

Summary and transcript of interview of Derek Walsh by Chris Thomas, 2007 (803/10)

Approximate timings given in minutes and seconds in various places.

Summary

Subjects include (transcript paragraph numbers given in brackets): disciplinary action taken by the Union of Post Office Workers leadership against Walsh and colleagues in the London region over the blacking of Grunwick's mail, including debate at annual conference (6-14, 86); leading role of Jack Dromey in the dispute (12); lack of union and working-class solidarity (14-16, 74-78); reasons why Walsh and colleagues supported the strike (14, 28, 38, 88); qualities and influence of Jayaben Desai (22-24); violent policing (30-36); role of National Association for Freedom in supporting George Ward of Grunwick (38, 45-58); fortunes of trade unionism since the dispute, and anti-union trends (40-44); personal pressure on Walsh and colleagues arising from legal and disciplinary action (86).

Transcript

1. **CT:** Terrific. OK, what were we talking about? The pressure put on Tom Jackson¹, were we?
2. **DW:** Yes.
3. **CT:** Oh no. No, your role: what was your role and the London region and – OK. Yeah, just tell us your – just straight to me – yeah, your role in the dispute.
4. **DW:** Yeah, I was a London district organiser, myself and John Taylor – that was my other district organiser, we had two district organisers – we were the people that were in charge of the London delegates. London was composed of probably about two hundred and fifty delegates at the time. These delegates came from every branch in London, and our job every month was to meet up with them and to decide on any action that they needed to be taken: for instance, going to London postal region to negotiate different conditions of service, and that was mainly what our role was. We used to have these meetings each month, and it was at these monthly meetings where we would have feedback from our branches about what was happening in their areas, and that was how we first heard about the Grunwick dispute, yes.
5. **CT:** Right, and – so we've now got the whole that story, that's fine. What happened to you after the pressure was put on and the vote was taken and the official blacking, or the support of the Cricklewood postmen, was forced to end?
6. **DW:** Well, Tom Jackson had already set up a discipline committee to discipline the people of the London committee, and of course we realised that there wasn't a lot that we could do about that because we had certainly been against – we had certainly disobeyed the rules of the union, which was what we were being accused of. And so we were obviously very interested in knowing what was going on with the discipline committee, but our main worry was that we would be slung out of the union, and we would have lost our job as district organisers.

¹ General secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers.

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7. **CT:** Can I just start that one again? Just get it – when, after the result, if you just pick it up there, a disciplinary procedure was introduced about – to discipline us in terms of the action we took [in] solidarity.

8. **DW:** Well, actually the discipline committee was set up earlier on in the dispute, as soon as we started to take unofficial action. What happened was that after we'd spoken to Jack Dromey², and we had spoken to the strike committee of Grunwick, we sent out a circular, and the circular was telling our branches to black all Grunwick mail, and it was pointing out to them the sort of bonus pools, etcetera, the different type of mail that was coming out of Grunwick. When Tom Jackson got hold of the circular, which he did, he said to us that he wanted us to withdraw it, and we said "well, we refuse to withdraw it." So he called us along to a meeting at headquarters, and I draw [drew] the short straw on this day and had to reply back to Tom Jackson. And what Tom Jackson said to us that we were infringing the rules of the union, and that he would be setting up a discipline committee, that if we were prepared to withdraw the circular we'd sent out he wouldn't proceed with the discipline committee, but if we did he said, you know, "there is no doubt we will take disciplinary action against you." And with that, he read out the riot act about what we'd done and what rules that we'd broken, and the chairman was sitting beside him who agreed that we were completely wrong in the attitude that we had taken. And I told the general secretary that there was no possible way that we could withdraw the circular, and that no one was standing beside the Grunwick strikers, and that we were, even if we were on our own, we would stand beside them and we would not withdraw the circular. And as I turned with the committee to walk out of the room, he shouted out to me "who do you think you are? The conscience of the union?" And I just sort of looked back and walked out. So, following this, and following the dispute collapsing completely after the Cricklewood lads and lasses had gone back to work normal, it was in the December of 1977 where I got a letter through my door; I remember it clearly, it was on the twentieth of December. The letter was posted through my door and it said "you are fined two hundred pounds as a discipline for what you did in breaking the rules of the union." Two hundred pounds in those days was quite a lot of money for a postman, so it did hurt, but I was pleased that in fact I had not lost my job as the district organiser, although we would have had appeal to the annual conference next year, and I had some confidence that even if we had have been taken off of our duties we would have had a right of fighting our case. [5:55]

9. **CT:** But how did you feel? Your trade union fining you for supporting fellow trade unionists over a basic principle of the right to belong to a trade union, and being fined – not by a boss, not by government – but by your own trade union for taking that solidarity action.

10. **DW:** Well, we did feel pretty rough. I mean, there was all of our committee, they was all fined: John Taylor was fined three hundred pounds and the committee was all fined various amounts, which amounted in total to over a thousand pounds. But yeah, we were annoyed, we were annoyed, but the argument came back, "we are not saying what you did wasn't morally right, but what we are saying is that you broke the union's rules – so and so – and you cannot argue that you didn't break the union's rules." And we couldn't argue, because I mean we did, we broke the union's rules, but

² Secretary of Brent Trades Union Council.

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we thought we had reason enough to do it. Obviously Tom Jackson didn't think that that was correct.

11. **CT:** What was the response to the fines?

12. **DW:** Well, the response to the fines was that Jack Dromey was always there whenever you needed him, and Jack Dromey had spoken to a number of MPs, they had all put their names to a piece of paper, and they had all donated monies, and they were asking for donations from trade unions. In next to no time the whole of the money was there, and we had to – in fact, we were oversubscribed, or the treasurer was in London, who was collecting the money – we were oversubscribed and we had to send the money back after the first day, so we didn't pay a penny in the end. The trade union movement were behind us non-stop. But, you know, talking about Jack Dromey: I mean, as far as I am concerned, when I look back on the dispute, I don't think the dispute would have been the dispute it was without Jack Dromey's complete and utter – well, he put himself into it. I mean, Jack Dromey was always around when the strike – when the strikers looked like that it was going to fall flat, the Grunwick workers were going to fall flat – he was always around. Jack was the one that got in touch with Arthur Scargill when things were going downhill; Jack would be the one to talk to the strike committee at Grunwick to boost their ego; Jack would be the one that would come down to the London district council and speak at our own council meetings; Jack would be the one that would ask us to black mail for the second time, it was Jack Dromey. So, I think, you know, I often think that Jack probably never got the kudos he deserved. I think that without Jack Dromey we would probably have had Grunwick, but I don't think it would have been on the scale that we would had a thirtieth anniversary of it today, that is my view. [8:56]

13. **CT:** I agree with you entirely on that. Just wanted to say: when you went back to your annual conference after the finings, what was the response like there?

14. **DW:** Well, when we went back to our annual conference we had a cheek because we put up a motion asking the conference to agree that what we had done was in the best interests of the trade union movement. And it was wonderful, I mean, it was a great couple of hours' debate. What happened was John Taylor – my colleague who I said was the real the leading light of London in my view – he was on the executive council, and John came down off of the platform, as we call it: loud claps as he walked into the rostrum on the floor to move the motion that what we had done was morally right and in the interests of the trade union movement. The intention was, of course, to get a little bit of our own back on what they had done to us with disciplining us. I seconded the motion, and it was a wonderful debate and – well, one that I've not heard – I never heard again afterwards with half the intensity. At the end there was a vote, and it was nine thousand for and nine thousand-odd against; they won narrowly by about three or four hundred members, which was absolutely fantastic. And I always remember that night, I was going to – we called it 'London night', we were having 'London night', it was a dance that we normally held for the delegates, where all the delegates would come and they would come into the night that we holding for them. And I was going up an escalator towards it, and who should I step up behind was Tom Jackson. And he looked round at me and he says "it's a good job I love you, Derek!" Strange, but that means something to me; probably wouldn't mean anything to anyone else. But yes, it was a good conference because I think what it did it gave us a boost that, as far as our union was concerned, they knew that we were

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wrong because we broke the rule, but they knew that we were right, morally right, because they gave us that vote, and I think that that to me gave me – and I know it did to John Taylor – gave us a boost, showed us that we were right. And, I tell you what, if you can't win a strike, if you think about it, if you can't win a strike against a bully – and that's all he was, I mean, Mr George Ward was a bully, who bullied immigrant workers, who paid them terrible wages, that made them work over their time, just before they were going home he would tell them they had to continue work – if you can't win a dispute like that, if the trade union movement, with so much right behind it, can't win a dispute like that, what in heaven's name will we ever be able to win? You know, I find it difficult. When I look back at that, I think, well, how come just a simple recognition dispute, how come that we didn't win it? I mean, it was so right; it was absolutely and completely right and yet we seemed to have failed somehow. Why did we fail? What was wrong? I mean, why didn't the trade union movement stick together? Why is it that when it comes to every time that we have this sort of argument, they all seem to go on their own and they're all sort of thinking of excuses as to why they can't do something? There's more principles about what they can't do than what they can do, I'm afraid. There you are. As I say, if we can't win that, then what can we win? **[12:41]**

15. **CT:** Did the trade union movement box below its weight?

16. **DW:** Yeah, I think it did, although – I think a lot of us lost a lot of faith in the joint TUC after that. And of course a lot of us, I think, stayed in the union for many years afterwards, went to the TUC and watched what was happening there, and it was plain to see afterwards, even if I didn't see it beforehand, that the trade union movement very rarely can stick together. They all know what they want for their own particular union, but it's very difficult for them to give a little bit more, like our Cricklewood people did, for another trade union; to really hurt themselves [sic], to put themselves at some risk, yeah? People don't do that; it's not just since the Thatcher era, as some people have said to me when I've argued that, I mean, as far as I'm concerned, thinking back now, it's always been the same. When do working-class people stick together? I can remember once, I think, when the nurses came out some time back when I saw a major dispute where people did try to, did try to assist. But normally, I'm afraid, we're not that brotherly. [pauses for drink]

17. **DW:** Are we doing OK?

18. **CT:** We're doing perfectly! That was absolutely, you know, really –

19. **DW:** You're happy about that?

20. **CT:** Fantastic! I just want to – that's it, that's it. [pause]

21. **CT:** What was I going to say? Oh yeah, how well did you get to know the strikers?

22. **DW:** Quite well, quite well. On a personal basis, not very much, because we normally met when they were at their strike committee, or they were coming to our meetings. And of course they were always very busy, as you are when you're involved with a dispute. So I got to liking them; I mean, in particular Jayaben Desai, who to me is just a wonderful woman, and I think that probably her personality had also quite a bit to do with the fact that our union was strongly behind the Grunwick

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people because she really was – what is the word? – a sophisticated lady who you think, well, if she's prepared to do what's she's doing, then we should be prepared to help, you know? Yeah, I think she's quite lovely, very exceptional person, very exceptional person. [interruption]

23. **CT:** Let me just pick up that, just in case, because I suddenly heard this sort of strange noise. Yeah, how influential? Just talk a little bit about Jayaben Desai and the image and influence she had over the movement, you think.
24. **DW:** Oh, I think she did. I think from the start, for someone who'd come from a country like she had, a depressed country at the time, for people that had very little bargaining power in the field, I mean, practically no bargaining power, that they had no one to help them whatsoever. That for her to stand up as she did, you know, she just wasn't going to have it. I mean, it's all very well for a high executive to do that, knowing he can get a job somewhere else, if you understand me, but for someone in the position that she was in to have said what she said to the people on the shop floor in Grunwick, and to have walked out with no help whatsoever, I think it was quite amazing, yeah. Yeah, I think she's quite a lady, yeah.
25. **CT:** When it came to getting the discussions and giving support: I mean, obviously, issues of immigration, issues of racism arise, and this is a completely unusual face of trade unionism that hadn't been seen before. How did the discussion go?
26. **DW:** Well, I think in particular, in my union, in the UPW, we, I think, were probably the forerunners in the era of accepting immigration. I mean, I had one of my branches, WDO, that probably had three quarters of them were from African countries. I think that we were quite in the fore – the forerunners of taking immigration, the Post Office. Probably in those days as well, the buses as well, and the trains, the railways. So we never had any difficulty with immigrants in our job, not that I can remember anyway. But yeah, very acceptable, yeah. We had no problem at all.
27. **CT:** But just in terms of getting – when you were going about getting support from London branch, was the issue, did it [a]rise then, the sacrifice, that this wasn't, you know, this was an unheard of element within the trade union movement?
28. **DW:** I think the fact that someone's being paid at such a terrible rate of pay, I think the fact that they had to put up their hand to go to the toilet, I think the fact that they could be compelled to do overtime just about when they were going home, would overrule any fact of being black, yellow or white. I think with trade unionists what we wanted to do was to stop suppression. That's why I think our Cricklewood lads said "I'll keep on going back." You know, were so good because they understood this and they wouldn't allow that to happen without them protesting. I think sometimes you've got to live with yourself, and I think that's what they had to do. Certainly Colin Maloney and people like Colin and Dodds and Archie Sinclair, who were the backbone of the Cricklewood branch, I mean I think they would say exactly what I've just said to you: that that was one of the main reasons, or the main reason, why they would not allow that to happen; they wouldn't allow it to happen in their own branch, and they wouldn't allow it to happen in any other branch if they had any way whatsoever that they could assist, and in this case, of course, they did have. [19:32]

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29. **CT:** Brilliant. Let's just talk a bit about the policing. Did you witness the policing?
30. **DW:** Yes, I did, I did witness the policing. In particular I was with one of my friends, his name was Bill Fry – only died this year, as a matter of fact, sorry, late last year – and Bill Fry and I – he was an engineer – we went over there on this particular morning, and there was quite a large picket out – picket that was out – and that meant that the SPG, the Special Patrol Group, and the police were out in absolute full force. And we got separated, and he told me afterwards that he'd got chased onto someone's front garden, he was smashed about the head and shoulders with a truncheon. And he was, he was physically shaken, on that night when we were sitting in the pub talking about it, I mean, he was really shaken. They were tactics that we'd never heard of before. I mean, later on we were to hear about them in the eighties with the miners, but they were tactics that we'd never heard [of] before. And we hadn't really had any dealing with the SPG before. And the fact was, what it appeared to us, it really did, it appeared that Grunwick, actually, that they were Grunwick's police, I mean, that's the way it appeared to us. They would – we knew that they were in the canteen, they used to go to a canteen and they would have tea with the management, use the toilets within the Grunwick facility, and so it soon got around to people that were regulars at the, on the picket line, that Grunwick and the special police patrol group were very close together. Yeah, very disappointing once again because you do expect police to be in-between, don't you? But of course they were not.
31. **CT:** Why were the SPG brought in?
32. **DW:** Well, I think probably, I mean, Callaghan³ must have had something to do with this I should imagine, or whoever is in charge of the – is it the Home Secretary?
33. **CT:** The Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees.
34. **DW:** Merlyn Rees, was it? Merlyn Rees, yeah. Yeah, well we didn't like him very much at the time, I remember, when he came along to the picket line and he got a bit of a jeering, yeah. But special police, as far as the Grunwick people were concerned, were a special type of brutal race of the police; they would hit first and ask questions afterwards.
35. **CT:** Were they brought in to intimidate people from coming into the picket line?
36. **DW:** I think so, yeah. I think so. Yeah, certainly didn't help my friend; he never came on the picket line again, Bill Fry, after that. Yeah, frightening. In fact, we only normally went along there when we felt we could be a little bit helpful, and that was on special occasions, you know, we wouldn't go there every day. It was, it was worrying, and it was worrying for the people living round the area. I mean, it must have been very frightening for them; you know, every day having that sort of, that problem. But you can be sympathetic, but other, sometimes things have to, people have to suffer to get the point over, don't they?

³ James Callaghan, Prime Minister.

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37. **CT:** I mean, do you think it was an impact, if it hadn't been on the front pages of the newspapers, no one would have taken any notice?
38. **DW:** Well, I think that obviously has a big effect, yeah, but I think the reason why it actually rose to the height that it did was, first of all, our own union, nationally taking action – the post is well known throughout the country, they know what's happening – the newspapers picking it up. So I suppose in a way that we helped to highlight it, but the other thing that really highlighted it was the National Association for Freedom. I mean, these were the right wing of the Conservative Party, very strong right wing. Had the money as well, I mean, they were the people who paid for the 'Pony Express'⁴, they were the people that kept John [George] Ward out of the bankruptcy court, they were the people that were behind the taking our union to court. So the National Association for Freedom were [an] extremely strong force to be reckoned with. Now, they were very anti-trade union movement, very anti-trade union, and I think that that's another thing that highlighted it: they were absolutely incensed to make sure that the trade union didn't win this dispute. I mean, they called themselves the National Association for Freedom; I mean, freedom for what? Freedom for them poor little women in the Grunwick factory to earn paltry wages, to be compelled to do overtime at the last minute. Yeah, I mean, is that the sort of freedom that the National Association for Freedom stood for? Was that the sort of freedom that George Ward wanted? Was it the freedom to be able to whip his people about and treat them in that sort of way? I mean, that's what annoys me about this strike so much, that it was so simple. It was one, as I say, we should have won. All the moral parts were right within it. Everything was right, and yet we still failed to win the day, yeah? But yeah, the reason why it was highlighted was because of the National Association for Freedom; they were prepared to put money in, they were prepared to back the 'Pony Express', they were prepared to do all the things that anyone who's made up his mind that he's going to win at all costs, and they were of course behind it, and of course Thatcher⁵ was well behind them, she was a great admirer of them. In fact, I remember reading at the time that when the 'Pony Express' moved in she says words to the effect that this was the next best thing to the Entebbe raid⁶. I mean, how can people take that sort of thing out of context – out of context? **[25:36]**
39. **CT:** How do you think it affected the political future, the outcome of Grunwick?
40. **DW:** Well, I don't think we've had a political future since, really, have we? I mean, we know Wappings⁷, we've gone through all the different disputes, but none of them actually have been winners. The miners has been a loser.⁸ I think the political future, as far as the Grunwick one is concerned, I think I saw a little while back, when the law had been changed to make sure that there

⁴ Arrangements to distribute Grunwick's mail when trade unionists were refusing to handle it.

⁵ Margaret Thatcher, Leader of the Opposition.

⁶ Raid on hi-jacked aircraft at Entebbe Airport, Uganda, in 1976.

⁷ Dispute between the print unions and News International over manning at their new printing plant in Wapping, 1986.

⁸ The miners' strike of 1984-1985.

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was different rules now for recognition, of course, George Ward could no longer do the things that he had done in the past. When it come to the voting, which was one of the contentions that ACAS⁹ had problems with getting the people inside the factory and outside the factory to get a vote together, George Ward wouldn't allow us access, etcetera, etcetera. So, things have improved; he could not have done the things that he did today. Also, you've got the National Minimum Wage, so he could not have paid the sort of wages that he was paying in that time. So, yeah, small winners. Should we have had that anyway? I mean, was that really so wonderful to win? Losers? Well, I mean, if you look at what's happening in the country today with the trade unions, much of our work is being sent outside – 'out-sourced', as they call it, done in other areas of the country. I mean, are the trade unions better off? We've got less trade unions today than we had in those days. No, I'm afraid in my old age that I can't say that things have improved at all.

41. **CT:** Do you think – I mean, it was to beckon in a whole anti-trade union era. If the trade union leadership had nipped it in the bud, there could have been a different kind of future?
42. **DW:** If we'd have nipped it in the bud. Well, I mean, already the Labour Party, under the Wilson¹⁰ government, if you remember, we had *In place of strife*¹¹ that was coming out with – who was that wonderful little lady that was in the - ?
43. **CT:** That was Barbara Castle.
44. **DW:** Yeah, Barbara Castle. But we already had, right from that time, the start where, I think the economists had got together, and I think the economists had decided that the main reason why the country was not doing so well was because the trade union movement was taking more out of the economy than it should be. I think there were people that thought in that way; certainly Margaret Thatcher felt in that way a bit. So I think the intention was to try to put down the trade union movement, to try to get them to accept things that were less that what they would not normally have been prepared to accept. And that is what started happening in Harold Wilson's time and it has continued to happen ever since. I'm afraid that –
45. **CT:** But was the National Association for Freedom, do you think they found George Ward or did George Ward find them?
46. **DW:** I think the National Association for Freedom found George Ward, yeah. I mean, they were already after us, the Post Office. They were against trade unions, so as soon as Grunwick came to the fore, yeah, with what happened with what we did, yeah? I mean, [?they were in it] in the November, in the November of seventy-six. So obviously, right from the start, the National Association for Freedom were there. I mean, they really were right-wing, and I mean right-wing of right-wing, and they hated the trade union movement, and I am quite certain that it was this very

⁹ Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

¹⁰ Harold Wilson.

¹¹ White Paper on industrial relations, 1969.

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strong, emotional feeling that helped George Ward through every one of his crisis [crises]. Yeah, I'm sure. And, of course, they had quite some power behind the scene[s] with different MPs, certainly on the Conservative Party much more so than on the Labour Party.

47. **CT:** And they were wealthy.

48. **DW:** Yes, they had wealthy people inside the movement, very – oh yes, they did do, and of course, they were looking after the –

49. **CT:** Why do you think the National Association for Freedom picked on George Ward as a – to support?

50. **DW:** Well, I think because the trade unions were amassing round the strikers, and so that was the natural counter-attack for them to come in behind George Ward. And it was their expertise.

51. **CT:** Do you think it was to spearhead an attack on the trade union movement?

52. **DW:** Oh, definitely, yeah.

53. **CT:** Because they'd got involved before, you know, the mass picketing took place and the miners arrived, didn't they? They were there giving him support from the beginning, so –

54. **DW:** Right from the beginning, no doubt whatsoever, yeah. It was, the National Association for Freedom came before George Ward, yeah, definitely. I mean, they were all, they had been there for some years – the McWhirters¹², the people behind that campaign – yeah, they'd been there for years, and they were just anti-trade union. I mean, you had Gouriet, John Gouriet, who was also a prominent Conservative person, who was part of the National Association for Freedom, I think he was the chairman or something, but he was certainly a high-up in the National Association for Freedom. They were anti-trade unions, they were really anti-trade union, they were anti-working class, in my view. You know, they did not believe – they were more on the Thatcher-type theory of the – you know, if you get there, if you're at the top, then you should stay there.

55. **CT:** When they saw George Ward's little story, what did they think?

56. **DW:** What, the National Association for Freedom? When they saw George Ward, I think what they thought was "here is some place that we can make our mark. Here is something we can't afford to lose. If we lose this, then we could lose other things in other parts of our community, that every employer will have to worry if we allow these people to win, if we allow immigrants to win." [32:03]

57. **CT:** Do you think they took it up as a champion for employers, to say "we can do it, you can do it"? Talk that through.

¹² Ross and Norris McWhirter.

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58. **DW:** Oh yeah, I think they did. I think that the National Association for Freedom were there for help if anyone needed it on the corporate side. I'm quite certain that that is a fact. And what they felt that they could champion was that any employer that had difficulties with a trade union. And they did just that, I mean, they really were, as I say, a strong, quite wealthy, had quite a lot of wealthy people, quite influential, I mean, people like Thatcher were behind them. And they were champion[ing] the upper classes, things that they wanted to win, yeah.
59. **CT:** Terrific. Let me just have a look at my – all right. OK, I ask everybody this one: what's your strongest memory of the Grunwick dispute?
60. **DW:** Oh, the police were bad, yeah. My strongest memory of the dispute was being afraid, seeing the patrol group rushing towards me. I think that was it, and I suppose the other thing was the point that I made to you when I was talking to Tom Jackson, I was walking away from him and he said "who do you think you are, the conscience of the trade union – the conscience of the union?" Yeah.
61. **CT:** Right, shall I just ask that question again? Don't refer backwards to the previous, just like to say it fresh for the first time. So, your memories of the – what are your memories of the Grunwick dispute?
62. **DW:** Well, I think the main memory of the Grunwick dispute is the fear that I felt when I saw the SPG at the Grunwick picket line and what they were doing to people. I think that that was very worrying; I think that was a big lesson which, to me, I've carried through the rest of my days. And the other thing was that with Tom Jackson, my general secretary, having said that we wouldn't give in to his pleas regarding withdrawing the circular that we put out to tell people to take action, when Tom Jackson said "who do you think you are, the conscience of the union?" Yeah, yeah.
63. **CT:** Any other positive memories from the dispute?
64. **DW:** I think the worrying point was that we couldn't win anything by using the law, you know, I think that that was probably one of the memories that, one of the things that come back to me, that, you know, the law seems to help very little when it comes to [the] trade union movement arguing their cause. Yeah, I think that's probably – and the other thing was the disappointment of the trade union movement itself, with not rising to the occasion with something that was so simple and so right. Yeah, yeah.
65. **CT:** And the positives, though? Because, what do you remember?
66. **DW:** Friendships, friendships, yeah, I think the positives is that when we were together fighting the cause, both inside my union with the Cricklewood branch, we made a lot of good friends. And I suppose like everything else if you go through tremendous times together you tend to gel together. Yeah, made some good friends, got some good memories, got some very good memories.
67. **CT:** Were you there when the Cricklewood postmen arrived on the big mass day on July the seventh outside to lead the march? Were you there?

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68. **DW:** I was actually at the front of that, I was at the front of that with John Taylor. I think we've got the photograph.
69. **CT:** So just tell me how that felt when you arrived at the front of the march.
70. **DW:** I mean, it was great, it was great. I mean, it was wonderful. It was John Taylor, myself, there was Paul Grace, another chap of the executive council, and – but the only thing was that cars kept on driving very close to us, and people were shouting out all sorts of ignorant sort of dialogue, so –
71. **CT:** But weren't you getting quite a lot of support from the rest of the trade union movement?
72. **DW:** Oh, we certainly did, we certainly did. When we did our march, yeah, we did do. And it was quite a few people who wanted to give money and things like that, to assist with what was happening. Yeah, wonderful days.
73. **CT:** Did it surprise you how much support there was for rank and file action [?out there]?
74. **DW:** I think there should have been a lot more, so no, no. I think there should have been a lot more support for such a simple cause, yeah, I think there should have been. Yeah, disappointment is more –
75. **CT:** I know what I was going to ask you: were you aware that the strikers went on hunger strike outside the TUC?
76. **DW:** Yes, I was, I was. That was near the end of the – when it all actually collapsed, and Jayaben and a few of the ladies sat down outside [the] TUC. But unfortunately, it appeared that they embarrassed, from my understanding, that they embarrassed the TUC and they were asked if they would move on, yeah.
77. **CT:** Didn't the TUC deserve to be embarrassed?
78. **DW:** Oh, absolutely. I think through every self-righteous, trusting trade unionist they were embarrassed. I mean, they were embarrassed because they embarrassed themselves. Yeah, I think it was terrible. It seems that when you go into these sort of disputes, after a while, when things get a little bit worrying, people seem to think about their own little jobs: "what am I liable to lose from this?" And you could actually see the jockeying around, you know, and looking for excuses as to why we shouldn't do something, and that's what happened again with this one. I remember reading Jack Dash's¹³ book, *Good morning brothers!*, and he comes out with exactly the same philosophy what happened in the great strike, that when the chips were down, there wasn't a lot of them around, mate!

¹³ Communist trade union activist.

Summary and transcript of interview of Derek Walsh by Chris Thomas, 2007 (803/10)

Approximate timings given in minutes and seconds in various places.

79. **CT:** Yeah, I mean, it's eternal pressure, you know. Now we call it – what do they call it?

80. **DW:** Cash for honours?

81. **CT:** Cash for honours. And now [?then] it was a nod for an honour, wasn't it? A lot of trade unionists all ended up in the House of Lords, didn't they?

82. **DW:** Absolutely, yeah. Lord Clarke¹⁴, one of my friends from the union, yeah.

83. **CT:** Where does the pressure – when it comes to pressure, where is it coming from? And how are –

84. **DW:** What, in that sort of dispute?

85. **CT:** Yeah.

86. **DW:** Well, I think the pressure comes from yourself. You know, when I was told that I was liable to lose everything that I had if George Ward decided to take us to the cleaners, that was a little bit worrying, because you see you're not just talking for your own house, you're talking for your wife, you're talking for your kids. And although you think "no, they can't", there's a little niggling feeling in the back of you says "well, maybe they can, and what happens? I mean, would my wife ever forgive me, would the kids? Have I any rights to make decisions like this?" That is the sort of little niggling worries that are at the back of you when you're in – and this of course is what they use against you. I mean, first of all we had George Ward and the National Association for Freedom taking us to court for the breach of the – a criminal offence [in] breach of the 1953 Act – then I listen to Tom Jackson telling me that I'm liable to be taken to court for the criminal act of breaching the 1953 Act? And you think "well, yeah." All right from a threat coming from them, but when it comes from your own you don't feel very happy about it. **[40:01]**

87. **CT:** But you stepped up to the mark. You said, you know, you said [indistinct] intimidation [indistinct] lose your house, threats to your wife and children affected financially, but you didn't.

88. **DW:** No, and we didn't lose anything either in the end, which was gratifying. But, yeah, as I say, I think there is a time in your life when you have to make up your mind in different situations whether or not you're prepared to put yourself on the line, and I think it basically always comes back to yourself. Are you prepared to put yourself? - If you look at them Cricklewood lads, if you look at people like Colin and David and Archie Sinclair, I mean, they were prepared to put themselves on the line, they were prepared to lose their job. Because, after a while, especially when you've been involved in something for a length of time, stepping down becomes more hard, harder and harder, and losing is something you just can't contemplate because you've put too much of your life on the line, if you understand me. And they were prepared to lose their jobs, they were prepared to lose their jobs, and I believe that the whole of that members [membership] – hundred members, I think they had – I think they were all prepared on that particular occasion because they had so much

¹⁴ Tony Clarke, Baron Clarke of Hampstead.

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pride in what they'd done and, you know, they had done something that was quite amazing. But not many people, unfortunately, are prepared to do that.

89. **CT:** I'm just going to –