

Edna Ryan interviewed by Lucy Taksa in the NSW Bicentennial oral history collection [sound recording].

Date Issued: 19 October 1987

Abstract: Born in Pyrmont, Sydney, Ryan speaks of her early life; going to school; clerical employment; studying at business college; different homes in Sydney; strikes; family life; memories of and attitudes during WWI; memories of the 1917 general strike; the working classes; International Workers of the World (IWW); politics of 1910-1930; her political interests; street corner meetings; family reading material; memories of the Domain; life as a Socialist, meeting places and haunts; favourite speakers; socialists being framed for crimes; socialist/working class communication; social conditions, her own research of the period; the War Precautions Act; socialism and the Labor Party; her interest in, and reading of Lenin and Russia; Justice Beeby and working class leaders.

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Location: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-216317169>

The full transcript is not available.

Session 1

At time 00:00:00

Summary: Edna Ryan interviewed by Lucy Taksa. Tape One.

Keywords: New South Wales (NSW) Bicentennial Oral History Project, National Library of Australia (NLA), Edna Ryan, Lucy Taksa

At time 00:00:01

Summary: Mrs Ryan was born December 15, 1904 in Pyrmont.

Keywords: Pyrmont, NSW, St Peters, Tempe Public School, Fort Street Girls' High School (Fort St GHS), Newtown Public School, bursary, Leaving Certificate (LC), Intermediate Certificate (IM)

At time 00:02:02

Summary: She had to leave school in fourth year.

Keywords: World War One (WWI), work, Kent Street (St), canvas factory, office work, school pass, ticket, train, Hurstville, fare

At time 00:04:44

Summary: She changed jobs every couple of years.

Keywords: White collar, clerical, typing, night school, Miss Hale's Business College, typewriter, Remington, shorthand

At time 00:05:48

Summary: She married when she was 24 years old.

Keywords: Marriage, Woolloomooloo, Sydney City Council, City of Sydney, suburbs

At time 00:08:05

Summary: Her parents were in the Australian Socialist League.

Keywords: NSW General Strike, General Strike of 1917, Australian Labor Party (ALP), Australian Socialist League, Balmain, William Morris Hughes, William Arthur Holman, newspaper, 'The Sydney Morning Herald'

At time 00:09:42

Summary: There was a very anti-British feeling during WWI.

Keywords: Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), frame-up, court case, Royal Commission, jail, The Domain, anti-conscription campaign, working class movement, trade union movement, anti-British, England, United Kingdom (UK), Australian troops, soldiers, Australian Imperial Force (AIF), comradeship

At time 00:11:46

Summary: The IWW was active in 1910 in Sydney.

Keywords: Russian Revolution, class consciousness, socialism, rhetoric, class struggle, arrest, literature, railway strike, Premier Holman, tailor, Irish, Ireland

At time 00:15:28

Summary: Her sister's husband influenced her views on the world.

Keywords: Queensland (Qld), United States of America (USA, US, America), tuberculosis (TB), men, women, meals, sewing machine, tunic, craftsman, tradesman, skill, high-class, worker, boss

At time 00:18:16

Summary: They went to The Domain on a Sunday.

Keywords: Communist Party of Australia (CPA), Australian Socialist Party (ASP), Socialist Labor Party, Percival Stanley (Percy, Jack) Brookfield, NSW Legislative Assembly, Industrial Socialist Labor Party, Turkish, assassination, rampage, Hoddle St massacre, Koorman Tomayoff, Cathedral St, Dowling St

At time 00:20:50

Summary: Street corner meetings were a normal part of life.

Keywords: Radio, Kathleen Kylie Tennant, slums, Neighbourhood Watch

At time 00:22:00

Summary: Her father's socialist newspapers came from America.

Keywords: Norway, Norwegian, Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Eugene Victor (Gene) Debs, August Bebel, 'Woman and Socialism', books, 'Chatterbox', bookcase, sideboard, cedar, grandmother, Charles John Huffam Dickens, Ellen Wood, (Mrs Henry Wood), Bushells Tea

At time 00:24:52

Summary: She didn't have much to do with her older siblings.

Keywords: Sydney Free Public Library, City of Sydney Library, football, cricket, hoops, bowling

At time 00:26:27

Summary: She remembers different socialist newspapers.

Keywords: 'The Truth', John Norton, divorce, 'Beckett's Budget', World War Two (WWII), 'Sunday Times', 'Labor Daily', composition, essay, Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky

At time 00:29:14

Summary: There were pamphlets and books for sale in The Domain.

Keywords: Pamphlets, bookseller, Henry George Foundation, Association for Good Government, 'Land & Liberty', borrow, spend, tax, lend, Castlereagh St

At time 00:31:15

Summary: They all used to go to Café Mockbell.

Keywords: Education, McNamara's bookshop, Café Mockbell, coffee shop, wharf, seamen

At time 00:34:33

Summary: They had meetings in the Protestant Hall.

Keywords: Accountant, economics, fiscal, local government, Protestant Hall, Castlereagh St, orator, poverty, margarine, butter, dripping, jam, treacle

At time 00:36:55

Summary: The IWW were blamed for buildings being burned.

Keywords: Donald McLennan Grant, arrest, Charles Reeve, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, Soviet Union), tourism, coat rack, hat rack, school hall, overcoat, police, cotton, kerosene

At time 00:39:02

Summary: People and information were transported by sea.

Keywords: Conspiracy, armchair philosophy, strike, information, communication, waterfront, stowaway, wharf, derelict, black people, foreign literature, Waterside Workers Federation of Australia, San Francisco, New Zealand (NZ)

At time 00:41:46

Summary: Her research after 1910 is patchy.

Keywords: Rag trade, textile industry, conditions, arbitration

At time 00:44:25

Summary: Some of the speakers wanted to go to jail.

Keywords: War Precautions Act 1914, Park St, Hyde Park, Scotty*, Scottie*, butter box, soap box, prison, meal, jobless, broke, hunger, Melbourne, Brisbane

At time 00:46:40

Summary: Her heroes were Lenin and Trotsky.

Keywords: Socialisation objective, left-wing, right-wing, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, (Lenin), Leon Trotsky, Sydney Trades Hall Association, bureaucrat, Member of Parliament (MP)

At time 00:48:50

Summary: She thought the one big union would happen.

Keywords: Fraud, Moscow, Leninist, Australian Workers Union (AWU), revolutionary, Roman Catholic Church, Daniel Mannix, Archbishop

At time 00:51:50

Summary: The Taylor System was the trigger for the 1917 Strike.

Keywords: NSW Railways and Tramway Department, strike, tram, George St, Essex St, Taylor System, Frederick Taylor, timing, efficiency, American ruling class, milkman, Eddy Avenue (Ave)

At time 00:54:38

Summary: They all shouted 'win the war' as they marched.

Keywords: Elizabeth St, Wentworth Ave, College St, bowling club, bowls club, 'win the war', patriotism, enlist, propaganda, Australian flag

At time 00:58:35

Summary: The IWW had song books.

Keywords: Songs, procession, IWW 'Little Red Songbook' 'Tramp', 'Hallelujah I'm a Bum', 'Mr Block', 'Casey Jones-The Union Scab', 'Solidarity Forever', parliamentarians, 'The Red Flag', 'The Internationale'

At time 01:00:32

Summary: Most of the Sydney Twelve were in jail.

Keywords: Sydney Twelve, activists, Benjamin King, Treason Felony Act, Royal Commission of Inquiry 1922, trial, bootmaker, Bexley, The Depression, photograph, scabs

At time 01:02:02

Summary: End of session

Session 2

At time 00:00:00

Summary: Edna Ryan Interviewed by Lucy Taksa. Tape Two.

Keywords: New South Wales (NSW) Bicentennial Oral History Project, National Library of Australia (NLA), Lucy Taksa, Edna Ryan

At time 00:00:01

Summary: Lucy and Edna discuss photographs.

Keywords: Photograph, Eddy Avenue (Ave), Elizabeth Street (St), aeroplane, strikers, procession, newspapers, hostility, formation

At time 00:01:30

Summary: Timing workers will always be abhorrent to her.

Keywords: 1917 General Strike, Australian General Strike of 1917, NSW Railway strike, Taylor System, stopwatch, swimming race, timing, wrist watch, soldiers, clock, World War One (WWI), pendulum, mantelpiece, Grandfather Clock

At time 00:04:11

Summary: She eventually lost touch with the IWW.

Keywords: Gold watch, NSW Railways, waistcoat, pocket, men's suit, chain, Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), The Domain, Goulburn St, George St, Communist Party of Australia (CPA), Police Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC) NSW, Sussex St

At time 00:06:36

Summary: She read 'The State and Revolution'.

Keywords: Revolutionary literature, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, (Lenin), Leon Trotsky, 'The State and Revolution', George Brodski*, George Brodsky*, Australian Socialist League, Australian Socialist Party (ASP), Moscow, Third International, Communist International, (Comintern), John Smith (Jock) Garden

At time 00:08:12

Summary: Judge Beeby was the enemy.

Keywords: William Pinkerton, Sir George Stephenson Beeby, Judge Beeby, arbitration system, Industrial Court of Arbitration, Scandinavia, trade union movement, United States of America (USA, America, US)

At time 00:10:17

Summary: Hughes and Holman were brilliant working class leaders.

Keywords: William Arthur Holman, Australian Labor Party (ALP), Newtown, William Morris (Billy) Hughes, working class, disillusionment, strikes, land rights, land reform, white landowners, conservatives, Country Party of Australia, National Party of Australia

At time 00:12:57

Summary: The arbitration judges were all viewed with hostility.

Keywords: 40 hour week, Justice Foster, Doris Isabel Beeby, daughter, Clarice Irwin*, Clariss Erwin*, Irene Beeby*, Dora Birtles, John Thomas (JT, Jack) Lang

At time 00:15:52

Summary: End of session

End of transcript