PARENTS OF THE FIELD.

Interviewee: Dr John W.Burton.

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Interviewers; Dr Richard Rubenstein & Dr. Chris Mitchell.

Richard Rubenstein: I'm Richard Rubenstein. My colleague, Christopher Mitchell, and I have come from the United States to interview John Burton, here in Canberra. We work at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, which is a place that John Burton had a great deal to do with. He was one of the founders and a guiding spirit of our Institute, and he has functioned, to both of us, as a teacher, a mentor, role model, and friend. And so we're very happy to be here, interviewing John.

John Burton was a student at the University of Sydney and at Melbourne and then at London. He became involved with the Australian government as Secretary to the Department of External Affairs and a delegate to the U.N. Charter conference in 1945. In 1947, John became permanent head of the Australian foreign office, the youngest person ever to hold that job. And in 1951, he became High Commissioner to Ceylon.

Beginning in the early '50s, John went into academic life: first, as a teacher at Australia National University, a Rockefeller Grantee. And then, in the early '60s at University College London, where he founded the Center for the Analysis of Conflict in 1963. John was at the University of Kent from 1979 on, as a director of the Center for the Analysis of Conflict, there. And in the early '80s, we were lucky enough to get him in the United States, where he came, first, to the University of Maryland to run the Center for Development and Conflict Resolution, and then, in the mid 1980s, to George Mason University, where he became associated with the Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, which is currently the Institute.

Beginning at an early period in his academic career, John began to write a number of books, some of which have become classics in the fields of peace studies and conflict resolution. I won't name all of them, but some of them are *Peace Theory, International*

Relations: A General Theory, Systems, States, Diplomacy and Rules. *Conflict and Communications* is one of the first and most important conflict resolution books.

World Society established a new model of international relations, based on the so-called cobweb model, instead of the nation state model. A book called *Deviance, Terrorism, and War* – not John's title, publisher's title – introduced the theory of basic human needs to our field, and then, followed G*lobal Conflict,* a series of four volumes in the conflict series, published by Macmillan/St. Martins Press in New York in 1990, *Resolving Deep-rooted Conflict: A handbook*, and in 1997, V*iolence Explained*.

These books, in many respects, are the basic books in the field of conflict analysis and resolution. And so, it's a great pleasure and honor for us to be in Canberra today to be able to interview John Burton. At this point, I'm going to turn the interview over to Chris Mitchell, who's going to began the questioning of John, and the conversation with him.

Chris Mitchell: Okay. John, I think there are many people in Australia who remember you as a diplomat and as a political figure, but I think there are probably fewer who know that you had a distinguished career as a scholar, over in Britain, and later, in the United States. So most of the interview is going to concentrate on your career as an academic.

But just to go back a little bit to your first career, I've often wondered whether there was, in that time when you were a diplomat - though I think, possibly, an unusual diplomat - was there anything that happened, or there was any particular point in time, perhaps at the San Francisco conference or thereafter, when you became dissatisfied with the thinking that was being [used then] – with underpinning, the way in which conflicts were dealt with?

John Burton: … I finally resigned. I don't think it was because I was dissatisfied with the way in which things were being dealt with. And in this office during the [Second World] war, over ten years, working virtually day and night… I needed the break. I stayed here while the government changed, and it was a year or so before I resigned. And I felt I needed a break from that career.

Chris Mitchell: And then, when you entered the academic world - which I did at the same time, except that you were a professor and I was an undergraduate - it was the beginning of what I suppose you could

call the field of conflict analysis - or conflict resolution, although we tended to call it "conflict research" around about that time. Who were some of the other major figures that you were working with in England, in that period, and who, if anybody, influenced your thinking at that time?

John Burton: Well, I'll have to go back a few years earlier than that.

Chris Mitchell: Okay.

John Burton: I attended some Pugwash Conferences. These Pugwash Conferences, started by Canadians, were conferences of those who had been involved in creating the atomic bomb – nuclear physicists. They were meeting together, at the **[inaudible]** complex, I think, trying to agree – Russians and Americans and British, in particular – trying to agree on ways in which they could get rid of atomic weapons.

So Marcus Oliphant, from Australia, was amongst this group because he had been involved, and he invited me to join one of these conferences because they were realizing, by then, that they couldn't, as physicists, accomplish a conclusion on these matters.

So I went to one of these, and I was not surprised, I suppose, but a bit concerned that the whole framework – it was the old, traditional framework of power politics. They wanted to get rid of this type of weapon, but there's no suggestion of getting rid of any other weapons. And the idea of balances of power keeping the peace, or of a superpower keeping the peace, prevailed.

I came back, somewhat disgusted, and wrote *Peace Theory*, with the subtitle *Preconditions of disarmament*. I went back to another Pugwash conference. This time, it was at Oxford. I tried to put some views forward, and it was like talking to a deaf audience. They couldn't understand what I was talking about because in those days, power politics absolutely dominated the field. John Burton: It was after one of these conferences that I met some of the Quakers] and was very active. And they introduced me to the Professor of International Law at the University College, London, Georg Schwarzenberger - and he asked me if I'd start teaching in a course in international relations, within his section of the Department of Law. And it was quite clear - he had just written a book on power politics - it was quite clear he wanted me to use that as a text. I didn't hesitate about it because I thought, "Well, this is the conventional wisdom. I have to start here, at any rate, and move, step by step, in our direction

of, if this is possible." And I haven't thought enough about it to be clear in my own mind.

I've been brought up around power politics. [The UN Conference at] San Francisco was power politics. Security Council will veto, the "Great Powers" will decide -and so on. So I started teaching. And little by little, moved from one position to another.

Chris Mitchell: Well, you started teaching in '63, but your time in London – it wasn't just teaching because I remember you were also very instrumental in starting, among other things, the Conflict Research Society and the International Peace Research Association. You were associated with that, you and the Bouldings…

John Burton: That's right. Yes. I was active in [peace] study associations, and I got involved, too, with industrial relations. I was a consultant, to a firm of consultants, on industrial relations. I gradually moved out of the narrow definition of international relations, but I ran into… trouble in 1971, when I wrote the book, which I called *Solving Unsolved Problems* – the publishers called *Deviance, Terrorism, and War*. In it, I suggested that deterrence does not deter – that there are more basic needs to be deterred. And therefore, you couldn't get rid of wars, unless – and wars, which would be – could be won by the more powerful, followed by a peace, which would be won by those who had been defeated – who still had their needs to be satisfied.

(Then, of course, we have the example of Korea and Vietnam, and even [the Second World War when]… Japan joined Hitler after 18 months because of British colonialism. Britain lost its colonies and Japan became a fairly significant economic power.) That caused a furor in London – in England. There were meetings of all teachers of international relations, throughout England, condemning this attack on power politics – heyt all had to change their lecture notes, if they had adopted this. So I was challenged to take a conflict situation and demonstrate that there were alternatives to power politics, which led to my first [problem solving] involvement.

Chris Mitchell: I wasn't part of that, but I do remember that you seemed to draw very heavily on some of your colleagues at the Tavistock Institute. You remember Eric Trist and Fred Emery, I think, were part of that whole pre planning for your first effort, weren't they?

John Burton: Well, it was hardly an institute. It wasn't a bit our style. Because the ["Establishment"] - and all their procedures, all their basic assumptions, and they were threatening the whole process of negotiation, bargaining…. So there was a lot of opposition at that time. I was quite clear that we had to be able to demonstrate there was an option. And fortunately, I was able to get a hold of the situation, which had been in the public eye, more or less, and apply our processes.

Chris Mitchell: Tell us a little bit about the thinking behind the development of the process… eventually, as I think you called it, "controlled communication". But, at that stage, it was very much an experimental process, wasn't it?

John Burton: Well, I had never been involved in this challenge. I suppose it was very helpful because it forced me to get involved, get the process operating. Harold Wilson had tried to intervene in a conflict in Southeast Asia, and invited the three leaders concerned, to meet with him in London, and they all refused, because for a leader to be talking to the opposition was a sign of weakness.

After this had failed, I wrote to him and asked him if he would have any objections if we called these parties together. In a letter, obviously dictated by him, he said, "Be my guest. Go ahead." And he appointed a back bench member [of Parliament] to keep in touch with me and him. And so he – [using] the ordinary processes of communication asked the three leaders concerned each to nominate three people.

Chris Mitchell: Did you know these [people]… before - the three leaders?

John Burton: No.

Chris Mitchell: Did they know you?

John Burton: I suppose that they knew of me because I've been in touch with these countries, from my position in [the Australian Department of] Foreign Affairs…. Within ten days, all three sent representatives, and we met for the best part of two weeks.

Chris Mitchell: This is in London?

John Burton: It was in London.

Chris Mitchell: Okay. And… the three were Indonesia… ?

John Burton: Well, I hadn't mention the names, but if [we need to] - Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Chris Mitchell: … I think you've written about this, so I don't think there's any need to be secret.

John Burton: And it was an emotional experience for me. I constantly recall it because it was so new, [so] out of this world. Here, these three came together. They wouldn't look at each other. They turned their chairs to face a panel of four or five that I gathered together as a "third party". And we asked and invited each one of them, one by one, to state their position. And they were as aggressive as could be. And then, we asked – after each one had stated their position, we invited the others to ask questions of them. But the questions must not be to provoke. They must be genuine questions.

And this went on, of course, and took some considerable time. And then, we started asking questions – asking the parties to explain this, explain that. Exactly what do they mean when they say this, and so on, and so on. And little by little (it took days), they started shifting their chairs around and looking at each other, facing each other.

By the end of the week, they're just about ignoring the third party. They are communicating directly, and totally changed their attitude. They recognize others as being human, too, with the same kinds of concerns, same kinds of security worries. They'd been fighting over boundaries and territory. In due course, I realized it had nothing to do with boundaries and territory. They all had a common concern. They were mainly worried about foreign interventions, particularly the activities of Chinese businessmen, who were in all those area and really running the countries' economies.

But little by little by little, they were able to define exactly what the problems were, and in due course, they felt that there was nothing more to say, so they went home.

After about 10 days, I hadn't heard from them, so I sent messages saying, "Is there anything else we can do?" And I got the replies back in identical terms, which was to indicate [improved] relations. No announcements of any agreement were made. The whole thing was in confidence. They were asked not to make any public statements, and the leaders should not make any public statements… But… within a few days fighting stopped, and there seemed to be no problems after then. That achieved my

purpose with colleagues. I was tolerated for a while after that and we were able to pursue other situations, and we went from one to another after that.

Chris Mitchell: So you are telling how you met the challenge – answered it, and therefore, your ideas are better tolerated in the UK - or was there still the same hostility?

John Burton: They still required enunciation which is why, I suppose, I wrote so much. The concepts have to be spelled out. Power politics made certain assumptions, and I have to – the book to which I referred, S*olving Unsolved Problems*, referred to human needs. Now, these weren't needs of territory or clothing or food or something. These were needs of the [entire] society – the individual needs of the society, or the national needs of the world society – national role -. basic needs of this order. This all had to be spelled out and explained before I could have larger communication with my colleagues.

And I must say, as you were one of those students, the students played a very active part in this. I moved from *Power Politics* to using books that I had written. And at the end of the year, I would give a series of lectures. And the end of the year, I had to change all these, in view of the comments made from the classes.

And the next year, I was teaching from the same notes, but with a quite different orientation. And by the end of the second year, I was ready to publish what I had written, and move to the next step. And I couldn't repeat to the student what had been written already. So I was moving, little by little, from one thesis to more this statement in another book. I think it explains why I'm wrote about fourteen books about this time !

Chris Mitchell: Rich referred to some of them. I can assure you, as one of your students at that time, it was very confusing for us. You were starting, when I began, your critique of "power politics", and, of course, none of us - when we first came in - knew what the hell power politics was. So we didn't quite know what you were critiquing !

Let me go down the road a bit… because the first exercise that you did, which was a pioneering effort, was the one over "Confrontation". Then, we did one on Cyprus. And then, you got involved in something much nearer at home in Northern Ireland, and I know that you did a lot of work in Northern Ireland in the early '70s. Were you beginning to develop your theories of human needs and applying them to that particular dispute? I know you

and Joe Camplisson did a lot of work behind the scenes, in that particular province. But was it all within the framework of human needs?

John Burton: You're asking me all these questions about situations I have… refrained from writing about. However, the answer to your question is, "Yes." I was able to bring parties together that had never been in the same room before – never in the same town together before. And I did a lot of silly things. I walked from a Protestant area to a Catholic area to interview the leader of a particular party, and I was warned that this was dangerous thing to do. I had searchlights on me from the army.

They couldn't quite understand what I was on about, but I used to go and talk to them fairly regularly. One of the staff of the commander was a former student of mine, which helped a bit. But I realize, in retrospect, I should never have done this. Well, I did go to see this man… There were at least five or six people standing around him with guns. However, we got into a very useful conversation. I was able to continue relationships with both sides. And then, set about trying to get them in direct dialogue.

Chris Mitchell: But this is also the time when you were beginning to think in systems terms, and also, developing ideas about human needs. Did the Northern Ireland situation strike you as being an example of the existence of a unfulfilled needs, or how did that all come together in your mind?

John Burton: Well, I guess I was assuming that there were some needs there that have to be revealed. They weren't revealed until the parties got together. But obviously, the Catholics felt they'd been treated as second-class citizens. Very resentful. The standards of living there [in Catholic areas] weren't as high as elsewhere.

The man that you mentioned, [Joe] Camplinson, missed out on an education… He had to spend time going from family to family and trying to find kids, who had been separated in all this conflict. Get families joined together again. A lot of that kind of work went along. There was a center in Northern Ireland, created by the government - by Westminster - to try to deal with these issues.

I spent a lot of time there. By accident, we used to have meetings between Protestants and Catholics. We'd have a Protestant there, and by accident, a Catholic would happen to come in, and these are very productive results. But the [Rev Ian] Paisley group [the DUP] resented this, and the center was finally folded up.

Chris Mitchell: As Richard's pointed out, during all of this time, you were writing. And as you said, you wrote – I don't know whether it was 14, but it was somewhere near that number of books. Intellectually, though you were always somewhat outside the mainstream of British International Relations and conflict thinking, but was there anybody whose work you found the useful at this time, or who sparks ideas off in your mind? And I remember very vividly that one of the books that you made us read was called *Nerves of Government*… which we could never see - at the time - what that had to do with conflict. Subsequently, I realized what you were getting at, but only subsequently.

John Burton: Yes, Deutsch's book was very influential to me. But at that stage, there wasn't much at all. It was only later – particularly when I was in the States – that I discovered all kinds of sources, which were stimulating. And I was glad when… I produced the four volumes, and I spent a year at the U.S. Institute of Peace, to be able to include a volume – well, articles – by various people, with whom I had worked and who had been very important in my own thinking, both initially and later on.

Chris Mitchell: I remember one of the first public lectures I ever heard you give at University College. I think you entitled it *The Resolution of Conflict by Casework*. I think you'd been reading a lot of casework studies at that time. Did that [approach]… make an impression on you at all?

John Burton: Casework was widespread. It's a term, which was understood. It was bringing, mainly, individuals together, or perhaps unions and workers or something, and employers. I suppose I used the term because it was familiar with people…. Instead of having [to undertake tough] negotiation, there can be an analysis, and both parties brought together.

Chris Mitchell: Well, I was… moving on to your time in the United States. So let me hand over to my colleague here, who got to know you, I guess, slightly later than your first trip to the United States, but Rich, do you want to take over ?

Rich Rubenstein: Yes. I wanted to go back, in fact, before the United States even, John. I wanted to ask you about – especially for people who aren't as familiar with your work as we are – when you talk about repudiating power politics – the public power politics approach –

even today, at our Institute, when we talk in these same terms, the students and other teachers on campus, when they get a chance to hear us, say, "What on earth are they talking about? What do they mean, repudiating? Isn't power politics reality?" People who adhere to that view call themselves realists, and I know that some – from time to time - some have called you a utopian. Are you a utopian?

John Burton: I understand what they're saying, and power politics does still dominate. Britain lost its role as the leading power, as a result of World War II. And now, [the] United States is exercising its role as the most powerful country, and intervening all over the place – in my view, doing more harm than good, in the sense that a tendency is to try to impose a, kind of, Westminster or similar situation on countries and on indigenous people, who have got long traditions. And so the United States has become the colonial power of the world. So power politics is still there and alive.

And in that sense, the realists are right. I just read a book produced by strategists. They would say they're right - you need the power political system. In my view… I made a comment on the book and wrote to those sponsoring it saying, "You're asking for World War Three. This is the kind of document, together with increased weaponry, which would scare China… relationships with China and other countries are going to deteriorate."

You might call the alternative approach utopian, but humanity has to make this choice. Well, it's going along this adversarial road in all its institutions and its relations. All those could become more constructive. I think it's a pretty depressing picture, really. I don't think we've achieved much in conflict resolution, except in particular cases. We haven't got a consensus change in viewpoints. In one book, I use the term "provention." We know what prevention is: More police in the streets, and more soldiers, this, that, and the other thing.

We don't have a concept of trying to get at the source of problems, and seeing that they don't emerge. We need this concept of prevention to be developed. Now, you could call it utopian, I suppose, but there's not much option, and the picture could be very depressing, and I feel, today, quite depressed – not so much emotionally, as intellectually, about what's going on, with more wars on the globe than we've ever had before - probably. But we haven't yet understood the way in which different tribes, races, religions are wanting to secure their role.

They've got a need for their individual and national and associates – to have some standing. For us to go into Fiji and elsewhere and say, "Unless you become Westminster bureaucracies, we'll impose sanctions," [This] is quite ridiculous. We ought to be studying the traditions, which have led Fijians in this way, and to their combat with Indians who were brought in by the colonists – the colonial power – to do the agriculture work on their lands. So I don't mind being called "utopian" - as long as the others will recognize that they're a total disaster.

Rich Rubenstein: John, when you talk about alternatives to power politics, those alternatives take several related forms. You often have spoken about solving problems that generate conflict, as a way of dealing with the root causes of the conflict and proventing it or resolving it. And you also have made a move away from considering international relations as an affair of states – of nation states - and towards an attempt to consider the human aspects of conflict and individuals and their needs as a basis for conflict.

One of the reasons that you've been called the utopian sometimes – and I, too, and a recent article that condemns us both – I don't know if I've shown it to you yet – as utopian, is by a conservative philosopher who says these people at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution don't understand that people are not basically good, that they are basically aggressive, and that they will seek power. It's in their nature to seek power. And if they're not stopped by superior power, they'll seek power indefinitely.

This man, who is at Boston College, goes on to say that Burton and Rubenstein and others underestimate people's capacity for evil, but also their capacity for good. They don't recognize that man can be diabolical or man can be saintly… and therefore, they question the theory of human needs.

John Burton: Well, this is a criticism of humanity – human intelligence. We're still in the days of early feudalism… All our institutions are adversarial. Party politics. You don't even have to listen to [some of] the nonsense, which goes on in your Congress to realize it's an adversarial system, where you vote. You don't discuss. Then, you move to industry, and you've got management and robots. Workers are not treated as individuals, with their own role as humans. You get into the legal system.

Lord Lloyd, who is in charge of [the Law Department at University College in the] University of London… wrote a book, in which he said, "There are those who have the right to govern, and others who have an obligation to obey." And this is still the

thinking of many people. Now, as I say, this is a criticism of humanity. Doesn't a human being have enough intelligence to know that the inevitable consequence of this is disaster?

We've had two World Wars. The next World War, with all the weapons now available to all kinds of countries, will be an absolute disaster, and that's where they're leading us. I agree that this might be unrealistic, considering the options, but at least it's an intelligent attempt to get humanity out of the evolutionary trends, which have dominated so far.

We've had the odd person who advocates some different approach, and they – the Gandhis and those kinds of people – crop up, but their influence is limited, too because they're talking within this adversarial framework. I think that the purpose of conflict resolution studies really - apart from dealing with particular situations - is to bring together different disciplines. We've got economics that couldn't care a damn about the person. If he happened to be unemployed, it might be good means of controlling inflation, but the human aspects are not taken into account. Even sociology is more concerned with the maintenance of the institutions of society than the welfare of the individual in the group, the community.

I did psychology [at university] . I learned nothing about the person. I learned about reflexes and instincts and IQs and one thing another, but very little about the person – the values the person has and the needs a person has. And you go to a psychiatrist, and they'll to try to adapt them, I guess. Psychiatrists will try to help the patient adjust to a condition. Very little, attempt to change the conditions, which have led to a problem in the first place.

I think [Johan] Galtung made an important contribution when he introduced the notion of structural violence. And the structures of society, the institutions of society - and the traditions - violate the person, and the conservative approach is to defend existing structures, not to change them. And I think that these people that you're talking about are probably conservative in the sense of "Let's keep – let's improve our weapons and our defense forces" and so on. And of course, the more any country does this, the more others fear, the more they'll do it - and so it goes on.

Rich Rubenstein: So you're saying that we need a theory of the person that makes more sense, like the theory of human needs, and also, a theory of the situation that generates the non-fulfillment of the needs. And that's produced two lines of questioning and some criticism of these theories, and lots of questions. One line has to do with the

human needs, themselves. Some people have asked, "If there are a limited number of basic human needs that require to be satisfied, if violence is to be avoided, why is it so difficult to identify what those needs are?" There's some disagreement among human needs theorists about what the needs are. And what do you think the basic needs are, and how can we arrive at agreement on this?

John Burton: It's something that hasn't really been thought about much, and I have had difficulty trying to define, precisely, human needs. Identity. Recognition – whether it be the person or the community or the religious group or whatever it is – is very important to the individual. If you have no role at all in society, then you're no more than an electric robot. You're not a person. And we've got so many people in societies that either are out of a job or are excluded from the community for one reason or another, who haven't found any role.

My hunch is that a good deal of the problems with drugs and theft and all kinds of other problems in society has relate to this. You find groups of people that haven't a role in society, coming together to form gangs. And in a gang, you can have a role. You can go and boast that you've done this, that, or the other thing.

And I can't define human needs. It's something we ought to be thinking far more about, getting together different disciplines, and trying to get a more useful concept on just human needs, itself. It's a very difficult problem, but it seems, to me, the essential one that we have to take over. This is what you discover when you have parties to disputes together.

They'll start out very antagonistic, and it doesn't matter whether one's more powerful than the other. Little by little by little, when they start cross-examining each other, they discover they've got all the same goals, and the goals relate to their security, their role, their status. And once they've discovered this, then they start talking about "How can we both achieve this." It's very revealing when you've got parties together like this. It makes the more powerful party realize that the use of power is not going to do anything to resolve a problem, and power becomes irrelevant. As I said earlier, we've had examples of very, very small countries defeating major powers.

Rich Rubenstein: One of the things we're finding about – you mentioned power and U.S. interventions, and so forth, earlier – is that the most difficult situation, if we're trying to talk needs and talk about the necessity of finding the causes of the conflict and dealing with them, is when

a figure comes on the scene, like Saddam Hussein or Milosevic or one of the Nationalist bullies, and –

John Burton: The regime of the Taliban.

Rich Rubenstein: Sure. Or the Taliban. But if the United States, especially, decides to demonize them even more than they demonize themselves, and begins to whip up the sentiment that, "We have to use force to stop these people. You can't talk about conflict resolution until you use force to stop these aggressors." Then we're back in the old power politics paradigm again, but it's very hard to resist that. And our students find it very hard to resist that appeal.

John Burton: Why are these people in power? Hussein – have you read his life history? Both parents committed suicide. He was isolated. He made good. He went to Cairo and got some education. But he tends to be described as a fairly neurotic person. And when I was talking about adversarial relationships and party politics and so on, I should have referred to leaderships. Leaderships, frequently – particularly, what we call strong leaders – are just neurotic people. You can go back into their background.

You get the "weak" leader, like [Clememnt] Atlee and, here, [Ben] Chiffley – no one would write them up as strong leaders. They were men of integrity. They couldn't be pushed around. They would be consulting all their colleagues. They didn't take, so called, strong actions, unless there was some situation which clearly required it, and then, only after consultation and consideration. And I think one of our main problems in electing leaders is we're electing people with all kinds of deficiencies.

I don't want to be too personal, but you had a President, who was regarded as a weak person, and he wanted to demonstrate this wasn't so, so he got the Army involved in the Gulf. The head of the [Joint] Chiefs of Staff resigned over it because he knew it was not the appropriate thing to do. So when you get a leadership like this, threats and occupations and sanctions and so on - they don't do anything. They tend to enable the leader to bring the people in his support because the people also are threatened.

The thing to do is to get hold of them and try to work out with them just what their problems are and how they can be overcome, and so on. It makes the consultation process even more important than normal in the usual conflict. And usually, when you get parties involved in conflicts, you come across this problem. I can recall one situation where after about four or five days of discussion, one chap says, "The problem's our leaders."

These were people who had been nominated by leaders, and… everyone around the table laughed. They all agreed. And they had to go home, of course, and say to their leaders, "Here's an outcome, which was acceptable. Do we add any policy announcements or [make any]… changes in direction to go along with it?" And almost always, in a conflict situation, you come up across this leadership problem. But again, we come back to needs. If these people had had a decent upbringing and opportunities, they wouldn't be behaving like this.

Rich Rubenstein: John, your comments produce two kinds of practical questions for me. One has to do with a specific process that you're strongly identified with, as a way of getting the leaders – and non-leaders, as well – to deal with the problems, and recognize them, which is the problem-solving workshop, and I think Chris wants to ask you some questions about that.

And then, either before or after that, I would like, also, to ask you if the problem turns out to be systemic, and you, yourself, said, a little while ago, that sometimes the system needs to be changed, in order to get rid of the problem – to solve the problem. Whether that implies some sort of political movement – whether that can be done by the leaders alone, or how, in fact, that kind of change is to take place. But let me turn it back to Chris to talk about the workshops or whatever else he wants.

Chris Mitchell: Well… I think that's an interesting thing because, if you're associated with a number of aspects of this new field of conflict analysis and resolution – and I think it is new – one of the major ones is the problem-solving workshop. So can you say a little bit about how you developed that idea in the first place? Where did the ideas come from? Where did you suddenly think it is necessary to get people – nominees - round a table for such-and-such a time, with a panel? How did you develop that?

John Burton: Well, as I said earlier, I was provoked to do it. I had no intention – never occurred to me. And then, I got this challenge from all the academic community in UK. I took the risk, I suppose, and – I'm not quite sure what the terms are – but I was a bit cheeky, I suppose, in writing to [Harold] Wilson, the prime minister. And it just took off from there. We went from one situation to another.

Chris Mitchell: How did it change as you went from one situation to the other, and what did you learn from the first one, to the second, to the other series, and –

John Burton: Well, I think you learn a lot with each situation. It worries me that there's so many people teaching this subject, who haven't had this experience, which I thought was quite an emotional experience. It gave me insights, which I could not possibly have had before. Maybe that just means that I don't know enough about people. I think it was, virtually, accidental – virtually. It's those circumstances, which led me in this direction. And of course, this changed my style of writing about processes. I realized how important processes were.

You must have off the record discussions. As soon as that parties would meet, I would say, "Look here. This is in confidence. No public statements at all. Not now, not in the future." And I said "not in the future" because if they made public the fact that they had gone through this - even quietly - others that we approached would say, "Oh, no. In two or three year's time, it'll all come out." And so we used to have to insist that no [public] discussion. And I, as you said, I referred to one situation in an article. I was a bit reluctant to do it, but it was –

Chris Mitchell: It was 25 years ago.

John Burton: It was 25 - 30 years afterwards. The situation had changed. Unfortunately, of course, when politicians do this, they want the publicity and the credits. And this destroys the whole process.

Chris Mitchell: That does lead to one problem, though – well, this is several problems, one of which is the fact that, if you keep it confidential, then… it's difficult to convince people that this is a good, useful, practical process.

But let's leave that one on one side, for the moment. The other one is one that you've already referred to, with regard to the leaders because there is always this problem, which I think [you] and Herb Kelman have referred to as the "reentry problem."

People go through this [workshop] experience and, as you say, it's an intensely emotional experience – an intensely change-bringing experience. And then, they have the problem of going back and confronting their leaders. And presumably, not just their leaders, but the leaders' opposition. And a lot of people have said, "Well, of course, you can bring change to those who come, but how do they transmit that change, and how do you know they've

transmitted the change?" You've obviously had lots of practical experience of that. How would you deal with that problem?

John Burton: Well, it's something that always comes up in the discussions, themselves. No public statements. Shifts in policy. Communication between them, as they review all the policies. At the end of one of these sessions, you usually spend a day or so discussing these matters in length, trying to come to some agreed processes, whereby they can do this. But I agree. It's a difficult process, and it frequently might mean quite fundamental changes in approaches.

I think that Australia's intervention into Timor was very unfortunate. There could have been an interaction resulting in quite a different outcome – a degree of autonomy, but still within the total framework. This wouldn't have been so difficult to sell, as the situation which was imposed on them. Now, none of this is easy. I mean, you can't be successful all the time. It's much easier, of course, at "lower" levels - in industrial relations and family relations, and so on. So communication is possible outside.

Chris Mitchell: Well, let's push that one a bit further - because one of the things that… has happened in the field, over the last decade, is [that] there's been a major shift in the way people write about the use of problem-solving approaches. And the big slogan at the moment is that you have to "problem-solve" not just at the leadership level, or the elite level, but also at the grassroots level and the opinion leaders level… this is not a particularly new idea… Herb [Kelman] has been doing it to opinion leader, [even among the] "rebels". Do you have any reaction to the idea that you have to bring the grassroots along, as well, rather than [just] operating at the elite level?

John Burton: Of course. And frequently, these conflicts involve the grassroots level, in particular. But more directly, it seems to me, now, there's an urgent need in the developed countries for different income levels, social levels, to come together and try to foresee the future and the consequences if nothing is done about it. If the rich go on getting richer, and the poor go on getting poorer, we're going to have terrible clashes, particularly in countries where there are minorities of different ethnic backgrounds or religions.

Chris Mitchell: Do you want to go back to Rich's question?

Rich Rubenstein: Well, John, what you just said provokes another one for me. A lot of people are now saying, with the near collapse – or maybe it's the full collapse – of the Middle East peace process… "Now, what do you – how do you conflict resolution people explain this? Doesn't this prove that there's something defective in your approach to this issue?" What should we learn from this Middle East –

John Burton: Well, first of all, you'll learn that you don't get a leader who wants the political credit to take the initiative.

Chris Mitchell: But they all do, unfortunately.

John Burton: The leaders on the either side to have to go back home without a formal agreement of any kind, and be accused of selling out. But they're in an impossible position… So the conflict escalates. If it had been done, not involving the leaders, but nominees of the leaders, in a quiet way, and each problem had been tackled [analytically], then it would have been possible, perhaps, for the leaders to carry public opinion, or sufficient public opinion, with them to do something about it.

Clearly, Israel has to make some major concessions. They can't go on behaving as it is. If [Israel] thinks because it's more militarily powerful that it can get away with it, it's got another think coming. And [the situation] could escalate into more and more violence over a long period of time, and other countries join in. It's a kind of situation, which could lead to far wider global conflict in just the Middle East...

Rich Rubenstein: Well, also, as I understand it, part of the philosophy of… this peace process was that if you dealt with the easier issues first, you would develop trust between the parties and momentum that would lead you, eventually… that would make the more difficult issues - like the settlers on the West Bank and the right of return of Palestinians and…the status of Jerusalem – easier to handle.

John Burton: If you… analyze a situation and separate easier "issues" from others, you're almost saying that you're in a bargaining or a negotiation situation. You have to take the situation as a whole. [and try to] get down to the sources, which are not issues in debate. If you went to the Palestinians and said, "Now, what are the issues?" They'll say that Jerusalem is the main problem [but] these are not the real issues.

If you get into an industrial conflict, the issue appears to be wage bargaining. Frequently, it's nothing to do with wages. It's to do with attitudes, conditions of work, and the way in which employees are treated, on the floor. So you can't separate the easy from the not easy. You take the situation as a whole and work toward finding the sources of the problem. And then, the so-called "easy issues" take on a different perspective, altogether. Frequently, they don't even get discussed because they're not real issues.

Rich Rubenstein: And how do you feel about the matter of whether one should… in a bargaining, negotiation framework, very often, you're working with "moderates" on both sides, to try to reach an agreement. And the "extremists", as they're called, are excluded. Is that any different in a problem-solving framework?

John Burton: I think it's important, when you're getting parties together, to make sure that the communities are [fully] represented. It's quite important to have the extremists involved, to some degree. It's not always possible to make a selection of people. You don't know enough about the situations to know who the extremists are. And I think that the parties concerned, when they do start discussing themselves, know who the extremists are and what the likely responses are going to be, and so on. You can't afford to separate the communities. If the extremists are causing the problem, it's [counter-productive] to exclude them from the discussions.

Rich Rubenstein: John, this leads, I think, to a more general question, which is, you've said that you are intellectually depressed about the extent of conflict in the world, and the difficulty in gaining acceptance for conflict resolution – some basic ideas. What do you think needs to be done to move this field ahead now?

John Burton: I don't know. I wish I knew the answer. I think it has to go ahead as it is, at the moment. [Initially, the Centre at University College] was the only center in this field, and now, there are not many major universities that are not teaching courses in conflict resolution in one form or another, and so [there are] many, many centers scattered right through the world community. In due course, the ideas, I suppose, will spread, but that's a long, long process. We're not going to really get there until we have teaching right from the primary level… about relationships and conflict resolution. We need courses for parents. We need management courses and so on.

It has to be part of consensus-seeking but all our institutions are geared in the opposite direction. The so-called Capitalist system – economic rationalist capital system, which, during the war, we called Fascism - has attracted a lot of people who want to make a lot of money quickly, regardless of consequence for others. And…if you think about the system and try to get it changed, the idea of smaller government handing over [the decisions to business], to my mind, is just a disaster. How could you have a community working together in a harmonious way if we have our education system geared toward being adversarial? "I'm all right, Jack - to hell with the rest !"

I think the trends are going against the way which we would like to see them, despite trying to promote the idea of conflict resolution. It's this which I find very depressing, not merely the international situation. There's a domestic situation, and I think you and the United States are going to be in for a lot of trouble, in the future, as we will be here. The problem, globally, is that conflict within a country spills over. It's almost impossible to have a major conflict within a country, without attracting the support of opposition elsewhere.

I suppose the most important conflicts to resolve are those – the domestic ones. We have to get into a situation where we have far more bottom-up decision making, rather than top-down. Get people involved. In this way, people sense that they are involved, and a sense of role in society. And I can't see this happening, and that's why I get depressed.

Chris Mitchell: Suppose you could go back, knowing what you know now, to London, in 1963. What do you think you might do differently, or what do you think you would change, or what have you learned that would alter what you would do?

John Burton: I guess I wouldn't have done anything differently, for the reason that everything I've done has been by accident. One thing leads to another. I've only applied for one job in my life. And something happens, and something happens, and something happens… You're writing a book. And all of a sudden, something happens or you read something else, and you shift. So I… could have got the option of doing things differently… I suppose I was dedicated in a certain direction because of early upbringing and so on. And the revelations I had when I was doing my Ph.D. thesis. I'll mention this briefly.

I went to an ISA conference in Bourbon, when I was writing a thesis about constructive and destructive intervention. The conference had to close because war was obviously going to break out in a couple of days. There were two very senior Japanese economists there. They handed out their papers. When I got back to London, I read them. And they said absolutely, categorically, if British colonial policy persists and excludes us, a small country with a large population from [access to markets and] raw materials and so on, we have no option but to join with Hitler. Eighteen months later, of course, they joined with Hitler. And in retrospect, they won.

As I suggested, Britain lost all its colonies, and Japan became a very industrialized country. So I don't think you can talk about doing things differently. You respond to whatever stimuli there are. You can look back and regret the mistake you made. You had a choice, and you took the wrong step. I've done that fairly frequently. But by and large, I think that you're bound by your circumstances.

As I went back to London in 1963, I could just trace out, step by step, how one thing led to another and one book led to another. And then, something happens within the university, so [there was] the moved to [the University of] Kent. And then, years on, [there was] retirement, and I had no option, so I moved to United States, where you don't have to retire 'til you die. And so I went on.

Chris Mitchell: All right, John. Here's really the last one. Supposing you had a 23-year-old junior lecturer here, just starting in the field, what advice would you give that person about what questions need to be looked at, what research needs to be done, what writing needs to be carried out, what theories need to be investigated? What's the next stage for the field of conflict analysis and resolution?

John Burton: Well, you're talking to an 85-year-old. The world has changed. I couldn't advise people on what to do now. The global system's changed. It is a world society. The book I wrote on systems structures, diplomacy, and rules - or something or other - wouldn't apply today. And so I'd have to say to your young people, "Think about where you think you can go," and what are [the current circumstances] and [which important] values you want to pursue, etc., etc., What are, in turn, available to them - rather then tell them what the issues are.

We have been talking about human needs. I think that's an issue that really needs thinking about, discussing. And I think lectures in this area need to be emphasizing, very much, the kinds

of perceptual processes and changes, which take place when parties are brought together. But I would hesitate to advise, at this stage. I read journals, and the language is different. I don't understand what's being said, half the time.

Chris Mitchell: That's all right. We don't, either !

Rich Rubenstein: John, thank you for submitting to this interview. Listening to you give the answers makes me realize why I'm in this field, and I think Chris feels the same as I do about that. Thank you.

John Burton: Thank you.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 76 minutes