

Summary and transcript of interview of Derek Walsh by Chris Thomas, 2007 (803/09)

Approximate timings given in minutes and seconds in various places

Summary

Relates mainly to the blacking of Grunwick mail by London members of the Union of Post Office Workers, and the eventual ending of this campaign because of pressure from the union leadership, who were afraid that consequent legal action would lead to the union losing its assets and the postal workers losing their jobs and their right to strike.

1. **CT:** OK, well let's start at the beginning: how did you first hear about the Grunwick dispute?
2. **DW:** Oh, the first time I heard of it was when I was on the platform, which we called, King Edward Buildings in London, and David Dodds walked up to the rostrum to give an account of what was happening in his area. And at the time it was Grunwick, and he explained to us that they were refusing to cross picket lines, and he also went into the history of what had caused the Grunwick workers to do what they were doing. So that was my first, the first time I got involved, so to speak. We used to have these London meetings, and they happened every month, and at these meetings our branches would come up and give us accounts of what's happened in their areas. And, as I say, this is where the Grunwick one was brought up and we first heard about it. After that – that would have been, I don't know, the late part of seventy-five, yes, the late part of seventy-five – and after that the next thing we heard was that Roy Grantham¹ had contacted our general secretary Tom Jackson² asking him if we could give a hand in helping them to progress the dispute. And on the first of November in 1975 -
3. **CT:** I think it was seventy-six.
4. **DW:** It was seventy-six, yeah. Want me to start that again?
5. **CT:** Yeah, yeah, go on.
6. **DW:** The first of November in 1976, we, our executive council, called a national blacking of the Grunwick mail, which everyone did, I mean, it was done to the man, and there was no difficulty at all as far as we were concerned: nothing moved at all, none of the mail moved, it was all left static in the offices where it originated from, where it was posted. And –
7. **CT:** Can I just take you back? Just to go through that sequence again, because it was such a crucial role. That, so, the sequences were first of all what happened, and then the dispute – let me start that question again: the postmen themselves came and reported to you; they weren't actually taking action at that time. Just explain how, what Dave Dodd reported to the London meeting.
8. **DW:** Yeah, what Dave Dodd told us at the London meeting [was] that he had a dispute in his area, and they were refusing to cross picket lines: that was the first bit of action. This was local, they were refusing to cross picket lines, and he went on to explain what was actually happening. He'd spoken

¹ General secretary of APEX.

² General secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers.

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to the strike committee there, and he told us the background to the dispute, what it was about. So in a way I suppose it gave us a little bit more privileged information than anyone else, being on the spot, and the whole of the London delegates that were there – which were over two hundred people that represented the whole of London – and of course they were privy to what was happening with Grunwick right from pretty well the start. [4:03]

9. **CT:** So what had caused him to take the action locally?
10. **DW:** What, to black the mail?
11. **CT:** Yeah.
12. **DW:** Well, what happened was the pickets had come out of Grunwick in Chapter Road, and they were picketing the area, and they refused to cross the picket lines, the postmen refused to cross the picket lines.
13. **CT:** Do you just want to pick that one up again? Just say it was the postmen who refused it, yeah. So how it started?
14. **DW:** Yes, what happened was that the Grunwick workers were picketing outside the factory in Grunwick – Chapter Road – and the postmen who would be delivering there refused to cross the picket lines. That was the start, when we first got involved in the dispute, yes.
15. **CT:** And what was the response then to management of Grunwick and the management of the local branch of the Post Office?
16. **DW:** Well, we had in those days a London-type agreement where we agreed with the management that we would not cross picket lines. Our argument was that at times it could be dangerous to do that, and we wouldn't allow postmen to be put in that sort of danger. Because of this, there was an agreement with the Post Office and any firm that wanted it, and that was when we refused to cross picket lines they were allowed to go to the Post Office to pick up their mail. And that in fact was what was happening: they were picking up their own mail.
17. **CT:** I see. So, basically, the mail wasn't being collected –
18. **DW:** Correct.
19. **CT:** - but Ward was able to collect his mail. And how long did that situation last?
20. **DW:** Well, that lasted right the way through the dispute. I mean, right the way until the following year, when Cricklewood got forced back to work. But yes, that happened right the way through. I suppose that was the simple part of the dispute, really. What happened from there was that in the November we blacked all Grunwick mail after Tom Jackson had been asked by Roy Grantham, who was the general secretary of APEX, if we could help him to progress the dispute. So that's what we did; we, the whole of the nation blacked Grunwick mail, and it was to the man, and because of this

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none of the Grunwick work moved at all. Following this, three days later, we found ourselves in court, taken there by the National Association for Freedom and George Ward, and we were being told that it was a criminal offence for us to black the Grunwick mail, and that under the 1953 Acts that, if in fact we were to black the mail, that we could be, well, we could be taken to court. I mean that's what the scene was about then. [6:59]

21. **CT:** But if my memory serves me well, wasn't it that there was a famous meeting at Conway Hall at the end of July with Norman Stagg³, is that right?
22. **DW:** That was after this. We're talking now [about] November in the seventy-six, aren't we?
23. **CT:** Ah, right, sorry.
24. **DW:** November seventy-six, yeah, yeah.
25. **CT:** OK. So, November of seventy-six; and that's the time when he had his little 'Pony Express' thing, when he smuggled –
26. **DW:** No, no. This was after this in seventy-seven, he was, actually the 'Pony Express' was on the ninth of July 1977. What happened was that the union – our union – took one official dispute, where we blacked the mail in November the first 1976, and then we had a further unofficial dispute when we blacked the mail London-wise – just London – and that was where I got involved personally with my friend John Taylor, where we were the organisers of London and we took unofficial action, which of course put us in difficulty with our own general secretary and executive council, and led in the end to us being fined over a thousand pounds, my committee was fined over a thousand pounds.
27. **CT:** Let's just go back over that story because we've now got to the part where there's official action is being requested (**DW:** correct) and given from one general secretary to another. We then have that challenged in court (**DW:** yes) and that backing is then lifted because it's a threat to the union funds. Is that right?
28. **DW:** That is correct. What happened [was] the injunction was taken out, and at the time George Ward was not co-operating with ACAS⁴, and on the side there was some discussion between our solicitors, and George Ward did agree that he would co-operate with ACAS providing that we lifted our blacking. And so Tom Jackson – I suppose itching for some reason to get off the hook, I don't know – but Tom Jackson agreed that we would lift the blacking. And of course it's history now that George Ward didn't keep his word.
29. **CT:** So then the story carries on (**DW:** right, yes) and what happens then? How were you approached?

³ Deputy general secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers.

⁴ Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

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30. **DW:** Well, what happened is that the difficulties continued and we were of course still hearing back from our own branch, that were still refusing to cross picket lines. We were also ourselves joining in the pickets at Grunwick, so we were –
31. **CT:** Can I ask you to start that story again, so you can explain, when you say “we were supporting”, that was London branch, was it, as distinct from Cricklewood, is that right?
32. **DW:** No, this was a general – yes, this is general London feeling for the strike, and being around and attending the picket and generally helping, but no more, probably, than any other union at the time that was also in the area, if you understand me, because we were all involved.
33. **CT:** Right, so just say – let’s start that story again. Just so the situation was continued and then you were approached -
34. **DW:** Yes. What happened was that in July, in July 1976, Jack Dromey⁵ felt that the strike was getting nowhere.
35. **CT:** Was that not 1977?
36. **DW:** It was, yeah.
37. **CT:** OK, let’s – it’s OK, we’ll just get the dates. We’ve got plenty of time to get it right. OK, so what happened in the next?
38. **DW:** Yeah, so things continued, the momentum of the strike continued with the mass pickets still attending at the Grunwick area, and we were not approached again until July 1976 by Jack Dromey. And Jack said to us that he felt the strike was losing its momentum, and he said that unless we had some backing from trade unions, in the form of the blacking of their work, that he thought the strike would be lost. At the time we were rather hopeful that the other unions would join in: the electricity and water, because they were both essential services for Grunwick, but unfortunately nothing occurred, we didn’t get anywhere with that. So yes, so it was after Jack Dromey had spoken to us that we telephoned round to our branches and got them to agree to put on the blacking again. Later on we went to one of our monthly meetings and we got ratification for what we did. So we switched the blacking on again and that lasted, well, for twenty days actually, twenty days throughout the July.
39. **CT:** How difficult was it to get support?
40. **DW:** From our branches, as I say, they were in the know, they did know what was happening. I would say that we did have some difficulty, as you always do have, and you go round and talk to the branch secretaries, go in and have a meeting and tell the branch exactly what’s happening. I mean,

⁵ Secretary of Brent Trades Union Council.

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when you start saying that “here we’ve got a bully” – and that’s who Mr George Ward was, I mean, he was a bully that was putting his staff under a lot of pressure, that was paying them meagre wages, and at the last minute was asking them to do compulsory overtime just as they were packing up to go home – when you tell me people that and you say “look, they’ve got no one, these are immigrants, people that’ve come over.” And of course the unions have got, I think, quite a lot of sympathy for that sort of situation. And so yes, it wasn’t all that difficult once you got in there and explained the facts branches were prepared to black the mail, yes. [12:57]

41. **CT:** And so how did it – what happened then?

42. **DW:** Well, this continued, and were becoming more and more threatened by our own union about what we were doing. They were telling us that, as we’d already got an injunction out against us, that we were already breaking that injunction. The union had themselves therefore had to work at arm’s length away from us, saying that it was “nothing at all to do with us”, nationally. And this meant of course that, as we were being told, we were personally at risk, and that we could lose our houses, we could lose any of our assets that we had, yes.

43. **CT:** So let me just get that clear: who was telling you this and who was “we”?

44. **DW:** The executive council - Tom Jackson in particular, Norman Stagg, who was the deputy general secretary – all of them were quite incensed about what we were doing. They all believed that we had already done enough by blacking the mail in the November of seventy-six, and that having done that we’d done our stint. They also told us we were under another – we had another problem and that was that we had already been pulled into the courts by the National Association for Freedom for blacking the – by foreign boycott of South African goods and mail, and we had been boycotting the mail, and the National Association for Freedom also had an injunction out against us. It was being told us by Tom Jackson and Norman Stagg that we were liable to lose our right to strike in the future if we continued with what we [were] doing. So there was a number of different threats and fears that we had about what we were doing, yes.

45. **CT:** And where did this come to the crunch?

46. **DW:** Well, Tom Jackson came down to a meeting on the – I think it was in July seventy-six – and he instructed us to pull all our delegates together.

47. **CT:** It must have been seventy-seven, though?

48. **DW:** I’m getting my –

49. **CT:** Don’t worry, just pick it up from “how did it come to the crunch, then?”

50. **DW:** Well, what happened was that Tom Jackson instructed us to call a meeting of our delegates together, which we did in July 1977. And Tom Jackson came down and he gave an account of what he had learned from our solicitors, what was liable to happen to us if we continued doing what we were doing. He told us that our jobs would be at risk and that we would be sacked by the Post

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Office. And he said that our families could lose their homes, etcetera, etcetera. And so it was pretty hard for the delegates there not to take notice of what was being said by our general secretary. There was also quite a lot of loyalty as well; we were a trade union that were very loyal to our executive council in normal circumstances. So yes, so they decided to call off the blacking; Tom Jackson had won the day, and that was that. At the end of that, I and John Taylor, my other district organiser, spoke to the Cricklewood lads at the back of the hall, and we said "well, that's it, we've done all we can do." But Colin Maloney and Dave Dodds said "there is no way that we can ask our people to work normal when we go back to the Post Office." He said "we just can't do it." We said "well, what help can we give you now? You know, we're lost; London have now decided they're not going to support any more industrial action." So, we left it and they went back to their office, and they spoke to their postmaster, and they said to him that they were prepared to handle all other mail with the exception of Grunwick mail. And their postmaster said to them "well, that's just not on. That we're just not going to allow that. You cannot segregate - [part of black background falls down] [17:09]

51. **CT:** Hold on, I'm going to have to just stop [background restored]. OK, so Tom Jackson was putting on the heat, yeah.
52. **DW:** Tom Jackson arrived; he instructed us to call this meeting, which we didn't want to call, we were quite happy with the way things were going. But he said "you've got to call a meeting," so we called a meeting, and all the delegates were instructed to attend. And Tom arrived with the chairman of the union, and Tom put on a very strong case as to why we should not black Grunwick mail. He also, one might say, threatened us with the fact that we could be taken to court, we could have all our assets taken from us, that we could lose our job, etcetera, etcetera. At the end of the meeting, John Taylor replied for us – for the council, my council – and he lost the day. And the vote was taken and we lost. So that, we thought, was it. And we walked to the back of the hall and met up with the Cricklewood lads, who were very, very desolate, they really were, they were very, very despondent. And we said "well, there's nothing more we can do now. You'll have to tell the lads to go back to work." They said "there is no possible way we can do that. We are not telling our lads to go back to work. As far as we are concerned, we are going back to our office and we are not going to touch Grunwick mail." Well, that's what happened; they went back to their office, they saw the postmaster, their postmaster, and they informed him that they were quite happy to sort all other mail with the exception of Grunwick mail. And the postmaster said "I'm sorry, but that is not possible; you either sort everything or you are suspended." And they said "well, sorry, but we're not prepared to sort Grunwick mail." He then suspended them and closed the office. That was the state of affairs until nine days later. And what happened was that the National Association for Freedom, with obviously the help of the Post Office, went into the office and extracted sixty-nine bags of mail that was trapped there. They then took this mail to a warehouse somewhere, and they stuck stamps on it and then despatched at different locations throughout the country, which they nicknamed 'the Pony Express'. And as far as we were concerned, what happened was that this mail started appearing in different locations throughout the country, and our people recognised it, and they said "oh, what's happening here?" You know, "this is Grunwick mail." So they refused to sort it, because we also had an agreement about diversions, and we were not allowed to divert work without the branch having knowledge of what was happening. So, seeing this work appear, they were naturally very worried about it. And Tom Jackson at the time told them not to sort the mail

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until he had met with his executive council. He had also got legal advice, and there was little doubt whatsoever that the National Association for Freedom and the Post Office had actually broke the 1953 Monopolies and Mergers Act by allowing people [who were] not Post Office officials to go into the Post Office, take this work out and just sort it, and to despatch it throughout the country. The Post Office alone had the monopoly of dealing with mail in this way. Now, we thought that Tom Jackson and the executive council, having the first real chance of having the legal position in their favour, that they would refuse to co-operate and they would not handle the mail. But unfortunately, this did not happen, and from what I heard from John Taylor, who attended the meeting – and obviously voted for the blacking of the mail nationally that was appearing in these post boxes – he informs me that the voting was thirteen to fifteen for continuing to sort the mail, which really as far as we were concerned was probably the biggest disappointment that we had. So that was the end of the main card that we had to play, after which the Cricklewood lads were called back to the office. There was now no work in there and no reason for them to do anything else but to sort normal mail, which was coming in from pillar boxes all over the place, and so that was the end of the dispute as far as the union was concerned, the Cricklewood branch was concerned.

[22.28]

53. **CT:** Just before we move the story forward: how did George Ward and his management get access to the post, the sorting office, to retrieve their mail?
54. **DW:** With the Post Office[’s] help. The Post Office and them connived to do it, there’s little doubt whatsoever.
55. **CT:** Let’s just elaborate on that story again. I mean, in the way that George Ward was able to get hold of his mail in that operation.
56. **DW:** Well, I think that the thing had got really big. I mean, it really had, with Callaghan⁶ being involved – I mean, I know that he was talking to Tom Jackson about the problems that we were having. We were becoming a complete and utter embarrassment to the government, to our own union, and I don’t think there’s any doubt whatsoever [that] there was conniving with the Post Office as a sort of last resort. They probably didn’t like what they had to do. They must have realised – because they must have got legal advice before they did it – they must have realised that they were breaking the Monopolies and Mergers Act; they must have realised they were taking a terrific chance because if we’d actually refused to handle that mail, I mean, and I don’t think there’s any doubt that the law would have come down in our favour, because it was a simple thing of looking at the Monopolies and Mergers Act and realising it had been broken. So, yeah.
57. **CT:** Let me just – sorry, to make it clear – because I lost it a little bit there: when George Ward got his mail back there must have – if you can just explain when he went into the Post Office to get his mail, there must have been collusion for him to do that.

⁶ James Callaghan, Prime Minister.

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58. **DW:** Oh yeah, there was no – yeah, there was collusion, I mean, there's no doubt. And the Post Office never said anything else, I mean, they couldn't do. In fact, when we got our legal people to look at it, I mean, they were quoting that the Post Office were at fault as well as what the Grunwick people were at fault.
59. **CT:** Just declare what George Ward did again: how he got into the Post Office.
60. **DW:** Well, what happened was that George Ward, with the help of the Post Office, went into the Cricklewood office, approximately about two o'clock a.m. in the morning, and extracted about sixty-nine bags of mail that was already been processed by Grunwick and was going back to people throughout the country, yeah. And what he did was that he, with the help of the Post Office, took this to a, we understand, a warehouse where he had people assisting to put stamps, overstamp the work, and then take it to different pillar boxes throughout the country and post it in pillar boxes so as in the morning the pillar boxes were emptied by our postmen and went back in to the different sorting offices throughout the country. Our people recognised the fact that this was not a normal posting; they realised that this was Cricklewood, this was mail that was proper to Cricklewood, and so they refused to touch it. And what happened was that the executive council were informed and Tom Jackson, and so Tom Jackson called the executive council together to discuss with them what should happen to this particular mail that had been posted in different boxes throughout the country. He must have known as well as we did that there was a break in the monopoly, that these people had acted illegally, and what we were hoping and expecting was for our executive council to tell us not to touch the mail, because if this had happened we felt that it was the one time that we were completely in line with the law, and we felt we had them on the hop. But unfortunately what happened was that when the debate had been finalised those were for trying to continue the blacking of the mail lost by thirteen to fifteen votes. I mean, that was the scene. And so what happened then was that there was no mail, no further mail in the Cricklewood office, and the Post Office lifted the suspensions, asked the people to go back into work, as there was no Grunwick mail there for them to touch there was no real problem, and from there the thing petered out as far as the UCW⁷ was concerned, that was our last involvement.
61. **CT:** We've missed out, though, one meeting which was the Conway Hall meeting.
62. **DW:** Yes, oh yes, yes, yes, I should've – after the 'Pony Express' had finished, what happened was that Tom Jackson called another meeting in Conway Hall, and instructed the Cricklewood branch to attend.
63. **CT:** Do you think you could put a date on that? That was towards the end of July 1977, wasn't it?
64. **DW:** It was, it certainly was, yes.
65. **CT:** Could you just start saying "at the end of July 1977," yeah.

⁷ Refers to Union of Post Office Workers, which did not become the Union of Communication Workers until 1980.

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66. **DW:** The end of July 1977, after the 'Pony Express', there was no Grunwick mail left in the office, and the Post Office therefore lifted the suspensions of the Cricklewood postmen, and they returned to work. There was no Grunwick mail in the office, so there was nothing for them to take offence about. No, I've still got it wrong, haven't I?
67. **CT:** That's OK.
68. **DW:** I've got it wrong.
69. **CT:** Before that, it was – if you just go straight into it with “in July [a] meeting was called by – “
70. **DW:** Yeah, that's right, yeah. I'm just thinking when the 'Pony Express' was, it was – it doesn't matter. Yeah, in July a meeting was called by Tom Jackson, our general secretary, and Norman Stagg, at Conway Hall, and the Cricklewood postmen were instructed to attend, which they did. Tom Jackson put over to the postmen, and Norman Stagg, the difficulties that they would face if they continued now to black the mail, because if they did do, it was a criminal act, and they were liable to go to prison, they were liable to be fined. And he asked them to take note of the Scarman Committee of Inquiry was still on-going, and that this was the real way that we could win this strike. We would not win it now by their industrial action carrying on any further. A vote was taken at the end of that meeting, and forty-six people voted for the amendment and forty-seven voted against the motion, and so the Cricklewood dispute was literally at an end, yes.
71. **CT:** What was the feeling?
72. **DW:** The feeling was terrible, it was devastating. I mean, it was devastating for everyone. Well, I mean, the dispute started, as I say, over bullying in the workplace by a few people, and bad wages, and recognition, but when it finished it really wasn't – that wasn't the whole of the argument. And we felt that the whole of the right wing of the country had joined together against the left with the intention of trying to beat the trade unions over the head with a big stick. And there's many of us feel that following that, that the government got a lot stronger instead of weaker. We didn't really achieve what we were after doing. The law was against us, I mean, no matter what we did the Law Lords went the other way. We seemed to – apart from Scarman, who gave we thought a very good report on what had happened inside the Grunwick factory, and he came down in our favour. But unfortunately, in spite of that, if you've got an employer that refuses to recognise these sort of things, and he refuses to co-operate, then of course you can't possibly win, and that's what happened. I mean, we just didn't win. Mr George Ward took no notice of ACAS, he took no notice of the Scarman Court of Inquiry. No one could force him to do that and we just go nowhere fast. **[31:33]**
73. **CT:** Who was putting pressure on Tom Jackson?
74. **DW:** Oh, I think [there is] little doubt that the government were putting pressure on Tom Jackson, yeah. I'm pretty certain that – but I think it was a very trying time: we were just com[ing] out of the, sort of, wage restraints; trade unions were really having enough of what was happening. I mean, only a couple of, or a year later, wasn't it, when we had the Winter of Discontent, wasn't it? Was

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that 1978, 79? And people were really fed up with life, if you understand me, fed up with the way they were being kicked around. That might have been one of the reasons why that they reacted in the way that they did in the dispute.

75. **CT:** What about the then Labour government? I mean, was that a friend of the trade union movement?

76. **DW:** Well, we thought it was a friend of the trade union movement when they moved in, but when they moved out I'm afraid, you know, there were some people that, you know, felt that it probably served them right because of the way that they had treated the working classes, you know, during that time, yeah. I mean, one of the main things was trying to bring inflation under control, and wages constraint with bringing the public service, bringing their wages down. And, of course, not being able to control the private, so the public services were really having quite enough of it all, yeah.

77. **CT:** What was going to win that dispute?

78. **DW:** Well, I think it could have only been won by our own power, by the powers of the trade union movement. If you work things out, the only way we could have really won was to have cut off George Ward's lifeline. If we'd had had the water, if we'd had had the electricity and the post all sticking together, then have the other unions backing up those three essential services, I think we would have had a chance of winning. But who knows, I mean, from their side, I mean, they brought in the Special Patrol police didn't they? SPG, the Special Patrol Group, who were no doubt the friends of George Ward, so we had this sort of heavy brigade moved in to try to push our pickets into line, etcetera.

79. **CT:** Let me come back to policing in a second. Because what I've heard is actually he was pretty close – that was one of the great sadnesses – just with the post, if the Post Office workers hadn't been threatened by their leadership and had stayed on, he was just about on his knees. True or not?

80. **DW:** We thought that at the time, yeah, we certainly thought that - the first dispute when the, the official one at the beginning - I mean, that was absolutely solid, and if Tom Jackson had held out I don't think that there is any way that we, that the country could not have won, the trade union movement could not have won. But there was so much fear; I mean, he was afraid that, Tom Jackson was afraid that we would end up with mass losses of jobs, you know, all sorts of things. He tried to get some form of assurances from the trade union movement, but some of the assurances were out of this world. For instance, it would cost at the time fifteen million pounds, I think it was, to pay the postmen's wages, you know, and they were saying "well look, if postmen lose that sort of money, could you raise that sort of money?" asking Len Murray⁸ if he could raise that sort of money to deal with things.

⁸ General secretary of the Trades Union Congress.

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81. **CT:** It seems extraordinary now that you could think that the panic was set in where one tiny little maverick employer in north-west London was going to cause an effective total stoppage of the post. All the ways the country depended on the post for industry and both for domestic services, and that will be allowed to happen. I mean, why did he actually believe that? It was -
82. **DW:** Why did – who actually believed that?
83. **CT:** Well, you were saying that Tom Jackson was saying “look, if we carry on we’re all going to be out of jobs, we’re all going to be, you know, locked out, there’s going to be fifteen thousand postal workers out of a job, who’s going to pay? I haven’t got that money in my union.” Why did he believe the threat? Did he actually believe that the country and George Ward could effectively force a lock-out of fifteen thousand postmen so no post would be delivered in the country? I mean, now, looking at it, it sounds mad, doesn’t it?
84. **DW:** It does sound mad, but of course things were probably a little bit different in those days. There was an awful lot of worry about what would happen to us as a trade union. As I say, what happened was that we’d already been to court twice, and we got injunctions taken out against us twice: once was for the Grunwick dispute in the November of seventy-six, and the other time was for the blacking of South African goods, with the post and telegraphs, in seventy-seven, in January seventy-seven. We were being told that we could lose the right to strike for good if we continued the way we were going. I mean, who really would believe that they could have done that? I mean, but at that time we had Tom Jackson actually believing that we could lose the right to strike forever. You know, I mean, this is the mental sort of way that things were being thought about in those days.
85. **CT:** Who was breathing down his neck?
86. **DW:** Oh, Callaghan – [I’m] pretty certain it was the government, yeah, oh yeah. Remember, they were a lot closer in those days, the government and the general treasurers – sorry, the general secretaries – they were much closer. I mean, it was only a little while before that we used to have the meeting-up of all the big-time, Gormley⁹ and Jack Jones¹⁰ and what-not. And they were still pretty close to the government, and I think that they pretty well knew that, or rather felt sympathy for the problems the government was going through.
87. **CT:** So were they more sympathetic with the government than their own members?
88. **DW:** Very hard to say, very hard to say. There was a lot of conniving going on. I mean, Len Murray gave the impression he was trying to get the essential services together, but nothing seemed to be very pressurised. Everyone was talking about what we should be doing, but not many people doing a lot at all. That’s why I’ve got so much respect for my, for the Cricklewood lads. I mean they were, certainly put themselves in a position where they could have lost their jobs, yeah, they could have lost everything, and they had nothing to gain except, I think, the fact that they stood firm and were

⁹ Joe Gormley, president of the National Union of Mineworkers, 1971-1982.

¹⁰ General secretary of the Transport and General Workers’ Union, 1969-1978.

Summary and transcript of interview of Derek Walsh by Chris Thomas, 2007 (803/09)

Approximate timings given in minutes and seconds in various places

going to continue to stand firm. They were tough, and, you know, I've got a hell of a lot of respect for those lads and lasses, yeah, I really have.

89. **CT:** So what happened? Just explain – let me just check we've got enough time on this roll – yeah. Just say your role in the London organisation of the dispute, and the solidarity support, and what happened to you.

90. **DW:** Well, there was two of us, two organisers of London: John Taylor, who was to me the highlight. He was a very strong person, a cockney that came from the east end of London. John Taylor was the leading light as far as London was concerned; I'm privileged to be beside him as his friend and the other district organiser. So, sorry, I got a little bit carried away there.

91. **CT:** No, that's absolutely perfect. Just one second; if we get it right now, I'm going to run out of tape. Let me just get –