

Summary and transcript of interview of Derek Walsh by Chris Thomas, 2007 (803/11 part 1)

Summary

Mainly relates to the motivation of the members of the Cricklewood branch of the Union of Post Office Workers in risking their own jobs by supporting the Grunwick strike.

Transcript

1. **CT:** OK, just about stepping up to the mark: you were saying, you know, the moment comes, yeah.
2. **DW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think in life, especially in this sort of dispute, there comes a time when you have to make up your mind what way you're going. And I think them lads at Cricklewood – lads and lasses at Cricklewood – had made up their mind. They were prepared to give a little bit more than what the normal person [is] prepared to give to ensure that they got a satisfactory outcome for the people that they were fighting for. And I think that there comes in life with everyone – it's personal, life does become personal, and not many people, unfortunately, in this day and age, be they trade unionists or whatever, are not prepared to put themselves at risk for other people. And I think that the Cricklewood lads in particular – the Cricklewood lads and lasses in particular – were prepared to put thierself out to the point that they could have lost their job. They certainly could have been in grave difficulties, and yet they were prepared to do what they did for other people. Unfortunately, that sort of wonderful thing in life doesn't seem to happen too often. Had it happened on this particular occasion with Grunwick, and had the trade union movement really stepped up to the line, and really felt that they had a course [cause] that was worth fighting for, and they had fought, then I'm quite sure that a different outcome would have arisen at the end of the day.
3. **CT:** Why do people make that decision?
4. **DW:** Not to? Not to?
5. **CT:** To take away the support. As you say, some people step up and do it [indistinct]. Why do people do it?
6. **DW:** I think a lot is to do with what you know, and I really believe that the reason why the Cricklewood people did what they did is because they had been told at meeting after meeting exactly what was happening in the Grunwick factory. They knew the suffering that was going on, and they knew that what they were doing was for a good, just cause. I believe that's why London in itself did what it did; and unfortunately that sort of thing isn't general throughout the trade union movement as great as what it, you know, as it could be. I didn't put that last bit right, did I?
7. **CT:** That's all right. I mean, let's just repeat it, there's plenty of time: so why do people step up to the mark?
8. **DW:** I think that they step up to the mark mainly because they've got a just cause, they've got something to fight for, they believe in something. On the opposite side, it's probably why the National Association for Freedom did what they did, because they thought that they had a cause. But our people, I think that Cricklewood in particular stepped up to the mark because they understood what was happening. I think that their branch had put them completely in the picture about these, the way these people were being treated, the wages that they'd been earning, the fact

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that they could be put on compulsory overtime, they had to put up their hand to go to the toilet. And I think the Cricklewood people thought, “that is not something that I would stand for in this post office, and this is something that I don’t think other people should stand for, and therefore I’m prepared to put myself forward, even if it hurts, to do what I can to help.”

9. **CT:** I mean, basically after all, trade unionism is about how we look after each other, isn’t it?
10. **DW:** It is, but unfortunately it didn’t seem to work that way, as life doesn’t seem to work that way, does it?
11. **CT:** Do you rank their action alongside other actions taken by the trade union – historically?
12. **DW:** What was that, sorry?
13. **CT:** Yeah, I mean, how do you rate the action taken by the Cricklewood postmen historically?
14. **DW:** Oh, I think it’s quite historic because, I mean, how many people are prepared to do for another union what they did for the APEX union? I think the other thing, of course, is that they realised that they were in a prime position. I mean, when you are in a mail order business, and you’re the Post Office, I mean, obviously the postal worker has more strength than any other union on the face of the earth, because the very commodity that Mr George Ward wants is in their hands. And so I do think that they felt that they had certain strength and that other people couldn’t do what they were doing, and that probably spurred them on as well, because they were being informed by their branch about what the scene was. So I really do believe that having the knowledge and understanding of what’s happening does help people when it comes to any cause like this, yeah, yeah I do.
15. **CT:** Anything else you want to say?
16. **DW:** I said my little bit about Jack Dromey¹, didn’t I? Which I think is important. No, not really, no. Just my own little London committee, I thought that they did absolutely marvellously, the way that they – there were six committee [members] plus the two district organisers, and they all stood gallantly together as one. No one faltered for all the difficulties that we had regarding the threats that we had made against us, of what they were going to do to us. And to a man we all stood absolutely firm, no one backed out. And so, yeah, I’m quite proud of the fact that we, together, held hands, if you understand me, through the problems what we had. Disappointments: I suppose the way our general secretary² – I thought he probably could have done that last thing that was most important, and that was when the law was on our side, he could have gone with it, but there you are. I think that’s about it for me.
17. **CT:** Terrific!

¹ Secretary of Brent Trades Union Council at the time of the dispute.

² Tom Jackson.