

## Summary and transcript of interview of Graham Taylor by Chris Thomas, 2007 (803/10A part 1)

Approximate timings given in minutes and seconds in various places.

### Summary

Subjects include (transcript paragraph numbers given in brackets): inability of TUC officials to override vested interests on the General Council to get stronger support for the strike (5-8); Taylor's regret that passive resistance tactics were rejected by the strikers' trade unionist supporters (21).

### Transcript

1. **CT:** OK, explain the approaches that were made to George Ward<sup>1</sup> to stand up on this one.
2. **GT:** I think George Ward's main motivation was personal ambition; this comes across in his book very clearly. But when he was faced with the initial postal boycott in November, his hard work, as he saw it, over many years was going to be destroyed, and he was very glad when, suddenly, [the] National Association for Freedom appeared on the scene. And they offered him advice, they offered him legal expertise, they offered him all sorts of backing from people who were very well-off and people who were very knowledgeable about politics and the law. Naturally, he accepted that. I don't think he was politically motivated at first, but soon he went along with it and became a convert to their cause.
3. **CT:** What happened to George Ward after the dispute?
4. **GT:** After the dispute, George Ward continued with his business. He did have an interest in politics and stood in his local constituency to – no he didn't, it wasn't his local . . . After the strike, Grunwick continued. It was successful, it's still continuing now. And George Ward tried his hand at politics – he seemed to have acquired a taste for it – and he was even considered as a candidate for Tory MP in one of the London boroughs.
5. **CT:** Terrific. Again, one question possibly we disagree on, really. It's around, you know – someone once said to me if Len Murray<sup>2</sup> had been as charismatic, dynamic as Jack Dromey<sup>3</sup> in terms of co-ordinating trade unions, and co-ordinating the leadership of trade unions to present a united front to the government, there would have been no contest, actually, at the end of the day. It would have been won straight out. But it was divided, and he didn't have either the charisma or the political ability to unite disparate elements on the trade union [TUC] General Council to present a united front, that whatever, if it really gets tough, we will actually, there'll be no services at all. And even the threat could have resolved the dispute. [3:09]
6. **GT:** I don't think Len Murray and the TUC could have done a lot more than they did in regard to the strike. The General Council of the TUC takes decisions, and the TUC officials themselves just abide by those decisions. And the General Council is a mass of vested interests, and the trade union

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<sup>1</sup> Owner of Grunwick.

<sup>2</sup> General secretary of the Trades Union Congress.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of Brent Trades Council.

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leaders there are going to stick out for what they think is the interest of their trade union. It's a self-interest group, and although Len Murray and other TUC officials were very sympathetic to the strike – and Len Murray actually came down to Brent and gave an impassioned speech saying that he was a supporter of the strike and would help them as much as he could – there was a limit, always a limit, to what the TUC could do. The TUC itself has no real power.

7. **CT:** But not with charismatic leadership, actually pointing out the consequences of failure, actually having a bigger vision for the trades union movement, calling on solidarity from the bureaucrats as was being demonstrated by the rank and file?
8. **GT:** I think the people on the General Council of the TUC are always conscious of their own union and their own union policies, and of their own position in that union, and they give very limited attention to the pleas of TUC officials. If there's not a lot to lose – for example, in the autumn of 1976, when there was nothing really for them to lose by giving enthusiastic support to the strike – then OK, Len Murray was able to win support from them. But once the anti was raised, and mass picketing was on the streets, and government was involved, and their cosy chats with government ministers were imperilled by what was going on in the Grunwick strike, no, I don't think Len Murray at that stage could have shifted them. [5:34]
9. **CT:** Brilliant. I've asked everybody this, and then we can start, just review everything, but we've got – I've got a . . . Residing positive memory of the dispute.
10. **GT:** Oh dear. Can you just hold on a second?
11. **CT:** Sure, sure.
12. **GT:** Should've thought of this earlier. You were bound to ask this.
13. **CT:** Anything. I mean, a moment of [to] treasure, basically. [break]
14. **CT:** OK. Yeah, a moment you treasure.
15. **GT:** I think the most abiding memories I have are from the winter of 1976 to [19]77, when the strike hadn't really got known around the country and wasn't a television item but was sort of in its low period. And it was so inspiring to hear Jayaben Desai<sup>4</sup> and the other Indian women on that picket line, day after day, keeping their spirits up, acting from conviction, from belief in the justice of their cause through very dark, cold winter months, and sticking to their guns, though they were losing money and they were being abused by passers-by, including racist abuse. But they kept going in such an inspiring way, and I think that's the memory I treasure most.
16. **CT:** I'm just going to ask you to go again: just a little 'vox popy' thing, the treasured moment again, just briefer [8:25]

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<sup>4</sup> Treasurer of the Grunwick strike committee.

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17. **GT:** I'm just thinking of a moment on the picket line in the winter of seventy-six, when a real racist came up to the women and made an abusive remark, and Jayaben turned to the girls who were standing there and said "do not answer that man! He knows nothing of history." And that sticks in my mind because it showed the sort of pride they had in their cause and the fact that they felt such a thing as racism was beneath them, beneath their contempt. There was that.
18. **CT:** That's terrific, that's terrific. I guess the negative, the negative.
19. **GT:** Well, the worst moments were in the summer of seventy-seven, when you could just feel the whole thing ebbing away, and there was nothing you could do about it. And I also had this feeling that there were lots of people who had switched off and had a political agenda that was quite remote from the strikers' cause. And yet the strikers' cause was such a good cause: they were fighting against an injustice and no one had helped them. And somehow they couldn't be helped; the strike was definitely going to be lost, and that was very hard to take. But you're looking for one particular incident, I know.
20. **CT:** No, no, that's . . . Did you think it was all over when the [postmen]? Was that the kind of . . . ?
21. **GT:** Actually, one of the incidents that really gutted me in the strike, and I felt really bad about it, was when they decided in the June not to use the non-violent tactics that the Indian women had suggested: the passive resistance, the Gandhi tactics. And I remember at the end of that meeting when they'd asked to be allowed to use that method and it had been dismissed out of hand, I really felt down because at that moment the media were having a field-day with all these violent images of fights between pickets and police, and it seemed to me that it had been worth a try, you know, that Gandhi did very well in India. He won the independence of India, and so it couldn't be such a bad tactic as the traditional trade unionists seemed to think.