CAUX

He was headed that way. I don't know if he was in it or not.

AMSDEN

There is a theory of recent years: David Montgomery and James Simpson of Great Britain are making the argument that the radical engineers, through their wartime experience, were pointed in the direction of the Communist Party, coming out of their class consciousnes. And so I just wondered if this chap would have been-

DE CAUX

That fits in very logically to my intellectual reactions to him. My sympathies for him were precisely because of that and because he was a practical person. There was another man [L. M. Cox] who was definitely becoming, he became quite famous, but he was at Ruskin at that time. But he was too grim and serious for my money.

AMSDEN

You mentioned him in the book, I think.

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

Did he end up in the Party?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. He became a very, quite famous one. read about him from the united States. He was always writing something, but he tended to be rather theoretical thought. He was a Welsh miner, came from the Welsh mines.

AMSDEN

The name in the book is also a pseudonym, I take it.

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. I couldn’t remember his name, for one thing, and anyhow, I avoided using real names, because I didn't know what had happened to these guys later and they might be embarrassed.

AMSDEN

Oh, yes. I understand.

DE CAUX

But that's my own orientation, [which] was always toward the practical working-class organizers and trade unionists. Still is.

AMSDEN

Let me ask sort of a hard question and it may be too hard to get now, but it looks to me as if you're on a divide at that point, right around 1919, 1920. You could have stayed with the English working class movement and your political friends, but instead you chose to come to the new country, the relatively classless country, in a sense start at the bottom as a wanderer and a wandering laborer. Could you give me a rough idea why you went one way rather than the other, given that your basic sympathy was working-class?

DE CAUX

Exactly what they were. I really had no choice, being what I was, rather a shy person and not an activist. You know so many radicals are guys who like to shoot off or push confrontations. I was the exact opposite, I was not that way at all. I considered if I could join the working class in England and considered it from every which angle, you may say, and I ruled it out as completely--Sure, I could have gone like the rest of the Labour Club people, you know, cottoned up to MacDonald or somebody like that and get pushed up the stairs, so that you run for Parliament. And good God, the British Labour party gave opportunities enough to Oxford and Cambridge boys from the public schools and wet-nursed them into office. But I had a very strong emotional reaction against that whole thing, people riding on the backs of the working class; that's all that was worth. Well, I couldn't do that, I couldn't do it. And then I couldn't even work for a living in England, I would be too much ridiculed, because of my accent, because everything about me was that of the other class. I just indicate it very roughly when I say that in the bus strike the bus leader, the guy used to call me "sir," you know. Boy, I mean, you know, that's the way class lines were drawn in England. I suppose not so much anymore, but they surely were in that time. You see, you belonged to one class or the other. And if you were, if you were trying to go into the working class in England, you were slumming, that's the only thing you were doing, or else you were there to ride on the workers' backs, like the British Labour people. There was just nothing for me there. So I considered the Continent too, you know. After all I knew French and I'd been over there. And I also went there again each summer, you know, Italy and France and all around. But there the same thing pretty much applies, as far as I could see.

AMSDEN

Were you in Italy when the factory takeovers--?

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

You were actually present?

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

And you must have seen [Antonio] Gramsci's paper coming out every day, L'Ordine Nuovo. Did you pick it up on the stands and read it?

DE CAUX

I read all the papers when I was there.

AMSDEN

Must have been a tremendously exciting time.

DE CAUX

What year was that? Nineteen twenty, I think.

AMSDEN

Nineteen twenty.

DE CAUX

That’s the first year. It was a terrifically exciting time.

AMSDEN

Did you spend much time in Torino?

DE CAUX

In Torino, in Milano. Actually I was staying with a family in Siena and I wasn't, you know, I hadn't got too much of a thought-out position there, though my sympathies, you see, once I had formulated them quite early in life, you might say, were definitely with the communists, with the left wing of the movement and not with the phonies. I despise phonies, and that includes communists who pretend to be on the side of the working class and are just exploiting petty bourgeois bureaucrats, but I don't like phonies. But anyhow, the communist movement had less of that than anyone.

AMSDEN

Were the workers actually in the factories while you were in Turin and Milan?

DE CAUX

I was in Siena. (I think my chronology is weak.) And there, too, I used to try to read the--I've forgotten the names, the Ordine Nuovo strikes a bell, I remember that. And then there was the Avanti! There was a trade union daily paper [probably the Battaglie Sindacali, journal of the C.G.L. (Confederazione Generale del Lavoro) --ed.], a syndicalist paper [Guerra di Classe], there was an anarchist paper [Umanita Nova], and I used to read all of them. There was no communist paper as such, as I remember, though there was a left-wing--Maybe that's where your Ordine Nuovo comes in, because there was--I used to read the right-wing, Socialist Party paper [Critica Sociale]. And then there was also a left wing in the Socialist Party which was definitely heading for the communist-

AMSDEN

I don't think the party, the Communist Party, had been founded quite yet, had it?

DE CAUX

No, it definitely hadn't. That would have altered my whole perspective, but there was a left wing in the Socialist Party that was definitely sympathetic with Moscow and so forth.

AMSDEN

That would have still been under, well, Mussolini stepped down in '19, didn't he?

DE CAUX

I was there before Mussolini.

AMSDEN

Before Mussolini. Mussolini was in the Socialist Party and then he left, I believe.

DE CAUX

I don't know just where he was at that time, but when I was there in 1920, the fascists had not been heard from as a big noise. There were these goons, or

whatever they called them, and the word fascio was associated with them. They were trying to break up labor meetings. I don't think they even knew the name of Mussolini then.

AMSDEN

Were you aware that he'd been in the socialist movement and the editor of Avanti! and the object of praise from Lenin and stuff? Did you know that at that time?

DE CAUX

I didn't know that Lenin had ever praised him, but I knew he was a radical socialist.

AMSDEN

I see.

DE CAUX

Yes, oh yes. Yes, I used to read everything, I still do. [laughter] Damn! Lose my eyesight from it. And so, what happened? When I was in Siena, there with a bunch of other Englishmen like me, see, I was placed, or placed myself, with an Italian family to learn Italian better, to hear it only spoken. There were a number of other British and French college kids doing the same sort of thing, so they came there. Everything was quiet, regular, so far as I remember. I remember the palio and all that sort of stuff. Ever been in Siena?

AMSDEN

Oh yes, I've seen the palio. On the occasion when they embarrassed the Americans getting on the moon, they had a special palio just for that, palio de la luna.

DE CAUX

[laughter] Really. So this is very interesting for me to talk to you, because you've been the same places that I have, but much later.

AMSDEN

It's a beautiful town, isn't it?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. So, I didn't know of anything too much happening politically until suddenly the news is broken that the workers have taken over the factories. And our landlady said, "You'd better get out fast. You can't tell what they'll do to the British and Americans and the others who are here. And we want to have all these young college people get out while the trains are still running." But I didn't. I stayed, and I can remember even in Siena--Siena was not--Nowadays it's quite a radical city, as I remember.

AMSDEN

It's been Communist Party for many years.

DE CAUX

Is that right?

AMSDEN

Oh, yes.

DE CAUX

Because to me-

AMSDEN

I'm sure, 1 1 m pretty sure about that; I'd like to check it.

DE CAUX

It seemed like a country town.

AMSDEN

well, it was, then.

DE CAUX

We used to get a beautiful view from the park, allover the surrounding countryside. And then on market days the peasants would all come in and sell their stuff and everything seemed to me a little medieval. But they said that even in Siena that the workers of a garage had taken over the garage and run up the red flag, see, and that [laughter] lid better keep away from there.

[laughter] So I went by there and, sure enough, there was a red flag flying. But it was largely a joke there in Siena, everything. The customers would come by--all the wealthy people, naturally, those days you know, they had cars to repair, and raised hell with the owner, saying, “Why have you run up the red flay?” [laugher] Oh, there were a lot of jokes about that sort of thing. So I decided to head out from there. I forget whether I first went to Milan--No, I don't think I was in Torino-Oh, no, wait a minute, that was on the way back. I headed down. The trains were still running. I headed down toward Rome, as I remember. And right from the train there you could see past these factories, every industrial segment, you could see the red flags and the black flags. Suppose a dike came, you could see all the graffiti there. Nearly all "Lenin," "Rivoluzione," and so forth, you know. Lenin was the big name. "Evviva Lenin! Evviva Lenin!" And then on the factories themselves there would be all these--They'd cross out the owner's name in nearly every case. They'd either put it belonged to the workers or to the popolo or whatnot, and the atmosphere was just like the height of the sitdown strikes in-

AMSDEN

Nineteen thirty-seven?

DE CAUX

--in Flint. Very, you know--Hanging out of the window, cheering, singing, and a red flag--[laughter] "Bandiera Rossa," all the words of that. And the "Internazionale." Then so far as the workers were concerned, that idea of keeping plants in operation, that they were now the workers' property or socialist property was all around. I mean, that was sort of taken for granted. Not in the press, though. [Giuseppe] Modigliani, [Filippo] Turati, and [Claudio] Treves and the ripening socialist pick, oh, they were deploring [the takeovers]. Just like Sidney Hillman in this country. The trade union paper-

AMSDEN

The syndicalists must have been overjoyed by it.

DE CAUX

No, I mean, syndicalism was a word 1--Just like I got fed up on anarchists, I also got fed up on syndicalists, because what they stood for in Italy at that

time, the major element in the trade union movement, as in France later on, essentially was what you Americans would call conservative trade unionism.

AMSDEN

I understand.

DE CAUX

In other words-

AMSDEN

Syndicalists in the sense of trade unionists, rather than anarchists.

DE CAUX

--of avoiding political parties, avoiding political action and asking--Frankly, they were the ones who were doing most of the negotiating with the "Fox," [Giovanni] Giolitti, that finally got him out of the things. But they put it, you see, as trade unionists would in this country, "It's a matter of winning certain demands. We want our wages, we want certain rights," and so on and so forth. "Soon as we get them, we get the hell out of it, no revolution." Certainly the Socialist Party wasn't going for it, not the right wing. The three, they'd had their manifestos out all the time. Those three names, I always remember them: Modigliani, Treves, and Turati.

AMSDEN

Turati?

DE CAUX

Yes, and all this extreme right-wing socialism, sort of, you know, "We're for you, but don't pull anything," you know, and sort of, "get out as soon as you can and we will elect a socialist government."

AMSDEN

Did Gramsci's name appear?

DE CAUX

Oh no, oh no. Even then, as I said, there was a left wing in the Socialist Party directly counter to the Modigliani--I mean, that was the fight within the

workingclass movement, between, essentially, those three rightwingers and a left wing. Now, the names I don't remember. You said the name.

AMSDEN

Did the name [Amadeo] Bordiga come up?

DE CAUX

Bordiga I vaguely remember. He was with the anarchists, wasn't he?

AMSDEN

At that time I'm not certain, but I think he was a left socialist.

DE CAUX

Yes, well anyhow, I only knew that Socialist Party paper, I didn't read the-

AMSDEN

Do you remember the name of it, by any chance?

DE CAUX

No, it could have been the Ordine Nuovo, but I don't think so. [Critica Socialel I don't remember it, and I certainly don't remember Gramsci. I only remember my own reactions to that paper, which was not, still not, right for me, because it seemed to me, obviously, that with all that power that they demonstrated, with all that feeling of working-class solidarity, my God, a really revolutionary party could lead them on to a revolution as they had in Russia. And they wouldn't talk that way. All the high-faluting language about revolutionary perspectives and all sorts of fancy stuff, but no real call to action. And indicating, of course, that they didn't agree with the social democratic line, that they were more pro-Soviet and so forth. But I didn't see anything. I just saw a badly divided working-class movement in its leadership.

AMSDEN

Well, nothing like that over here, mind you. When you first arrived here you must have missed some of those expressions of class politics and things. I get the idea from the opening pages of your book, at the point where you arrive in Philadelphia, that it looked pretty grim to you.

DE CAUX

Yes, definitely. Yes, but you must remember that after seeing this happening allover Europe, and it wasn't succeeding--I mean, there was a revolutionary wave in Germany, here and there, and Hungary, I guess, and this, that, and the other. And in Italy as soon as they were out of the plants, you know, Mussolini then came to the fore, he and his Fascists. And he marched on Rome not long after that. I think those things happened before I even left. So it, in one sense it exhilarated and excited me a great deal. I come back to Oxford and I find that that goddamned British Labour party is just like it's always been [begins speaking in falsetto], and the Oxford boys are just like they've always been, you know. That kind of parody there, reactions. I don't know whether you noticed that little part in there.

AMSDEN

Oh yes, I did.

DE CAUX

The Labour party are different, you know. You can't blame those blokes, but after all it's good that we don't have people like that in this country. [laughter] Oh shit. That was the atmosphere. I couldn't stick with it, stomach it much more after having seen the idea. And, as say, I couldn't see myself playing any part in that situation, because I was not an agitator, I was not a real--I suppose I'm not to this extent, but I did want to identify myself with the working-class movement. And, this sounds corny, but that was my whole thinking, and that was the reason why I decided to come to the united States.

DE CAUX

He can't get a job, but he's been trying for a year to get on with the emptying the garbage cans. That's another story. But anyhow, so I didn't know where the hell I was at when I came to this country, I just had general concepts of what I wanted to do. I wanted to be with this movement. And if it meant being a working man for the rest of my life, I was quite willing for that. Of course, I didn't know too much about how it would actually be, but I couldn't get a job in New York.

AMSDEN

Was it hard times then, early twenties?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. There was a depression in 1921. But not as bad as the depression now if you ask me. I don't know what the unemployment figures were, but it's nothing like as bad as it seems to be getting to be right now around here. None of the kids could find anything but shit jobs.

AMSDEN

I know.

DE CAUX

And then only for a few days, or a week, or something like that. And they don't get any unemployment insurance. All this so-called welfare state passes them over. And those were working-class kids, all drop-outs from school, none of them with any educational opportunities. However, that's another story. But anyhow, 80-

AMSDEN

Were some of these kids you met on the road sort of like these kids today?

DE CAUX

Oh yes. Running away, running away.

AMSDEN

Like Shorty and, the one you called Shorty and the guys, the partners.

DE CAUX

And they didn't have--I don't know--Tracy's got a place here, a home to live in, but none of these other kids, they can't hit the road like they did in those days. That's not a practical life. But it was in '19. The road was the first escape from where you were if you were out of a job, and that meant riding the freights. It doesn't mean the highways.

AMSDEN

I suppose you read John Dos Passos after that, because he describes in the novel form a lot of things you actually did-

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

--in USA. Did you ever read it?

DE CAUX

I don't remember. I remember reading some of Dos Passos' stuff, and I remember also when he turned forty being asked what I could do [laughter] to straighten him out. I think it was Joe Freeman asked me when I was in Washington at the time. But I don't remember even having met Dos Passos then. I didn't think much could be done. He became a regular conservative, didn't he? A red-baiter in fact.

AMSDEN

So you went on the road really looking for work?

DE CAUX

No. It didn't happen as quick as that. I couldn't get work in New York, I got pretty hungry. I had fifty dollars left when I landed in this country, and that was soon gone, believe me. Particularly for a person like me. And I just think I collapsed on the sidewalk, Twentysecond Street, there across from the Metropolitan Building in New York and was just picked up by the police, and that was just absolutely my break. Taken to the hospital there and got free treatment and was given alcohol to drink--you know, this was in prohibition, too. And when I got out there, they steered me on to a job at the YMCA, I think it was. I got a job in the .cafe't.er La , I was so green. It was really enjoyable because I got three meals, I could eat as much as I liked. But all the American expressions I didn't know, you know, "eggplant." I thought--They were always putting me on, you know, the girls particularly. It was really a nice little episode there. And from there I was getting seven dollars a week, and I could live on that and save a dollar a week.

AMSDEN

What did you pay for rent?

DE CAUX

I think two dollars, one dollar or two dollars, something like that. Had a nice room for that.

AMSDEN

You were getting your food free, so you had five, six bucks to spend and a buck to put away.

DE CAUX

Yes, I had, I could live on, yes, that's right, about the size of that.

AMSDEN

So, you got a little stake together.

DE CAUX

Yes, I got a little. But then I got a better job. I got a clerical job, see, through the YMCA again, at the Onyx Hosiery Company there. It was filing some damn thing, you know. Luckily didn't lose perspective, I mean, on work. And that [clerical work] was easy for me, of course. I mean, you know, I had all the educational requisites. [laughter] Then I kind of enjoyed life for a little while in New York. I got around the City Club. I remember [We E. B.] Du Bois very well. I had a good friend from the West Coast there, a former lumberjack, Frank Anderson. He was with a labor research organization. He introduced me to liberals, radicals. I got introduced to the needle trades unions and he took me all around New York. And it was really, it was a nice sort of break. I kind of enjoyed life then, I remember. And I learned a lot about the American movement. I used to read all the papers of the movement. There was a left wing paper favoring the communists, and that's the one I usually read. To my knowledge, then, there was no communist party still.

AMSDEN

Not until, not until, well we're talking about ’21, ’22, are we?

DE CAUX

Twenty-one.

AMSDEN

Oh, well, a couple more years, I think, ’22.

DE CAUX

So, anyhow, for that period I got fairly good [laughter] psychological characteristics started to overwhelm me again. What in the hell was I doing there? Why in the hell was I--? I didn't have any confidence in the white-collar workers being the vanguard of a revolution, like the kids in the sixties had about students leading the revolution, or something. I never had kidded myself. It was the working class was the only movement that amounted to anything to me. So how could I get into it? I consulted with this guy, see. He had worked with his hands, after all.

AMSDEN

The lumberjack?

DE CAUX

Yes, the former lumberjack; he committed suicide eventually. And also with Powers Hapgood, who was his friend. Powers had left Harvard and had gone all around the country, bumming his way, trying different trades, working with different things, to sort of wash Harvard off his--As I needed to do, I knew that very well. So, I had a sympathy with Powers. picture in my own mind. But then all my personal And they advised me what I should do if I wanted to do what I said I wanted to do. Which was, they said I should get out to the harvest riding the freights, and I could skip--I mean if I went out on a labor job for the railroads, you know, they used to ship you out free. I could skip after a bit and go on the freights on my own until I got out there. And that's the way I got started out.

AMSDEN

Kind of romantic, wasn't it?

DE CAUX

Sure, for me, yes.

AMSDEN

I always wanted to do it when I was a teenager and I never even actually got onto the boxcar, although I tried once.

DE CAUX

Yes. [laughter]

AMSDEN

But it's pretty scary.

DE CAUX

Oh, definitely. [laughter] For me particularly, because, of course, another thing I was trying to live down was my really sissy, chicken type of a person that I was, see. I wanted to be a little more of a man, you know, because I'd been so bad at games and everything else. Anything that was manly was not for me. I was the student, the--Oh, I just wanted to live that down, you know. I got rid of all my books in England and I tried to keep away from books (I couldn't help going to a library once in a while). I tried really to sort of roughen up. And after I had been all around the country--I don't know whether you read that part of the book?

AMSDEN

Well, it looked a little scary to me, to tell you the truth.

DE CAUX

It looked what?

AMSDEN

It looked a little scary. Life in boxcars, with the people who could be, most the time, cutthroats carrying guns.

DE CAUX

Oh, not most the time, no, there were a few always, but most of the guys were my friends. Oh, yes.

AMSDEN

I was thinking of those gangster-type guys you met in Montana.

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. You see, I do try to depict the different elements that there were on the road, and that essentially I didn't run into until I came out West to meet the veterans. In the East it was just the sort of runaway kids. Then from

Chicago on to the harvest fields it was none of the, not many of the cutthroats. There were a few sneak thieves, things like that, but most of them were just guys going out to work the harvest without any money. You know, God knows, people have no--oh, what's the use of going into that, you know, that concept of what life was like for the working class of this country before the New Deal, before the Depression and the New Deal?

AMSDEN

Because they were broke they had to ride the trains, didn't they?

DE CAUX

Well, that was the only way you could get to the harvest. There was no, I don't remember highways. Oh yes, good God, who would hit the--They had an expression for that, but I never heard of anyone doing it, bumming a ride. I tried it once, and most of them told me that there was nothing to it. It wastes too much time and it was impossible anyhow. The freights were the method of travel in this country. And of course, the west was still alive. A lot of the guys I knew in the printers union were Westerners, came from Montana. And they used to get around by the freights, you know, that was the Western way in America and certainly for the harvest, for the wheat harvest, which I followed two years running.

AMSDEN

That's pretty tough work, harvesting wheat, from the way you relate it.

DE CAUX

Yes, I thought I'd die. [laughter] I always was a person who was driving myself. That's what's nice about being old age, I don't drive myself anymore. I was always driving myself to do things that, I think, were probably too hard for me, so that I would toughen myself up and build up my determination. That was in my character. And that was a reflex of having always been considered a sissy, a rabbit, a groise and all the rest by the mannish young kids I grew up with.

AMSDEN

Well, by the time you were running into the occasional Wobblies out there, the organization as a whole was coming under pretty heavy persecution.

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

Did you get any echoes of that?

DE CAUX

No.

AMSDEN

It wasn't strong?

DE CAUX

No, but at that time, in 1921 or '22, was the time when I first came up against the, to the IWW. They had a big headquarters in Chicago. I was there. They used to have a meeting room downstairs, they turned it into a printshop, finally. I used to go to a lot of meetings there, listen to George Hardy and different IWW people. was not aware of any persecution. Now, there was persecution I knew of in this sense, that most of the leaders were in jail all around the country. But the time of the trial was over, and the time of the hysteria that went with it and around it was a little past. So I was not aware there particularly of the persecution of the Wobblies.

AMSDEN

And in that space from Chicago to the harvest fields, the Wobblies still ran the trains?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes.

AMSDEN

still enforced standards.

DE CAUX

Yes, you see they continued into the twenties. And in fact that tactic came later in IWW history. I forget what period it was, but I cover it in my book on

the Wobblies [The Living Spirit of the Wobblies. International Publishers. 1978] They made a sort of turn, you know (I forget what they called it) [laughter] sort of turn to the job and so forth, that they would send organizers into the harvest fields, onto the freights, into the camps, and so forth, and do their organizing there. Before that they had depended a good deal on organizing the harvest hands and the other migratory laborers when they came into town.

AMSDEN

So they went right out to where the men were working.

DE CAUX

In that period, oh yes, they went out, and they went out in a way that was not good, in the sense that anyone could get a card as an organizer, so they had a lot of stool pigeons came into the organization in that period. And also, I suppose, some of them just kept the money that they took.

AMSDEN

That's what I was going to ask.

DE CAUX

Yes, I don't doubt it. But on the other hand there were plenty who were really good guys, and it wasn't that that did for the Wobblies. It was toward [the] end of that whole phase in which they had done very well in the harvest fields, you know. They even had an agreement with the Farmers' Non Partisan League in the Dakotas, and so forth. And they built up their finances for other work. Not that they did much other work. So what screwed them up on that tactic, which could have continued, was that the old harvests as such came to an end. The harvest in my first year [there] must have been hundreds of thousands of unemployed from allover the country came there, and they could all work for a few days, for a little while, because it was all hand labor. The combine was not available. We handled the stooks-get mixed up, the Canadian word is "stook" and what do they call them in America? I've forgotten for the moment.

AMSDEN

Stocks, I think.

DE CAUX

Stocks, shocks, shocks, yes. "Shocking" we used to call it. That was all done by hand and then, again by hand, you pitched the shocks, or the stooks they called then in Canada--I was in Canada, too--into a cart, into a horse-drawn vehicle that went to the threshing machine. The threshing machine didn't belong to the farmer who was being harvested. It was, you know, it went around, did a lot of things. And there, again by hand, it was pitched into the threshing machine and so forth. That was hand job.

AMSDEN

How much money were you making a day at that kind of work?

DE CAUX

The most I ever made in harvest fields was eight dollars. And that was in western Kansas.

AMSDEN

Now, that's only a couple of years after you made seven dollars a week in New York.

DE CAUX

Right.

AMSDEN

So, that must have looked like big money.

DE CAUX

Oh, yes.

AMSDEN

Even though you were working hard.

DE CAUX

It was big money, but it didn't last for long, you see. Then you hit the road again, and of course, if you were a sucker, you got highjacked, or into a card game, or something and you lost your stake. You might come out of it with--I

came out of it, after spending nearly a year, with about a hundred dollars when I left North Dakota and headed out for the Coast. So, the next year, there they were firing at the guys right in Kansas City, Kansas, on the guys who were trying to make the freight trains.

AMSDEN

What do you mean “firing” at them?

DE CAUX

Firing at them. I suppose the railroad bulls.

AMSDEN

with pistols?

DE CAUX

with guns.

AMSDEN

Literally shooting at the guys that got on the train?

DE CAUX

Shooting more to scare them than to kill them, that was the idea. So that we had to--My last experience with that was in the jungles outside Kansas City, Kansas. Big jungles, must have been hundreds of guys out there all trying to head for the harvest, because that was the place where all the freight trains went out. You could see them, right down ahead, gathering to go out, all empty, out to the harvest fields, to fill up with the grain.

AMSDEN

Sure.

DE CAUX

And I said, "Well, why in the hell are you guys staying up there? They have these freight trains going out all the time." And they put me wise. They said, "You'd better not. You'd better wait until dark to make it, see." I didn't see any of the guys. All those guys up in the jungle there, you have to run right down the hill to get into those empty freight cars which stopped there. It was a

natural, for loading up. And then, by God, toward dusk I see three or four of the guys running down just like they were soldiers of the French, you know, crouched down, toward the freight train. And then I'd hear these cracks of the guns. Now, I didn't know. I didn't get shot at myself, so far as I know, but I say, "I'm not going to go down there." And, of course, that's the same way the other guys felt. "I'm not going to risk my life for that." But at night they gradually slipped down, one or two at a time, and you'd hear an occasional shotgun firing. Then, toward the morning, you know, about four or five in the morning, I took a chance at it, see, being so quiet for so long. It was dark, and you could see nobody else. I ran down, and I got into a freight car without any trouble. But, you know, everyone was indignant, including the farmers. They say, "What in the hell are these railroads trying to do? Freeze us out of labor?"

AMSDEN

Probably were.

DE CAUX

Yes, but they could do it simply because the combine harvester was coming in that year, and because the farmers could harvest their stuff--a lot of them were still doing it the old way--in a more modern fashion using fewer workers. So, that after that, very largely, the farm labor supply came from the immediate neighborhood, you know.

AMSDEN

Did you work that year?

DE CAUX

I worked, that was the last year I worked. That was '22 or '23, was it? I worked, I headed out, again, I took advantage of that fact that they were paying only about four or five dollars in the eastern part of Kansas.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (Video Session] (June 26, 1981)

AMSDEN

with Len today are two of the boys who live here. Hi, can you tell me your name?

TRACY

Tracy.

AMSDEN

Tracy, how long have you lived with Len, or known Len?

TRACY

Almost all my life.

AMSDEN

Really?

TRACY

Yeah. Fifteen years at least.

AMSDEN

How did it happen that you carne to stay here?

TRACY

Well, I was a neighbor of his for a while, then moved in on him.

AMSDEN

Oh, I see. So, Len looks after you in a way.

TRACY

Yes.

AMSDEN

That's nice to hear. And you, what's your name? DON: Don.

AMSDEN

Yes, and have you stayed with Len too? DON: No, I'm just visiting. I live right next door in the white apartments.

AMSDEN

So, you guys keep an eye on Len.

TRACY

Yeah. DON: Body guards, so to speak.

AMSDEN

That's good to hear. OK, thanks a lot. It's been nice talking to you. Have a good swim.

TRACY

We'll see you. Bye-bye.

AMSDEN

Len, you told me you looked after a number of young people since you've lived here, over the years. How many young lads like that have stayed here?

DE CAUX

Oh, I don't know. I haven't kept count. I've always had open house, pretty much. GUys come in, one thing and another. There was a time when those who ran away from home would land up here, quite a few of them.

AMSDEN

It made me think a little bit of those opening sections of your book, where you talk about coming to the united States and meeting young lads, sort of like this, in box cars, bumming around the country. Is it the same sort of kid, do you think?

DE CAUX

No, no. The kids change with every generation, and are different. I wouldn't put them in any pattern.

AMSDEN

You've lived here [Glendale] more or less since you retired?

DE CAUX

Yes, I retired 1965, I guess. I was living up in Montrose then. My wife died in 1959, and I have been here pretty much since then.

AMSDEN

Would you go over some of the causes of your leaving the labor movement or at least a paid position in the fifties. I'm referring to chapters towards the end of your book.

DE CAUX

[laughter] I didn't just leave. I was bounced, politely said that I resigned, but Philip Murray asked me to resign and then cooked up some story that I was resigning to write a book or something like that.

AMSDEN

If I have it correct, you took your trip around the country after you first left active, paid employment in the labor movement. And the way you tell it, the labor movement was still alive at the grass roots in the late forties, early fifties. You met a communist organizer in Bridgeport, I think-

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

--and you found a functioning Wobbly hall in Galveston, Texas. Do you think any of those people, or the people that follow them are still out there? What's your view of that?

DE CAUX

Yes, I imagine there still are. They're rather, either subdued or have left the movement or--I don't know what has happened to them, but many are still very staunch and are there, doing what they can wherever they are.

AMSDEN

As a labor reporter and editor you worked for a lot of labor leaders in the American labor movement. Let me ask you a question. Which one of those people stands out largest in your memory?

DE CAUX

Oh, John L. Lewis by all odds, from every angle. I worked against him at the Illinois Miner. Frank Farrington was his one threat against Lewis in the mine workers, and Oscar Ameringer, the editor who was ridiculing him. At any rate,

that was the enemy. And so my first approach to Lewis was that of being within the enemy camp, very definitely, and, I think, with good reason. Then, of course, later in life, when the CIa came along, I would say that Lewis changed his stance almost completely. Then I worked with him, at first with my fingers crossed, and then after seeing his role in the formation of the CIa, leader of actually a great workingclass uprising, I admired him. I worked with him closely, and he gave everything he had to the success of that movement. I developed a great deal of respect for him, an extraordinarily mixed character but certainly outstanding as against the average labor leader.

AMSDEN

He was the man who very early on achieved a centralized control of his union, I think. Isn't that correct?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. Ruthlessly and brutally at times. He set out for power. Power was the thing that Lewis understood, that he grasped for, that he worked for. He achieved it only gradually, and I would say largely at the expense of the united Mine Workers [of America] up till the period of the Depression, but he did achieve it. He became the "Boss." Even his brother [A. D. ("Denny") Lewis] used to call him the "Boss" of that union. A dictator, if you like. You can say everything you like about his rule over the mine workers, and it has been said. Then when the New Deal came along, Lewis, still a Hoover Republican lined up always with the most conservative elements in the labor movement and in the country, still opposed [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt even after the Depression started. But in spite of him Roosevelt did make it. Then Lewis showed an extraordinary new side, a capacity for seizing an opportunity when he deemed the time was right. He took every advantage of the New Deal for the miners initially, and helped, led a reorganization of that union, which had been brought down to next to nothing. At the same time he started to playa role in the life of the country, a very progressive role in my opinion, pushing Roosevelt, pushing Roosevelt on every thing that concerned the working people and labor organization. Then again, when he saw the right time was ripe for a movement like the CIa to organize the mass production industries, basic industries, the industries that had the least organization and yet were

the major monopoly industries of this country, he seized that opportunity again. And, as I say, exhibited extraordinary capacities for leadership.

AMSDEN

Just to go back for a moment, if I could. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the Illinois revolt against Lewis. Was Farrington politically principled? Was it a revolt in nature of politics, I mean to ask, or what exactly caused him to stand out against Lewis, and how did Lewis handle that?

DE CAUX

Power fight. He was about the only man who was as big and rough and power hungry as Lewis. And he was also head of a district, one of the few strong districts remaining in the united Mine Workers, the Illinois miners at that time. The rest of the union was suffering from unemployment and suffering from everything. The Illinois miners had probably the best contract then, and Farrington was the John L. Lewis of that union, a man who was power hungry, ruthless, dictatorial and out for himself, if you like. That's what they used to say of Lewis, which is probably true, too, even when he was on the progessive side. And he was Lewis's competition, as it were. And then I was witness to the period when Lewis started to move in. It was a battle of the, not the robber barons exactly, but pretty close to that. It was a battle between two very strong characters. Lewis used every instrument of power that he had and he was in enemy territory. It was almost like a war, his men against Farrington's men. Then at some point Lewis started to get the upper hand and Farrington went off to Europe, usually a thing that's not advisable. Lewis again seized his opportunity to produce a letter showing that Farrington had signed a contract with the Peabody Coal Company to represent them in labor affairs while he was still on the payroll of the united Mine Workers. [Lewis] used it to full advantage, and Farrington was through. After that, Lewis still couldn't control the district. It took him some years to do it, but eventually he did. Because it was an independent district. You asked if there were any issues. The issues [were] there, but you asked me about Farrington and Lewis.

AMSDEN

Well, were there political issues between Illinois and the rest of the union?

DE CAUX

In many ways, yes. Illinois was a progressive district. Farrington's editor happened to be a socialist, a very famous socialist, Oscar Ameringer, with a whole life devoted to the socialist movement. And he produced a very lively paper, the Illinois Miner. He would take radicals or anyone to work on that paper and he did a terrific job, amazed people. They said, "How could Farrington put up with it?" He, again, like Lewis, was a right-wing Republican. Meant nothing. Democrats were too radical for him, and how could he stand for a paper that was edited by a socialist and that was of the character of paper that that was? Farrington didn't care, just so long as it was a weapon to use against Lewis, you might say, a weapon in his power struggle. He was not ideological, and, in a sense, Lewis wasn't ideological. He could be right, left, in the middle, any weapon that would help to strike his foe down.

AMSDEN

So, when it came time for you to apply for a position with the CIa that was under Lewis's, or in Lewis's gift, Lewis had your work on the Illinois Miner to hold against you, but also something more, wasn't there?

DE CAUX

ah yes. My whole life in the, as far as the labor movement, had been in association with Lewis's enemies, which were essentially, I would say, the progressive, the left, the liberal elements in that union, the rank and file, if you like to put it there, whom he had fought to establish his control over. After I worked on the Illinois Miner, I went to work with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, whose publication [Locomotive Engineers Journal] was edited by a man [Albert F. Coyle] of a liberal type, one of the brain trusters for Warren [S.] stone, another extraordinary character in the labor movement. A man [Stone] who largely initiated labor banking, who promoted the idea of independent political action and labor party, one thing and another, and yet again, like most of the early labor barons, was a dictator. [laughter] The delegates sometimes would say that they were afraid to get up and speak in his conventions because they'd scrounge him down in his seat--Stone would have his enemy, just like Lewis, [and] would scrounge him down in his chair, see, so [they] kept their mouths shut while Warren stone was there. But again, you have this curious contrast among labor leaders that sometimes the most dictatorial types, like Lewis and Stone, were men of also strong progressive

tendencies all mixed up with business. He started the labor banking phase, he put all the engineers' money into buying the [Equitable] Trust Building, I think, in New York and a whole capitalist empire. Yet at the same time he was open to any, to the [Robert M.] La Follette movement, he was one of the movers of that, the Plumb plan for nationalizing the railroads, helped to start the paper Labor, which is still in existence, I believe.

AMSDEN

Was he aware of your political ideas when you worked for him?

DE CAUX

No, Warren Stone was already dead when I came to work there, but his lieutenants were still around. He had a brain trust of his own. Frederic [C.] Howe was one of the chiefs of that brain trust, and Albert Coyle, who was the editor, was one of quite a group of liberal brain trusters, who promoted cooperatives, labor politics, all sorts of things.

AMSDEN

Did you discuss politics with Coyle?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. [laughter] Coyle would discuss anything with everyone. Yes, he was a real character, nothing inhibited about Albert.

AMSDEN

When you went to work for-

DE CAUX

No, excuse me. You might ask the question in regard to Lewis.

AMSDEN

Lewis. He knew about your politics?

DE CAUX

Oh yes, because Albert Coyle, the intellectual in the labor movement if you like to call it that, was concerned with all progressive causes, including the opposition to Lewis, who, by the way, again, like him and Farrington, fought

this bully-boy Warren Stone bitterly. They hated each other and he claimed that Warren Stone ran non-union mines in West Virginia, which I believe he did. This extraordinary mixture of characteristics fascinated me. Well, anyhow, Coyle would have gone into these campaigns anyhow. A lot of them were none of his business, but all the liberals were supporting Brophy, John Brophy, against John L. Lewis. He was supposed to be the hope of the liberals in this reactionary union of Lewis's. So Lewis kind of concentrated on Coyle. [Lewis] was no mean politician. "What had this"--I don't know if he called him a communist or not, he had some fancy names for him. "What was he doing butting into the mine workers election affairs?" And he purloined a letter, he or his people, that Albert Coyle had written to Powers Hapgood, another of the opposition to Lewis.

AMSDEN

And a friend of yours, as I remember.

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. Yes. I was with that whole crowd. And Lewis used it to denounce, I forget the fancy expressions he used, "this emissary of Moscow" (or something like that) "working to destroy the united Mine Workers" and so on. [laughter] Never hesitated before hyperbole, shall we say.

AMSDEN

So, what part--?

DE CAUX

And I worked with Lewis, you see, after that.

AMSDEN

Right. That's what I was going to ask. What part in the drive to build the CIa, under Lewis's leadership, did you play?

DE CAUX

Well, I was hired by John Brophy. When Lewis objected to my whole record, he finally had to laugh. He says, "Couldn't you get anyone else except this man?" Because after that also I had worked with Federated Press, which Lewis regarded as his enemy. And then he laughed because he himself was hiring all

his enemies for the CIa drive, an extraordinary thing to do. He made John Brophy director of it, John Brophy, the man who had run against him, that he had called every name under the sun. Adolf Germer, was one of the first organizers, a socialist who, a big man, he used to march down the mine workers conventions [laughter], breathing fire and brimstone against Lewis. And Lewis breathed more than that against him, you know. All the people that were against him were brought in. I was one of them. I was hired by Brophy to handle the public relations or rather the--what shall we say?--the propaganda work in the labor movement for the CIa as we started. Put out a clip sheet and then eventually I made it into a paper, the CIa News, with Lewis's approval. And dealt chiefly with Brophy at first until the sit-down strikes, which were the big operation, the thing that really made the CIa. And again, I gained a great deal of respect for Lewis as I saw his leadership. We were on the phone, Brophy and I, twice a day and so on with Lewis, and he was laying down the line. He was the real leader of that sit-down strike that made the CIa. I respected his leadership a great deal. I mean, he had a great grasp of power. That was where the power lay and he could take advantage of it and he could also inspire his followers to militancy and to everything else that was necessary, as he did. so, after that I came closer to Lewis and by then I was editor of the CIa News and public relations director. In fact I made my own operations there, chiefly with Lewis's approval, and everything was checked with him. Brophy, by that time Lewis would start to get a little bit suspicious, I think, [so Brophy] was sort of being sidetracked a little bit. He was no longer the, he was a director in name only. But Lewis was watching his ambitions, he didn't trust him. He [Brophy] might challenge him again.

AMSDEN

There's a detail in your book that made me think that Lewis also wanted to oppose the growing anti-communism of the late forties. If I have it correct, you said that Lewis was against signing loyalty affidavits with any unions. Is that right?

DE CAUX

Against what?

AMSDEN

You write about the loyalty affidavits that union people were required to sign after the Taft-Hartley amendment.

DE CAUX

Oh, oh yes. No, that is much later, you see [Taft-Hartley Labor Act, 1947]. Yes, that came after Lewis had already--No, had he left the CIa? I think, yes, he was in the American Federation of Labor by then. I had no direct contact with him after 1941 or '42 when he broke with the CIa, went into the American Federation of Labor. But he did oppose the Taft-Hartley law. Again with a determination and an aggressiveness that was not matched by any of the other labor leaders, certainly not the American Federation of Labor, certainly not Walter Reuther, certainly not Phil Murray. Lewis fought it, he was no longer a CIa leader then, he was head of the united Mine Workers, which, by the way, had its own loyalty provisions against communists. ah yes.

AMSDEN

ah, that I didn't know.

DE CAUX

Yes. It had a grab bag clause which it opposed from time to time. Leaders of the Boy Scouts were one of them. Anyone who seized the, incurred the wrath of Lewis essentially. When the communists fought him bitterly in the united Mine Workers, before the CIa days--They changed as Lewis changed, and as I changed, our alignments, when CIa came along. They saw that this was a great opportunity for American working class, as Lewis, everybody [saw]. Everything was changed. But in the earlier days he fought them, expelled them, beat them up, did everything, I mean, and red-baited them, everything. And that clause remained in the united Mine Workers constitution throughout. Maybe still there, for all I know.

AMSDEN

Did you have anything to do with the National Miners Union in that early period?

DE CAUX

No, personally I had nothing to do with it. I recall—They were much earlier, they were in the-

AMSDEN

Late twenties.

DE CAUX

Right before '29, I think, before the Depression or just at the start of the Depression, when the whole labor movement, including the mine workers union, was in its doldrums. And I just read about them. The left-wing movement was for them. The communists were for them. And Brophy was also somewhat involved. I know he would argue later that he had, you know-- It was a count against him, see, against his loyalty to the united Mine Workers, but he was involved. That's a matter of historical research in which I didn't know too much, because I was not involved with Brophy at that time. So, the only thing aside from reading about them in the papers, they had a strike in Harlan County, they had, they conducted about the only militant strikes in the--When was that? The 1929, I think, yes. Around that period, right before the Depression.

AMSDEN

Would you say Lewis smashed them the same way that he dealt with Farrington in Illinois a little bit later?

DE CAUX

Oh, he'd use everything against anything when he could. He had no scruples about striking the first blow, or the last blow, or any blow he could against anyone who stood, up against him. That was the secret of the fear that he engendered among a lot of people there, because they knew that he was an all-out fighter, you know. Anyone who was against him, he wouldn't, he'd stop at hardly anything. Yes, he fought them bitterly. Anyhow, I remember the strike in Harlan County because NMU miners were up in Cleveland, where I was working for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. And in my apartment, they had it full of these guys, they were up there soliciting funds to help them out in that strike. That's the only direct contact I ever had with the National Miners union. I don't know how long it lasted, but like most of the unions that the communists started, they performed a role prior to the Depression, when the whole labor movement was quiescent, doing nothing, saying you couldn't strike because there are a hundred men looking for your

job if you do strike, and so on. And they were the only aggressive element. But when this Depression came along and particularly when the CIa showed signs of becoming the movement that it became, the communists changed their line, or rather they used the revolutionary unions, so-called left-wing, in a dozen different industries as the recruiting ground for the CIa, essentially. First of all with the American Federation of Labor, go into the mainstream, that was their policy. And all of their left-wing unions were liquidated. Not liquidated entirely, because they carried over into the CIa unions, and in a number of cases they were the real, the only base that the CIa had.

AMSDEN

Would that be true in steel, in the Steel Workers Organizing Committee?

DE CAUX

Yes, there was a Steel and Metal Workers Industrial Union, I think it was called, that conducted some strikes. Because the old AFL Union, Amalgamated Association, "Mother" [Michael F.] Tighe's union [Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers] was hopeless. It was a joke. Though the communists formed the left-wing union which played a minor part in the early organizing days in steel, then when CIa finally made the steel workers its chief project (it was the first and chief project for Lewis and the CIa [Steel Workers Organizing Committee]), they advised all their people to join the new organization. Which they did. In fact, they supported it in every which way, were among the pioneer organizers. think [William Z.] Foster calculated that, I think it was, sixty members of the Communist Party were hired by Lewis and Murray for the earliest and hardest organizing work in steel.

AMSDEN

Well, it looks a little strange to someone like me, brought up in the fifties, in a very anti-Soviet period, to read about delegations of American labor people, CIa officials like yourself, going to the Soviet Union, meeting regularly with Soviet officials, and even in the later period working for a world unity line. I wonder if you could explain a little bit more how it was that the united States government officially backed the line of world trade unity and trade unionists in that immediate post-war period?

DE CAUX

Yes, it seemed very clear to me. It may be forgotten that the United States and the Soviet Union were allies in the Second World War, an alliance that was sabotaged by many people in the British administration and in the United States. But that, on the whole, was loyally carried through, I would say, by Roosevelt and as a war measure by Winston Churchill in England. And not all of Roosevelt's people, by any means, in the State Department and elsewhere- I think it was a good deal Roosevelt's personal influence and possibly, in Britain, Winston Churchill, again, another fire-and-brimstone hater of the communists, the man who started the Cold War and everything else. But as a war measure, I think, he tended to go all out. I mean, you have so many characters like this. Like Lewis went all out for CIa, genuine and sincerely. And I believe Roosevelt and Churchill were both concerned with winning that war, genuinely and sincerely, even if it meant shaking hands with Stalin or doing things there. A lot of their work was sabotaged. But at any rate, the thing in the 1940s, 1945 I think was the launching pad for the World Federation of Trade unions. I think in the year before, the moves toward that end had started. They originated from Great Britain, if you ask me, from Churchill, who thoroughly approved of the British Trades Union Congress taking the lead to unite the unions of the Soviet union, the working class in the Soviet Union with the working class of the united states and of the whole world in order to win the war. When the war was over and won, Churchill lost all interest in it, completely. And maybe Roosevelt might have, but he died before that happened. But anyhow, he took a similar attitude, and on his orders every step taken to form the World Federation of Trade Unions--including the Soviet Union--had the official backing of the United States government, as it had of the British government. They issued the visas, the passports, they paid a lot of the expenses, they entertained us at the embassies in every country and maybe, some of them, with their tongues in their cheek or with reluctance, but nevertheless, they did. That was the official line. In the united States [Sir Walter] Citrine of the Trades union Congress, ran into a difficult situation in that the American Federation of Labor was as anti-Soviet then as it's always been and refused to go along. [It] also stood on its rights as being the only American trade union movement recognized internationally. There was competition between the CIa and the AFL, they were about equal strength. So, that Citrine had to use his diplomacy to do something about the American Federation of Labor. He could count on CIa support. Murray, of course, was a

good Roosevelt man. He'd go along with the administration on anything they advocated, so would Hillman. Hillman was the real labor lieutenant of President Roosevelt. And both Murray and Hillman worked all out at first, so that delegations came over from the Soviet union, were entertained here, we sent delegations to the Soviet union, there was a going to and fro. If you had videotapes in those days, you could have some nice pictures of Phil Murray, the later banner of all communists, sitting at the same table with Vasilii Kuznetsov, who's now a foreign secretary, I believe, in the Soviet Union and who had been a steel worker, knew more about the steel industry in the united States, by the way, than even Murray did, because Murray was a miner. But that was how it started. And that's how it got its support, I would say.

AMSDEN

It wasn't long after that that someone you'd met many years before cooperated with the government in starting a rival trade union. I'm talking about Jay Lovestone. Isn't that right? wasn't Lovestone involved in later American efforts to set up a rival to the WFTU?

DE CAUX

He could have been. Let's see, I'm not sure. I couldn't tell. Chronology is an important matter in these things, and I don't like to misspeak myself. Lovestone from being a Communist [Party] leader, you know, formed an opposition communist group first of all, when he split with Foster and with the Comintern [Communist International]. I think the Comintern was still in existence at that time. He went from there to work with David Dubinsky, who was another full-time anti-communist, regardless of the [Second] World War or anything else. There were a number of American labo~ leaders who were that way, who did not go along with the official CIa line in this. They had to sort of pay lip service. Dubinsky was not in the CIa by that time anymore, but I'm thinking of Emil Rieve, who was the same type. Well, anyhow, Lovestone, from there he developed such reputation as a conspirator against the left wing allover the world. After all he had been [laughter] with the Communist International, and he knew everybody. I mean, he knew all these "dirty communists," who they were, what they were up to, see, so [George] Meany hired him for the AFL. And he was their eminence grise, or whatever you like to call it, in foreign affairs for a long time, right up until relatively recently. So,

yes, he was the brain truster for Meany in the whole campaign. Well, now, Meany was no slob at anticommunism, so anything that Lovestone wanted he'd go along with, and he had his fights with the international trade union movement, I guess, with Lovestone advising him at that particular time. You can't say that Lovestone formed this. Yes, he did in a way. It was his men who were involved in fighting the French trade union movement. Oh, you're probably thinking of France, yes, rather than an international movement. Well, I was thinking of the international movement.

AMSDEN

Force Ouvriere I think [Confederation generale du travail--Force Ouvrierel.

DE CAUX

Yes, what is it? Force Ouvriere, yes, the third and smallest trade union movement in--That was an American creation, almost entirely financed by CIO and Lovestone and Dubinsky and Meany and the rest of them, and scabbing on strikes and everything else. It had a record allover. As far as the international movement was concerned, Meany even split the International Federation of Trade Unions [Amsterdam Internationall, which was what the communists called the "Yellow International," as against the Red International [of Labor unionsl. It was the right wing international. Even they were too socialistic for him, see, so he split with them, too. The International Federation of Trade unions was about on its last legs when the World Federation of Trade Unions was formed, and Citrine of the British Trades Union Congress was the real boss. I think he got more money from Britain than from any other trade union movement. So, they just went along like good boys on the whole World Federation of Trade Unions deal and were granted the due recognition and so on.

AMSDEN

Now, some of those very same people who were implementing American government policy in the WFTU later became the objects of a more or less official repression within the labor movement. Could you say a few words about the ways in which the purge of the labor unions was carried out after about '47, '48, since you were one of the victims yourself?

DE CAUX

About the purge of the unions?

AMSDEN

Yes. In other words, all the left-wingers that Lewis and others had hired to build the CIa then had to be purged-

DE CAUX

Right.

AMSDEN

--according to the way you tell it in your book. What were the mechanisms of getting rid of people like yourself?

DE CAUX

As I reminded you, we were allies with the Soviet Union and then after the Second World War, after the-(Yeah, was it the second? I get mixed up. I've been through three of them. [laughter] Nothing new, alright, [except] maybe the coming one.) The whole line changed after Roosevelt died, as you may remember, and tough little Harry Truman, you know, was going to tell the Soviets where to get off, was now the man who was dictating policy. That change was already coming in 1945. I remember I was on the delegation to Soviet Union in that year. The war was over to all intents and purposes then, and already Soviet Union was becoming the main enemy to the Americans who had been loyal, or ostensibly loyal, allies anyhow. I got that out in the Pacific, with MacArthur's setup there, with the office in that year, 1945. They were talking about the Soviet Union being the next enemy. Go over to the Soviet union, [William Averell] Harriman, the ambassador who entertained us at the embassy there, would--Joe Curran was calling for I don't know how many billion dollars in credits to be granted to the Soviet Union, anything to forward and continue into the postwar this alliance which Roosevelt had pledged himself to, after all. But he was already being warned that they were to be the enemy, cautiously, diplomatically, everything else, but it was rather obvious. Well, the counterpart of that [was that] what was happening abroad was also happening in Washington even before I was purged from CIa. It was no longer, "What can you do to help the Soviets in this war," you know, Soviet war relief, this, that, and the other. Then it stopped. The labor people started

to be called in to various government departments, meet with certain government leaders, the guys who sort of hated to be labor, and being given the new line that now Soviet Union was to be the enemy, and "When are you going to purge your commies?" "When are you going to purge your commies?" I got that again and again and again. From the administration it came. And that was the whole change. Everyone. They bought off Joe Curran, there, who had a largely left-wingled union, the National Maritime Union. How [Mike] Quill of the Transport Workers [Union] and other--He was supposed to be one of the worst communists in CIa, you know. He said--what was his famous expression?--"I'd rather be a Red to the rats than a rat to the Reds." That was what he used to say. Well, so he became a rat to the Reds and informed on Harry Bridges and on the UE [United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers] and on all these other left-wing groups. But it was very much organized from on top, there was no question about it, and Murray was their man pushed by walter Reuther. Murray did it with some reluctance. After all, through the war years he'd been in alliance with the left and consciously in alliance. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he knew all about the left-wing unions and the communists and everybody else. But Walter was the man who was doing it with a venom that was extraordinary. If Murray would show any tolerance, anything of being soft on the left and so on, but Walter Reuther particularly would jump and would pressure him and so on for an allout purge, see, as Reuther operated within the auto workers, which again was a union with very strong left-wing. So, that was the way it was being operated. Lewis, who was out of the CIa by that time, he had a number of communists and others on his payroll with District 50, before he [laughter], before 1941, before the Soviet Union was invaded by the Nazis and when he went along with the isolationists. So, this is a double reason for not having to do with the Soviet Union. He wouldn't have anything to do with the World Federation of Trade Unions, and he just fired every left-winger in District 50, just like that. And yet he'd been in close alliance with them, and they had worked with him very closely.

AMSDEN

So, one mechanism of purge was simply to fire the people that had been working for you for a long period of time. What sort of thing did they tell you when they asked you to leave, for example, in your case?

DE CAUX

Well, I'd say my case was a little bit different in many ways because I was protected by John L. Lewis after Murray took over. His brother made no bones about it that he would--Denny Lewis--if I'd run into trouble, he'd say, "Well, look, I hear these bastards are out after you" and offered to help. Lewis, of course, was above all that, that type of petty intrigue. But the point was that when Murray took over the CIa leadership in 1940 at the urging of Lewis, very reluctantly, he said, "John wants to put me on top of a dung hill." That was about situation in the CIa. It was torn by factionalism, with all the red-baiters out for a terrific purge, and so on and so forth. And with Murray himself surrounded by three priests. Lewis thought that he could put him in and keep a hold on him through the position in the Mine Workers after Lewis himself stepped out. He thought wrong and was very bitter about it, saying "That's disloyal." So Murray took over very reluctantly, under certain conditions. One of them was renunciation of totalitarianism. I forget, they worked out some goddamned formula with him. And all that sort of stuff. But at the same time he was scared of Lewis still. And I didn't like what happened at all at that convention. I wanted to get out.

AMSDEN

What was the year now? So as soon as Murray was elected and officially took over, I went to him--as indeed I should have done anyhow, I'm just explaining my sentiments at the time--and offered my resignation. I did it on the basis that I was a Lewis man and that Murray had taken over, he was the type to do his own thing, and would just like to have an adminstration with his own people. turned to the right and to anticommunism and this and that and the other.

DE CAUX

Nineteen forty. The whole thing stank to high heaven. I mean, I could see the whole movement being turned to the right and to anticommunism and this and that and the other. So as soon as Murray was elected and officially took over, I went to him--as indeed I should have done anyhow, I'm just explaining my sentiments at the time--and offered my resignation. I did it on the basis that I was a Lewis man and that Murray had taken over, he was the type to do his own thing, and would just like to have an adminstration with his own

people. He was always much more of an ideological person than Lewis. Lewis didn't give a damn. I mean, he worked with the communists if they were working with him, he'd work against them if they were against him, so he didn't have an ideology. Murray did. Murray had a Catholic church ideology and of course the Catholic church was making its main enemy the left-wing and the communists. So, I went to him-

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (Video Session] (June 26, 1981)

DE CAUX

All of the right wing had long been behind Murray and the left wing was supporting Lewis. Murray's personality which I think you would appreciate from what I wrote, he was very definitely a torn man, he tore his soul apart. When he was torn, he really seemed to suffer between his loyalty to Lewis, which was getting pretty thin at that time and his own views, which hated most of the things that Lewis stood for. So, I emphasized my feelings I had for Lewis, which were very strong then and which was really the main reason I had for wanting to get out. So we had quite a talk and he said, "No, no, no, no, no, no, Len. No, no, no, Len. I want to carryon just like John did. I want you to stay in your job and all the rest of the people to stay on the job." And any move he would have taken against me after that, in his mind would have been subject to Lewis thinking he was being disloyal, he was firing [Lewis'] people. So, that's the basis on which I stayed on after that. I had [laughter] even for a pure employee who could be fired any time, I had a certain bargaining power.

AMSDEN

You mentioned an organization called the ACTU-

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

--as important in the transformation of the union at this time. What do those letters stand for and what did it do?

DE CAUX

ACTU, I don't know whether it still exists or not, I have no idea. American Catholic--Oh, Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, that was it, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. Now, that was the movement in the CIa, insofar as it was an organized movement, to combat the communists and the left wing generally. It was the ACTU. It was organized and even professedly tried to imitate what it regarded as the communist tactics. That's to say, saying that the communists had gained all this influence in the various CIa unions by staying later at meetings than the others, you know, by this that and the other. Well, the ACTU started to adopt similar tactics, what they believed to be similar tactics, on the other side, to get rid of all the people they regarded as communists or leftwingers. They didn't have any following in certain areas. was surprised in New England, for instance, where the church people there told me they had no contacts with the ACTU. It didn't operate in New England. But in Detroit, in Pittsburgh, and in a number of other situations, they had the in, with Murray in pittsburgh and [David J.l McDonald in Pittsburgh and with [Vin] Sweeney and with all the Catholics. It was largely a Catholic set-up there. And also with Murray personally. As I say, he was surrounded by priests most of the time and he was most, seemed to be most concerned about saving his soul, see. In the difficult situation in which he had been suspected of playing ball with the communists, which, of course, he was doing many ways. And these people were guiding him as it were,and by 1940 very obviously. The leader of that whole group on the right was--again, so many extraordinary, interesting characters in the labor movement--was Monsignor, I think he was a monsignor, maybe father, Charles Owen Rice. He wrote the pamphlets for the ACTU. He was the sort of spiritual and practical organizational leader of the ACTU. He wrote a pamphlet, How to--I don't know whether he said--Delouse Your Union of Communists, I mean, that was the title, somewhat like that. And also, he was pulling strings all the time, as I mentioned, through Murray and through the office in my later years there to get rid of me--we were on opposite sides--to get anticommunists put into every job that came along. I would always try to get the good guys [laughter] into the various editorial jobs around the country. And then I found I was up against Dave McDonald and his crowd, essentially the ACTU crowd, and they finally succeeded in a lot of places. In other cases--They weren't the only faction, of course.

You mentioned they'd playa role in conventions, for example, shouting down the other side. You suggested in one place that there was, in fact, some organized violence. Was there a lot, or was this restricted to conventions? Or when did that take place?

DE CAUX

I couldn't say how much there was out in the field. Against the left there was always rough stuff, you know. There always had been in the labor movement. Beatings up and so on, there were plenty of cases of that sort of thing, you know. But when it came to a national convention, even Murray had to say, "Tut-tut." That happened in the Boston convention, when they were preparing for the complete break with the left wing and for expelling these eleven unions. Yes, the extraordinary part about Charles Owen Rice, is that he--Not only he but,it seemed to me the whole or a major element in the Catholic church that had dealt with labor changed its line almost completely.

AMSDEN

When was this then?

DE CAUX

I would say--I know it was operating already at the time of the Vietnam War. When I wrote my book, I wrote to Father Rice, you know, sort of kidding, just as I sent copies of it to the other people who had been gunning for me. You know, some kidding around about it. He wrote back a very nice letter. He said, "If I had my life to live over again, I would not do what I did." He recognized that he and I had been on opposite sides. He says, "I now am in favor of a united front with everybody who goes along with what I'm for. And he operated that, in the Vietnam War. He was a great opponent of the Vietnam War and he would go on the platform with communists and with anyone else. And he has hewed to that line. The man who was the leader, you might say, of the other side. So many extraordinary transitions take place in the labor movement. [end of video recording] We've only retained our strength in CIa because of the alliance with the Soviet Union. I mean, that was the real saving thing, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. That was what saved the left, saved everything progressive in this country and that's why I give credit to the Soviet Union.

CHILD'S VOICE

"Unky."

DE CAUX

Hi, guys.

AMSDEN

Hi, boys. I'm talking to your uncle about what he did many years ago. You've been a very active man. What's your name?

REGAN

Regan.

AMSDEN

Regan. What's your name?

TERRY

Terry.

AMSDEN

Do you come and see Len De Caux a lot?

REGAN

Yes.

AMSDEN

Why?

TERRY

Why? Because we like him.

DE CAUX

Oh, that's nice, I thought it was for sodas.

AMSDEN

How old are you?

REGAN

Ten.

AMSDEN

You're ten. And how old are you?

TERRY

Eight.

AMSDEN

You're eight. Oh, that's good. Well, listen, want to talk to him about some things that he did way back before you were born. Is that OK? So, you can just listen and you'll hear some things you never heard before.

DE CAUX

Well, they probably don't want to listen.

REGAN

May we listen?

DE CAUX

Anyhow, you can go out. If you want any, I got some more of that red licorice if you want any. No, I think you'd just get bored.

REGAN

We're just listening.

AMSDEN

So, you think foreign policy was really key to the maintenance of the CIO through the war years.

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. No question about it. Yes, definitely. So many, you could easily analyze all through the history of the CIa the influence of foreign events on the internal politics of the union, just as clear as could be. That's as clear as could be. And very dramatically so, just as in world politics.

AMSDEN

I continue to be interested in the mechanisms of the purge. Did it include rough stuff as well as firings? And second question: What happened to all the people who left, that you know of?

DE CAUX

Yes, that's, that's I'd say a long, sad story. Nineteen forty-seven, I saw what was happening, you see, so I could only generalize, in that I don't know what happened to everyone. But you'd find the unions that were under attack, like the UE, see, having to layoff organizers, you know, the good guys, and you'd run into them. So, what were they doing, see? They were mostly--I don't know--of a type that you are probably familiar with. They come from the shops, most of them. A few of them were sort of college boys, but they weren't typically college by any means. A number of them were war veterans, and so forth. But they identified themselves with labor movement of a certain character that the UE stood for, so that when they no longer had jobs with it--And they were paid very little, you know. That was another uniformity of the left wing. It paid about half as much as the right wing paid, because the guys on the right were always in it just for the money.

AMSDEN

What was a UE organizer paid in those days?

DE CAUX

I've forgotten the exact price, but I know they were always complaining [laughter] how tight [Jim] Matles was. He was the director of organization. They couldn't get expense money, they complained. There sure was no corruption there. So, what did they do? I mean, just to take one group. A lot of cases, the wives would get jobs as waitresses. You'd run into them around the country. They couldn't get jobs themselves. Some of them could become salesmen, some went into college work. Some--I don't know--just became disgruntled, sort of disgusted, you know. It's--You realized you were on the out. So, of course, what happened to the porkchoppers, that's to say the guys who pretty much were in it for what they could make, you know. No problem with them. They just jumped over onto the other side. So the right wing would take over in a certain union, well, they'd make their peace with the right wing

and become big red-baiters and so on. Plenty of that happened. Others would just become disgruntled. I don't really like, it's a little too painful to think of my personal friends, what happened to so many of them, you know, just everything they stood for was kind of blown up. And it still persists to this day. Did you read my book on the Wobblies, by the way? [The Living Spirit of the Wobblies]

AMSDEN

I've been looking at it. I've been going through the other one a lot more carefully.

DE CAUX

Yes, I tried-

AMSDEN

I just picked it up. It’s right out there in the car, actually.

DE CAUX

Yes well, I don’t care if you read it or not. But the point is that I tried to analyze that question that you, the answer to that question when I say, "What happened to the Wobblies?" Similar thing in a way happened to them when that movement--All these people there, poets, writers, organizers, real militants, this, that and the other, so many of them drifted in every which direction. You pointed out some of the directions. Even over to fascism, one. And, well, I suppose, in a way the same sort thing happened after the purge in the CIO. That was more or less the end of the movement and I was lucky to have unemployment compensation coming.

REGAN

It's Danny.

DE CAUX

Who is that?

REGAN

Danny.

DE CAUX

Danny. OK, get him some licorice or a soda if he wants it, will you, guys? And I really don't think you're interested here and-

AMSDEN

Yes, I think you've listened long enough and it's making a little extra noise. So, I'll see you later. Do you think going in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee [Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives] affected people like this at all?

DE CAUX

Oh, yes. That had a terrific psychological effect. And that was the worst part of it. Got a soda in the-

DANNY

Where?

DE CAUX

--refrigerator in back, if you want one. A soda, or might as well have anything. OK, Danny.

AMSDEN

Bye, boys.

DE CAUX

Good-bye.

AMSDEN

Well, you were called before BUAC, I believe. I think you mentioned the year was 1953

DE CAUX

The McCarthy committee and then later the House Un-American Comrnittee-- No, there was real persecution, I tried to indicate that, in the later chapters. It wasn't just fear or misfortune. It was the way it struck at the basis of the people's confidence, so that you had a generation coming in the fifties there

were afraid to stick out their necks on anything. I got around a little bit there in that period, I was no longer with the CIa, and, oh, the terror against being identified with anything of a communist character, or even any radical character, was so great among the whole generation. You know, repression, when it's sort of all-out, you fight or die, is one thing, but this sort of psychological terror that was excercised by the whole McCarthy movement is disgusting.

AMSDEN

Did [Joseph R.] McCarthy ask you: Were you then or had you ever been a member of the-

DE CAUX

Oh, yes.

AMSDEN

What did you answer?

DE CAUX

Not McCarthy personally. I was before one of his subcommittees. I think it was headed by a senator from Utah [Arthur Watkins]--if you know Mormons and the like--who was more or less polite. But the questioning was done by the employed hacks, [Robert] Morris and all the others, ex-communists and so forth, fighting out their fight against the communists. What did I answer? I had followed the advice of a lawyer in each case and the advice then was to plead the Fifth Amendment, and that's what I did. Because if you didn't, then you would be required to name names. There's been enough written about, all around the Hollywood Ten. Hollywood Ten was just ten people in a rather prominent public position who are being written about to this day. And yet there were hundreds of people, hundreds of ordinary working people who lost their jobs, who lost their union connections, and went through all of these things, probably in a more acute form than the Hollywood Ten did. And some had to go under cover, as they said. [Wyndham] Mortimer used to say, "Dig a hole and pull it in after them." Get into a hole and pull it in after them. That happened to lots of them. They'd be scared if you see them even today. People have gotten into other jobs, they've gone to college, become

professors of this, that, and the other, scared to have any reference made to what they did, which was things to be very proud of in a lot of their organizing work, and the courage and the daring that they showed in those days, that really built the CIO. And I am pleased because writers like Roger Keeran are finally giving credit in their researches to what the communists did in the auto industry, what they did primarily in the auto industry. I was terribly pleased about it, because even in my book I dare not sort of do that, because it might embarrass or place in jeopardy some of the people or their families. And there are people who still fear that, all these years after. 'Most half of them dead, anyhow.

AMSDEN

Did appearing before these two committees put you through an episode of psychological trauma? What was the effect on your life?

DE CAUX

No. First time, actually, when I went through the McCarthy subcommittee--I forget the name of that senator, [laughter] it might as well be forgotten anyhow--that was nothing. They were polite, they were gentlemanly. And I had a job. I was editing March of Labor then. I wouldn't be fired for that, that was just another feather in my cap. So I had nothing to fear, just followed the advice there, taking the Fifth Amendment. The whole thing was ridiculous to me anyhow, disgusting. The amount of stool pigeon evidence that they threw in in the closed sessions. They had closed sessions, then open sessions. Closed sessions go on half a day sometimes. People testified that I had gone to a Lenin memorial meeting in Los Angeles, that I was--Somebody had said that I had met a certain girl at a certain time, all sorts of things that were not public knowledge, that could only have come from friends or from friends or associates who had been with me at the time. All that sort of stuff, it was disgusting and it was ridiculous. Most of the stuff was completely ridiculous. The second time was totally different before the House committee. Then I was blacklisted already. I had a job I didn't want to lose. And I had a family to support and I was right down at the bottom of my spirits anyhow. I couldn't get a job. Oh, it's in my book, that sort of period. That was before I was at the committee that I was pressed by the blacklist. The blacklist is a very, very, very upsetting thing. My own daughter called me a bum, you know. I couldn't get a

job anywhere. I couldn't get a job even doing labor at the post office. Why not? Because I'd have to sign a form then that I had had nothing to do with the Attorney General's list of God knows how many organizations. If I lied about it, then I was subject to perjury. Well, nothing might have happened, but still. So you kiss off that job.

AMSDEN

Do you think it affected your relationship with your kids?

DE CAUX

No, not terribly, because--No, I wouldn't say that. For the same reason that almost anything that would happen to me here, wouldn't affect my relationship particularly, because they're completely unpolitical. My wife, of course, was the same as me in politics. Our daughter--an adopted daughter--could never quite figure it all out. She had the FBI after her to try and tell her things about me or my wife and saying they'd meet her. What did she do when she came home for lunch? Was there anyone in the house? She had that, but at that time she was just a, under, pre-teen, I guess. She couldn't figure what the hell it was all about. And the word meant nothing to her. She never was quite sure whether it was the communists who were after me. She'd been told, of course, that communists were bad people. They all know that, you know. They've all gotten that thing. Or it was the other way around. [laughter] And when I wrote this book, I can remember she was already in her later teens by then, she got after me in great agitation, saying, did I mention her in the book, see. And I said I had and I told her in what connection. She didn't care about that at all. "Did you mention any of the boyfriends I had?" she said. "I don't want Gordon to know about my boyfriends [laughter] when I was in Chicago." Oh yes, she's just the same now. She's a sweet girl. I have a lot of fun with her, but she's completely unpolitical.

AMSDEN

What year did your wife die?

DE CAUX

Nineteen fifty-nine.

AMSDEN

And did you get a regular job after these original blacklistings and live together as a family?

DE CAUX

Yes, the first job I got was with Stewart and Friar, a print shop in Chicago, a job that was easy for me, proofreading job. But they published a lot of publications, so that my work was very much like the work I had done for CIa when we got out various labor publications, you know. But it was non-union and my chief care was then not to let it be known that I was a union man. There was some-Chicago was pretty well organized, so I used to go around to the ITU [International Typographical Union]. Boy, talk about underground work. [laughter] The, what do they call them? Not the business agent, it's like the business agent there--He had me come up and pull all the blinds around when I'd be in there, and he said I mustn't lose that job under any circumstances. He said, "If necessary, tell them that you are against the union." That was one of the few remaining non-union [shops] that they wanted to organize. So, that was fine. But then when I was hauled before the Un-American Committee in Washington, I not only stood to lose my job, but I stood to lose all the usefulness was to anyone in that particular period.

AMSDEN

What year was that?

DE CAUX

That was 1953 or '4, I don't know the date exactly. Somewhere in the early fifties, while the HUAC was still going strong.

AMSDEN

Did that sort of event have anything to do with your ultimate decision to come to California?

DE CAUX

No, when I was fired, you know, I wanted to lead the good life as far as I could. I could live on my unemployment compensation and severance pay for a while, so I wanted to go where it was nice, the climate was nice. I'd always wanted to go to Southern California and see where I could swim even in the winter and devote myself to writing. I thought, "What a soft life these writers

have", you know, "they can live anywhere they like, they keep any hours, they don't have to punch a clock, they don't have to be involved in politics or anything very much, they can just take it easy and write whatever comes into their heads." Well, I kidded myself, of course. I couldn't write, I couldn't. I was thoroughly demoralized in that period.

AMSDEN

What pulled you out of it, your being demoralized?

DE CAUX

Oh, physically, I was pulled away from Southern California by Johnny Steuben, who wanted me to come and edit the March of Labor. Which I didn't have great expectations for, because the purpose of that magazine was to hold together on the left the remaining unions that had not been purged and the remaining people that had not been purged. So, we got support from the longshoremen, from the UE, and from the remaining unions. But everything was going down. I never kidded myself about the trends, "The way things are going" as Jimmy Carey used to say. So I did my best on that, and, of course, that went kerflooey too, eventually. I wasn't really pulled out, however. I was kept in more or less extroverted activities in that period. I suppose, gradually, I just overcame it. Oh, and then I, of course, eventually I got an honest job. [laughter] Which I tried to get, I did try to get at first, but not in the writing field. I could never do that. I'd learned the printing trade and then, I suppose, that's really what pulled me out. Because having gone to school, having worked in these print shops and then going to school, I learned Linotype and then also floor work, and so forth. I still had to have a lot of experience before I could really hold down a job, so I did what printers have done for a long time. That's one of the origins of the expression "boomer printers." I barnstormed around the country in the small towns, and they have publications always looking for guys. They're all non-union, you know, in those various, all around, in Michigan, the Middle West, and one thing or another. And, oh yes, I was pulled out in the sense that I had to earn a living and, what the hell, you can't become too morbid when you get damn busy.

AMSDEN

Did you take your family with you?

DE CAUX

No, they stayed first in New York, and then, forget where they were in, I've forgotten. Now, we were divided many times in my life, in residence, which never meant anything much to my wife, because she was a very independent person too. We led independent lives. Then the job was to get into the union. And you can't get into the union if you're not a member. [laughter] unless you have a union job, and you can't get a union job unless you're a member. So, it's a bind and I really had to work at that. Got turned down the first time when I applied in Bay City, Michigan. Not for any particular reason, but that the guys--They'd say it's very democratic in that union, that they could vote on who shall be given a membership in the union. So, how does it work out, this democratic business? It works out that the guys, if they have a long list of people waiting to get jobs in their particular shop--they had a union daily press there--then they're not inclined to vote because they don't want too many people. Take a guy up to the union and give him the right to be, I'd say extra board, but they don't say that in printing. So that's the only reason I was turned down, by vote of, I think, some small percentage of something. They voted right down to one and, oh, five-eighths of a vote or something like that. Then I had to go on the bum again. I came out to California then again that time and worked in union towns there and again worked in the non-union places and worked with the union to try and get them organized, did that in Oakland. Oakland, San Francisco were almost a hundred percent union.

AMSDEN

You worked in an organizing drive in Oakland?

DE CAUX

Not a drive, no. What I did was just as I had done in Chicago, namely I'd go to the union there and they'd want to know if I was a member and why I'd been turned down and so forth. And I had to wait six months after that before you can apply again. Then I'd say, "Now, which plants are you trying to organize?" In Oakland there were just two. I worked in both of them and then would report back to the union on it. And then they finally got one of them, one of them right near the University of California there, Berkeley. [laughter] Then I did the same thing in Los Angeles, came down here eventually and worked around all sorts of little, non union places. Of course, here there are plenty of

non union jobs. It never was a union town in the printing trades. Then eventually, through some of my friends, got in onto a union shop and eventually got a really full-time job that I held for ten to twelve years, with financial printing. I became a regular union member, and I was all set after that, you know. They can't blacklist you there when you have a union.

AMSDEN

Well, looks like you got your wish. You started out wanting to come to America to join the working class.

DE CAUX

Right. [laughter]

AMSDEN

Did you get retirement benefits and so on by the time you finally retired, social security and all that stuff?

DE CAUX

Social security I have, of course. I'm afraid I don't want to put the ITU down, but I have a pension from the ITU of $15.67 a month. By the time I'd be eighty, as I would be now, I'd have had enough time in membership to rate a union pension, which was a hundred or so. So, what did they do before I get there? They turned down all their pensions, all their own-financed pensions, just have the pensions they have organized, that the employers have granted through negotiations, which I came in just before they had started that. Everything used to be what they call the fraternal pension.

AMSDEN

Well, do you get a pension from the employer now?

DE CAUX

No. Just that $15.67, that's all.

AMSDEN

So that most of your funds are from social security.

DE CAUX

Social security and then I had savings by that time. As I say, I had sold my house in Pacific Palisades, which I largely built, and got pretty good rates. You'd laugh if you think of the price there. And Caroline and did a lot of the work in building it. When she died, I sold it, and the proceeds I put into those apartments there. And after that I was a rentier so far as owning property is concerned. And every time I'd buy a house I'd always sell it for more than I bought. I've done that ever since I was in Washington, as a matter of fact. So I had some savings. And now I have sold this property and [am] living on that for the rest of my life. The social security is too little for me to live on. I still have a, you know, fairly good standard of living.

AMSDEN

I have one more question which is sort of an odd one. Supposing you met a young English person who'd come to the united States to devote himself to the working-class movement-

DE CAUX

Yes.

AMSDEN

--today. What would you tell him to do, given the air of someone who'd done a rather similar sort of thing? What would you tell him to do?

DE CAUX

I'd give him no advice whatever. I've been asked that question. I must have spoken since my book came out at 200 colleges and I got a good reception in the colleges. This was the tag end of the sixties, you know, and there was still plenty of the youth generation and whatever you like to call it, who had been radical, the anti-Vietnam crowd. The thing had, obviously, by 1970, gone down a lot, but there was still quite a repercussion. And I'd get that question in every damned place. At Cornell I can remember a guy asked me after I'd been talking, "What would you do if you were twenty-four now?" So I thought and I said, "Oh boy, what wouldn't I do!" [laughter] But I just kidded it off. That's about all I can do with you, because it depends on the individual. Many used to ask me whether they should go to work in the factories and that sort of thing. Young lawyers, for instance. Well, I thought, personally I would think

that a young lawyer would be more useful at a lawyer's trade. Enough people need help from that. But as to his personal characteristics, why he might want to do one thing or another, I wouldn't know, I'm not a shrink. [laughter] No, I couldn't give any advice on that. It would depend on the person's individual choice and preference. Many tried going to work, you know, with a sort of middleclass background and [laughter] found it pretty deplorable, got out as soon as they could. [laughter] Well, you know, you can generalize on that. To me it doesn't make too much sense. I didn't have anything to offer when I came over.

AMSDEN

Well, what did you think of the New Left of the late sixties and the early seventies?

DE CAUX

I thought it was terrific. It was just terrific. It confirmed my feeling that nothing is ever settled or ended until it's settled right, that here you had a reincarnation of my generation after the First World War. You had young people there who were rebelling against everything they'd been taught to believe, who had--We had been shocked to our senses by the First World War. They had been shocked to their senses by the Vietnam War. So, that was where I came in, this is my last chapter and that's the way I felt with them, right along, this is where I came in. Now, come to analyzing their stands politically, I thought they were crazy in lots of respects, just a bunch of goof-offs. My own kid, you know, the one I brought from Fiji, he was going to college at that time and because of me--of course he was also watching his visa, he didn't want to get too involved, very cautious--he said he went to these--what was it, [Tom] Hayden's outfit--meetings. Social-

AMSDEN

CEO [Campaign for Economic Democracy].

DE CAUX

CED, or whatever the hell it was. The first thing that sort of started as a organized movement to express that the-

AMSDEN

Oh, the SDS, Students for a Democratic Society.

DE CAUX

SDS. He went to their meetings. And then they had all their breakoffs, and he says he couldn't take it. He says they were just quarreling with themselves all the time, fighting over this thing and the other, and he wasn't interested. I mean, however, when the--I think it was the invasion of Cambodia took place--when the whole antiwar movement reached its peak so far as the colleges were concerned, he was along with all the rest. He was lying down on the freeways there to block the traffic, and he was being--took. over the cafeteria or whatever else they took. He was going to Cal State at that time. But, by and large, the kids were crazy in so many ways, but their spirit was terrific. It was just like the spirit of the Wobblies, it was just like the spirit of the communists. And I resented the way they tried to piss-off the communist movement. I took the same attitude, I think, [as] the historian [David] Montgomery. There, a very fine guy who used to be with the UE and so forth. He's now one of the outstanding labor historians of this country, and wrote many books. But he said they're taking their--I forget now, I can't remember the nice words, the right word, it spoils it a little--but taking their line essentially from the McCarthy period in which they've been brought up that the communists were something rotten and [there was] something rotten about Soviet Union, something about the communist movement. So this attitude you reached of their disowning all their antecedents as they were doing. What the hell were they? They were the next generation to the communists who played the role that they were trying to play in this country. All in--not in England, after I'd come to America--in the CIa, the depression, the CIa period. It was the young communists who were the same crowd as they. They were their fathers, and so on. So, what'd they do? They'd piss them off, they were all sorts of McCarthyite anti-communist. "They don't count. They're irrelevant" and so on and so forth. "We're something new and something different." Hell! And we thought we were new and different [laughter] in my generation. But to me it was a continuation of the same movement, a revival of a similar movement. And it comes down in different guises from generation to generation in different issues which it grows up around. No, I really liked their attitude. Of course, when it came to all of their alleged libertarianism in regard to pot, and so on and so forth, I simply wasn’t interested. I was only interested in the

political. Of course they that way, too. Some of them were not political at all, see. Some of them just believed in--I don't know, not free love anymore, because that's been free for a long time--but in all the drugs and all the hippies and all that kind of stuff. Well, you know, it's interesting. We used to get all the hippie things down here in Los Angeles. But the real thing to me is the political.

AMSDEN

Do you think there'll be the rise of a disciplined political party again, or have you thought about it? Have you thought about the possibility of a disciplined political party arising again? Do you think that the experience that you went through can ever be relived?

DE CAUX

No, not in the same form. You know history repeats itself, but on a different level. But in some of its essentials, I think it will be repeated. When you say disciplined party, I don't anticipate, except in a country--what shall we say?--under fascist regime, that's got to have a fighting revolution, then I think the communist movement, as it came up in the Russian Revolution, makes sense. You've got to have a tightly disciplined movement in order to achieve military objectives and revolutionary objectives in that sense. When it comes to a situation like exists at the present time in most of the so-called Western countries, the capitalist countries, the countries that are different from the ones where the communist movement has succeeded so far, that's another matter. And I think the communists have seen that. That's why I think they've learned their lessons in many respects, so that the very things for which they used to be taunted by a lot of these New Left guys, for the popular front [which] was supposed to be a terrible thing. To me that made every bit of sense, and the fact that they would vary their tactics from time to time, according to the situation, also makes sense to me. So just what the situation will be if we ever get a mass progressive political party in this country, I don't know. But I do think that there are plenty of people now who've learned from the past and who will adjust their tactics to what is necessary at that particular time.

Date: