

Summary and transcript of interview of Norman Mullings by Chris Thomas, 2007 (803/03A part 3)

Approximate timings given in minutes and seconds in various places.

Summary

Subjects include (transcript paragraph numbers given in brackets): variety of people supporting the strike (2, 13, 15); higher level of solidarity at time of strike than at time of interview (2, 4-6); importance of trade union membership (10).

Transcript

1. **CT:** What do you think the qualities were that were drawn out, brought out in us during that dispute?
2. **NM:** I think it brought out a number of good things. It brought out – what it did was to show also that – there was a lot of argument about, you know, that understanding, that is not all the time when you're doing things, we did things because we did it together. And the important thing was that, it wasn't a case that it was the big guns doing it for us. It was everybody was in it together. We would – some of the meetings I been to, you know, the trade council would say their piece, the Grunwick ladies would say their piece, somebody from – if I remember rightly we also have [had a] couple of radical preachers, because we have some people from Harlesden Methodist Church, they've also been involved in marches, and that has not stopped. And it was a coming together of trade unionists and Christians, but we were all were in it together, whether you're communist or you are Christian or you're Labour Party, we put aside those things for the time being and came together. And I think it was good, it was a good lesson to show that at times of crisis there are times when we could put away our differences and work for the common good. Unfortunately, I don't know how much of that is happening now.
3. **CT:** Yeah. Do you think we look after each other as well now?
4. **NM:** In a way it's – I don't think it is as – we don't have that closeness. I think, also, it's now much more subtle; people pay a lot more lip-service. In those days it was action, you know, everyone rolled their sleeves up and get [got] on with it. These days we have a lot of rhetoric and lip-service and, it's a subtle way of it, and also a lot of people are not too keen to, as it were, go out on the limb because these days they chop it off, you know. I suppose times have changed.
5. **CT:** Do you think there was more confidence then for people to look after each other?
6. **NM:** Yes, and I don't think people were as, more or less – it wasn't a case of just looking after the me, the individual, it was much more of a wider, looking at the needs of others, and selfishness was not as much as it is today. We've become a lot more selfish, and I think some of it has to do with the way, the message you get from politicians. You know, if you're a self-made millionaire, or if you are a great entrepreneur, you are making money, why should you be worried about those who are less fortunate? And I think that some of that must, I think government are to [be held] responsible for some of that, their policies have created some of that. **[3:32]**

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7. **CT:** In terms of trade unionism and its ability to embrace all members of society, did that change, do you think? There was a time when trade unions was [were] looked at as just white people looking after themselves, protecting certain valuable jobs. How did that change?
8. **NM:** Yeah, I think people also from the Grunwick situation, I think it – not only that, I think the trade unions, and I think in particular, talking about Brent, which is a place I know pretty well, I think a lot of people have a lot of regard for the way the trades council conducted itself. And it was, you know, it was very transparent that they were not there just for the few, but they were there for all. Yes, individual trade unions were criticised, and even today some people may feel that some of the convenors are not, as it were, for the workers, they are much too close to management, But, you know, in terms of negotiation these days you have to be subtle about it, and sometime[s] it's how you play it, it's not that they may not have the workers' interest at heart, but to the chap who wants it immediately, wants it done now, he may feel that the trade union is not on his side. Not necessary that it's so, but they want it more immediate.
9. **CT:** But what do you say now if someone is saying "it's pointless belonging to a trade union, it doesn't do anything"?
10. **NM:** Well, people will say that about many things. People will say – my argument is that it's unfair if you don't belong to a trade union, why is it, then, when everybody else go on a strike you're going to benefit from the outcome of that? And therefore you should belong to it. It's part of the togetherness, it's part of collective bargaining. You can't keep out of it and then expect to benefit from the proceeds of that bargaining, you must be part of it. And I think, quite often, we have these debates on-going because, from time to time, we will have people who said "well, I work for one company but I'm not going to join the trade unions," and I'm saying "well, you know, when you have more than – when you alone go to negotiate, management don't take much notice of you, but if half a dozen of you go together they will start thinking a little bit more serious." And I always believe that trade union is a very good thing. Collective bargaining is always, in my view, is the best way to move forward. **[6:26]**
11. **CT:** Terrific, terrific. [break]
12. **CT:** OK, what do you remember?
13. **NM:** Some of the things I remember was the coming together of so many different people. I remember the Brent Teachers' Association, they supported it, and it was remarkable that there was such a support [indistinct], you know, a wealth of information coming in from all other people who may have had not such a campaign, but had done things that they share with the local people, and I think it was good. Information was coming in.
14. **CT:** Oh, one second. Let me just ask that quest - [break]. OK, just give us an example of the variety and the sort of people that were supporting each other in the dispute.
15. **NM:** The support we had was that we had support from – the support came from churches, from the teachers' association, from areas that you feel that they wouldn't become embroiled in

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something like that, but the support was there, and that was interesting. And they were not doing it – and they were doing it for – there wasn't any ulterior motive, they were genuine because they were concerned. And I think in the main, people were very impressed that – the campaign may not have been a success in terms of how some people may see it, but I think what it did, it brought a certain amount of solidarity among the working class, especially around Brent, and if it wasn't for the campaign I don't think that would happen.

16. **CT:** Terrific, terrific.