

## Summary and transcript of interview of Mary Davis by Chris Thomas, 2007 (803/18)

Approximate timings given in minutes and seconds in various places.

### Summary

Subjects include (transcript paragraph numbers given in brackets): serious foot injuries sustained by Davis during attack on her on picket line by members of police Special Patrol Group (8); negative reaction to her appearance at subsequent press conference organised by TUC (8); unsupportive attitude of Labour government to the strike and to trade unionism generally (12, 18, 60); right-wing groups supporting George Ward, owner of Grunwick (13-17, 19); underestimate by government of level of support for strikers (22, 46); significance of support given to Asian women by labour movement (22, 60); blacking of Grunwick mail by Cricklewood postal workers and lack of support from their own union (23-34, 42); role of the TUC (36-42, 46, 55); conservatism of APEX and its general secretary Roy Grantham and the way in which the dispute forced them to be more progressive (44-46); lack of unified sense of purpose in labour movement (48, 54); role of the media and its relationship to government (50-52, 60, 63); concern of Labour government and TUC to preserve Social Contract and (54); George Ward's disregard for conciliatory procedures (58); reactions to rise in trade union membership to a peak in 1979 (60).

### Transcript

1. **CT:** Right [?might as well] start at the beginning. I mean, what was your trade union, what trade union activity were you involved with at the time of the Grunwick dispute?
2. **MD:** Well, I was the chair of the NATFHE<sup>1</sup> branch at Tottenham College of Technology. I was also on Haringey Trades Council. I was active at a local level, because I'd just had a child, so I didn't get involved much in national things until they were a bit older. And we had made a decision locally that we would attend the picket line every morning, which we did. It was quite a commitment, and that's a whole group of us from the branch did that.
3. **CT:** When did you first attend, then?
4. **MD:** It was quite early on. I can't give you the exact date, I really can't, but it was certainly at the time that there was mass picketing, and there was a call made through trades councils and other organisations for there to be people to go and swell the ranks, as it were.
5. **CT:** And how did the actual – you heard through that call – how did you actually formally hear, or informally hear, about the Grunwick dispute?
6. **MD:** Well, I mean, it was [a] very famous dispute, wasn't it? And certainly through the *Morning Star*, through trades council circulars; through the union as well, because it was officially supported by the TUC anyway, so all affiliated unions received news about Grunwick. So, yeah, I mean it was a *cause celebre* in the sense that the miners' strike later became that. You know, a group of women who were fighting for trade union recognition, and of course this was at the period where trade union recognition was a very, very important issue. The Labour government was in power, and trade union recognition was one of the things that they had promised, and for them not to get recognition really was, I think, felt by many trade unionists to be something which could affect us all.

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education.

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7. **CT:** And when you attended the picket, what happened? What was your observations?
8. **MD:** Well, for many days things were relatively quiet and peaceable, but I was badly injured, personally, on a fairly momentous day, dreadful day really. It was the first day that the Special Patrol Group replaced the local constabulary as the police officers for the dispute, and that made an incredible amount of difference. There was a certain amount of good-humoured bantering between police and picketers up until that time. The day the Special Patrol Group came there was [had] obviously been a decision made from on high that mass picketing was not going to be tolerated at all any more. And the Special Patrol Group are distinguished by two things: one is their brutality, and the other is the fact that they don't wear numbers on their epaulettes so you can't distinguish them. The local police that were there warned us that we were in for a good hiding that day, and of course you don't believe things until you see them. I was standing in a line with people from my own workplace, and one of these gentlemen of the constabulary – not a very gentle man, a horrible man – grabbed this woman's hair, and that was an Irish woman, she had very long hair, and I said to him "leave her hair alone, it's hurting her!" So he said "right," he said, "we'll have you instead." And with that, he grabbed me and a circle of them just came round me so that they were so huge you couldn't see me in the middle of this. I mean, there must have been eight or ten policemen just encircled me completely, linking arms. And their tactic was simply to stamp on my feet: stamp, stamp, stamp, stamp, stamp. Nobody could hear or see anything – well, they might be able to hear but – I mean, it was mayhem. I mean, I wasn't the only one being attacked, but I was left with the small – unable to walk, and had to be conveyed to an accident and emergency unit by ambulance. I had the small bones in one foot broken, and the other one was absolutely cut to the bone. I mean, you could actually see the bone in my foot where their hobnail boots had, you know, I mean, absolutely diabolical stuff. And I was in a wheelchair for, well, weeks and weeks afterwards. [5:15] Another woman had her arm broken; they seemed to be going for women, actually, particularly singling out women on that day. There was a big hoo-ha made about it because it was brutal, and of course the problem was that we couldn't get numbers because they didn't have numbers, although there was a picture in the *Morning Star* of me on the floor and police officers just about vaguely identifiable. There was a press conference at the TUC organised because they said that they would definitely, you know, seek to ensure that, you know, justice was done, and "this brutality, blah, blah, blah", you know. And at the press conference I was wheeled in in my wheelchair, and the other woman had her broken arm and so on, so we looked like, sort of, you know, casualties, really. Well, we were casualties but, you know, [we] looked like war wounded. And we shouldn't really have gone to that press conference at all; it was a real stitch-up, you can well imagine. I was asked where I worked and, foolishly, foolishly I said where I did work, and that was printed in the *Daily Mail*, and of course, hate mail came to my workplace with demands that I be immediately kicked out of my job and how could somebody like this be – I was a lecturer at a college of further education at the time. But also what came out was the fact that I had a baby. Oh dear! Well, that really made people hit the roof: "ha! Mother goes on picket line! Der, der, der! She deserves all she gets!" You know, with all sorts of implications that this was a, just a, you know, callous and casual approach to motherhood, and all the rest of it. How could she – breast-feeding mother, as though they knew I was even breast-feeding – but that's neither here nor there, you know. So the press conference was absolutely diabolical, really, in terms of the impact. There were a number of MPs who were taking up the case. Len Murray was the TUC general secretary at the time, and, you know, he interviewed

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us. You know, I was a bit concerned that it became a bit of a diversion from the issue of the strike, although I do think police brutality was a major issue because they were trying to do everything to stop the solidarity of that picket. [8:04]

9. **CT:** On that exact point: at the time, as you say, a Labour government in power, Merlyn Rees was the Home Secretary. Was he complicit in that form of policing? Did he turn a blind eye to it? Or did he actively want the picket intimidated and the SPG to do that job?
10. **MD:** I think Merlyn Rees was entirely complicit, that's my view. That demand had to come from on high; you don't get the local force replaced by the special patrol group just because the local constabulary decide. It is decided by the Met<sup>2</sup> on orders from above, so I think Merlyn Rees, who was pretty unsupportive anyway, was complicit.
11. **CT:** So that brings us to the Labour government: what was their response to the strike, and how did they want it to resolve?
12. **MD:** Well, I think they were – it's a very – I mean, I'm a labour historian, so it always strikes me that this is the contradiction that Labour in power always faces: that on the one hand it might pass legislation which appears to be union-friendly, on the other hand it wants to preserve a paradise for the capitalist class if you like – of whom George Ward<sup>3</sup> was an example of a sort of self-made man, entrepreneur, blah, blah, blah – to be able to make their profits in the way they see fit. And the key thing within that is to have orderly industrial relations. What they saw in terms of the Grunwick dispute was disorderly industrial relations, because those mass pickets, as far as they were concerned, were something they had to smash, because that kind of solidarity, really, you know, was something – if you think back to *In place of strife*<sup>4</sup>, which was really only four years beforehand. I mean, they were trying to ensure that things like that got sent to a court of arbitration. I mean, in this case, George Ward was clearly defying every precept that the Labour Government said it was in favour [of]. It simply refused to recognise a union: what were the women supposed to do?
13. **CT:** OK, so now let's talk about how that situation was being exploited by the forces that were supporting George Ward. Who were they?
14. **MD:** Well, the Aims of Industry and various organisations like that: highly organised forces who had in the fifties and sixties had different incarnations as anti-communist forces. I mean, they saw everything as a communist plot, including these Asian women as, you know, agents of foreign powers and all sorts. So George Ward was being supported by – I don't know whether by the CBI<sup>5</sup>, I would imagine he was.

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<sup>2</sup> Metropolitan Police.

<sup>3</sup> Owner of Grunwick.

<sup>4</sup> White Paper on industrial relations, 1969

<sup>5</sup> Confederation of British Industry.

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15. **CT:** The National Association of [for] Freedom were the main players.
16. **MD:** The National Association of [for] Freedom, yes, but that was, the predecessor of that was Aims of Industry; they're all one in the same to me. So he was their darling; I mean, he was giving trade union militants a bloody good hiding. And, you know, that was, from 1979, I mean, he was, I think, thought of as a great hero during the Winter of Discontent<sup>6</sup>: "see what happens when you don't deal with – don't support the George Wards of this world. You get this disorder on the streets and we can't have that."
17. **CT:** But I was thinking more: were they as forces, the National Association of [for] Freedom and their allies, aware of the contradiction of the Labour government, in terms of its relation to trade unions, and its anxiety to be a competent government for a capitalist system, that this was ripe for exploitation?
18. **MD:** Well, you see, the thing is that – I mean, this is where there really is major debate about this, because would the Tories have done anything different? And now, there is a view which is now – because the state papers are now being revealed after thirty years, and we can see – that there was a view that up until 1979 there was a harmony of interest between – well, the so-called 'Butskellism'<sup>7</sup>, you know, the consensus view of British politics, that Labour and Tory, broadly speaking, had similar industrial relations policies. It would appear that that's not actually the case. I mean, the proof is yet to be – it's only anecdotal – it's not anecdotal, the papers are there, but they're still being looked at. I think that certainly after seventy-nine there was a big stepped change, but was it really such a change? Did the Tories already. . ? I mean, both parties, I think, were beginning to evolve during the seventies anti-union policies, despite the fact that the Labour government arguably did, you know, quite a lot: you know, establishing the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Trade Union Labour Relations Act, and so on and so forth. But when it actually came down to trade union power, as it were, in terms of collective bargaining and workplace organisation, I think they were as concerned as the Tories were. **[13:35]**
19. **CT:** But I'm thinking: these forces were already [interruption]. I'm just wondering in terms of, you know, as we review and look back at it thirty years on, and the forces that were being groomed in the background. They were already choosing and selecting their new Conservative leader, and there had been, obviously, the miners' dispute that had removed Heath's<sup>8</sup>, the Tory government –
20. **MD:** Seventy-two and seventy-four, yeah.
21. **CT:** Seventy-two and seventy-three and seventy-four. So there was unfinished business from that, and if they could, you know, generate an industrial calamity in terms of how it's viewed by the

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<sup>6</sup> Series of industrial disputes in 1978-1979.

<sup>7</sup> Term for political consensus of the 1950s derived from the surnames of Rab Butler and Hugh Gaitskell.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Heath.

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general public, that could be the background when they came to power for [a] massive shift in [the] legislation against trade unionism debate.

22. **MD:** I don't think Grunwick was the moment; I think it really was seventy-nine. In fact, I think in terms of popular support, the Labour government miscalculated because I think there really was popular support, despite *Daily Mail* stupidities and so on. I mean, after all, what were they asking for? [They were] only asking for trade union recognition; this was a hardly a major demand which was going to rock the economy like, for example, you know, car workers, you know, asking for a ten per cent pay rise or something. You know, it was – and also because it was women. There was an element of racism in it, however, which I think was exploited. I mean, “who do these blinking Asians think they are?” you know. On the other hand, in terms of embedding an anti-racist feeling within the trade union movement, the Grunwick strike was I think incredibly important, both for women and for black people, because it showed the linkage of the separate spheres of race and class in a very dramatic way, and the fact that a group of Asian women did get such tremendous support from the, you know, the sort of the hard-core male bastions of the labour movement I think was pretty unheard-of. So in that sense I think Labour miscalculated; I think they thought this was just going to be a storm in a teacup, but it really wasn't.
23. **CT:** Let's just now talk about the support. The Cricklewood postmen: what were you aware of in terms of the support that they provided?
24. **MD:** Well, they were just there. Every time I was there they were there with their banners, and, you know, everybody thought that was fantastic because we were led to – it wasn't a particularly progressive union.
25. **CT:** But it was them that actually refused to handle his mail that brought him to his knees and that was –
26. **MD:** Yeah, exactly, exactly. And we knew that, and so they were kind of the heroes, really. I mean, if you – I suppose the significance of all of that is really reflected in what the Tories later did in terms of secondary action, because it was about the most effective secondary action imaginable, wasn't it? And – which is why that was the cornerstone of the Tory anti-union legislation. So I think you're right in that sense: the Tories did learn something from Grunwick. I mean, they also learned something from other disputes as well, but I think the secondary action thing was critical.
27. **CT:** Their own union, ultimately, put pressure on them locally to stop the core action that was affecting the dispute. Why was that? And what was your response?
28. **MD:** Oh dear! Well, I mean, I think this was the biggest weakness of all, and no amount of support from other unions could mask the fact that they weren't getting what most of us thought was the support they should have got from their own union. It was a political question.
29. **CT:** Sorry, I couldn't ask you to answer that again including the Post Office workers, just so the answer's specific to them. Does that make sense? Just when you answer the question, say the role of the Post Office workers was crucial.

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30. **MD:** Oh, did I not?

31. **CT:** It was because I asked the question; you didn't mention the subject, that was all.

32. **MD:** Yes, the role of the Post Office workers was crucial because what they did was to provide a very, very effective form of secondary action which probably was very instrumental in the Tory government's decision, when Thatcher<sup>9</sup> came to power, to ban secondary action effectively, because it really was important. And that is in sharp contrast to the – well, what some of us thought was the lack of support that they got from their own union. So no amount of support from other trade unionists could really do anything unless they were fully backed right until the end by their own union, and the reason that their own union didn't is a political issue. And the politics of that union, I think, were very – and I think there was a lot of pressure from the Labour government to ensure that that union behaved in the way that it did. It was not known as a particularly left union, or a union which would want to embarrass Labour in any way. I mean, it's the old story, really.  
**[19:34]**

33. **CT:** Which is?

34. **MD:** When push comes to shove, the leadership of certain trade unions will always ensure that they support a Labour government in power, and will do very little to ensure that it's – and will ensure that it's not embarrassed.

35. **CT:** [That] brings us on to the role of the TUC.

36. **MD:** Well, likewise, I would add that the TUC – just that little example, you know, of mine, where they were going to do something about me but they didn't. I mean, it didn't come as any surprise to us because again there was big pressure being put on them by the government to, you know, to withdraw from this and, you know, let the government sort out the George Wards of this world, not that they ever intended to. So I think that there was a growing coolness from the TUC as the dispute wore on, because they thought it was a dispute that was not going to be won, or couldn't be won. So it was just a little local issue. You know, nowadays, they have lots of posters of Jayaben Desai<sup>10</sup> as though, you know, somehow or other she was a great martyr of the TUC cause, but in fact that wasn't really the case, and we knew that. Disappointing.

37. **CT:** If Len Murray, general secretary of the TUC, had acted like Jack Dromey<sup>11</sup>, do you think the dispute had been won?

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<sup>9</sup> Margaret Thatcher.

<sup>10</sup> Treasurer of the Grunwick strike committee.

<sup>11</sup> Secretary of Brent Trades Council.

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38. **MD:** Well, I think their own union was a critical player in all this. I mean, the TUC can – cannot determine what a union does, and their own union was the key thing.
39. **CT:** But it can co-ordinate, it can provide initiative, it can talk in certain ways.
40. **MD:** But if they haven't got the support of the union on the ground then I think they're stymied. I can't imagine, for example, if the miners in eighty-four didn't have the support of the NUM<sup>12</sup>, if the TUC had organised it, would it have been a success? I don't think so; the strike wouldn't have lasted two weeks, let alone a year, or two days.
41. **CT:** Even within the bureaucratic administration of trade unions it was official policy for the TUC to support it, [there was a] standing ovation at the TUC conference, I think, in the year seventy-seven: 'great heroes of the movement, the Grunwick strikers.' They could've, within that, the, you know, interest and enthusiasm generated at that moment, that was the moment to strike and co-ordinate the action.
42. **MD:** It was, yes, it was. I agree with you, but I'm not disagreeing with you, but, I mean, if you're saying "well, what was the crucial thing?" I think their own union is critical. I think the TUC is also critical but, I mean, nothing – what other unions were doing was pretty amazing. There was pressure, though, being put on all sides. The longer the dispute went on there was, obviously – I mean, a number of the unions that were supporting the Grunwick strikers nationally were not particularly progressive. They might have been progressive locally, but they weren't particularly progressive nationally, so it didn't take an awful lot to sway them. I mean Post Office workers, nationally, at that stage was – nowadays it's completely different, the CWU<sup>13</sup> is a very, very progressive union nationally, but then it wasn't. I mean, what the Cricklewood postal workers did was quite fantastic, but they obviously – I would imagine, I don't know because I haven't even, I don't know at all whether this true, but I would imagine they had a bit of pressure put on them nationally to sort of back off. **[23:36]**
43. **CT:** Let's talk a little bit about APEX as a trade union and the role they played in taking on the strikers.
44. **MD:** Well, I mean, APEX was really one of the weakest unions, as far as I'm concerned, is one of the weakest unions I've ever, in the whole of my knowledge of the trade union movement historically. And its general secretary was really the most undynamic – he's not still alive, I don't think, so I can say this. Roy Grantham, wasn't it? I mean, the most uncharismatic and – he had no interest, he was of the old school of general secretaries who just wanted a quiet life. And he didn't give a monkeys about Asian women; he probably never met an Asian woman in his life before and never wanted to, so it wasn't going to happen. You know, it was a [the] wrong union for them to be in, actually. **[24:33]**

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<sup>12</sup> National Union of Mineworkers.

<sup>13</sup> Communication Workers Union.

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45. **CT:** Yet they took them on, they paid them strike pay for over two years, nearly two years. I mean, that was an extraordinary commitment in itself from a small union, and there are those that say he was forced by the circumstances to be radicalised.
46. **MD:** Yes, that's true. It was also forced by the circumstances when the – and you see I do think that what happens in circumstances like that is the movement itself generates a force which can't be – you know, which has to be paid attention to. That's what I mean about what the Labour government didn't take account of was the popularity of the cause and the fact that it did strike a real note, which in a sense forced the likes of people like Ray [Roy] Grantham to act in a progressive way, which is what a mass movement's all about in a sense, as far as I'm concerned. It actually forces the unwilling to act, you know, as agents of the willing, if you like. But how long can the mass movement be maintained without a leadership which is co-ordinated and united? And I think that's probably what didn't happen during the Grunwick dispute, and it's not surprising because, you know, the TUC, of course, always wants to resolve things rather than to let things carry on. After all, if you think about the General Strike, they called it off after seven days. They thought it was really going to be too troublesome; it was all about who rules Britain. I mean, I don't necessarily think they thought that Grunwick was about who rules Britain, but I think there was a lot of people who thought it was getting out of hand, and that they were unleashing forces beyond the control of the more moderate-minded elements, and that was where I think governmental pressure came in.
47. **CT:** So trade unionism's all right if it whispers but not if it shouts.
48. **MD:** Well, trade unions without a political voice – and I don't think trade unions themselves are political voices – but without a labour movement which has got a sense of direction. You see, the consequences of winning the Grunwick dispute would have been very important; it would have given the movement great heart; it would have forced the Labour government into making many more concessions because, you know, if you – a victory is always something that can be built upon. But what we lack, and what we have historically lacked in this movement, is the political representation of the kind of spontaneous – well, it wasn't that spontaneous – but the mass movement on the ground. And what we've got is labourism, and that's, obviously it's a broad church and it's got its left and right forces. But the fact is that we are in a difficult, difficult situation, and Grunwick and those disputes sort of indicated – I could name others, but we're talking only about Grunwick for obvious reasons – but without a movement that has got that sense of purpose then I think that inevitably there's going to be some kind of bowing to the most organised political movement, which certainly was the Labour Party in power, and all the pressures that it could put on people, and did.
49. **CT:** The other player, obviously, is the media. What influence do you think that had on the dispute?
50. **MD:** Well, the media is one of the things that I think we've always had to contend with is universally hostile to trade unions. I mean, I mentioned to you earlier about how I wished that I'd never attended that press conference. I mean, the way in which things can be manipulated. I mean, I knew it, but when it actually happens to you, you really know it with a vengeance. I don't think that there was any paper that was particularly sympathetic. People talk about the *Guardian*, but it's not, it's absolutely not. I mean, the *Morning Star* reported it faithfully, but of course it's not read by



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enough people. So the media played a despicable role, frankly. If it reported it at all it reported it badly.

51. **CT:** But did it establish the agenda for the government to respond to?

52. **MD:** Oh, I think this is a very major philosophical question! You know, what comes first? Do ideas? I don't think it needed to; I think that that agenda was already there. We've already talked about Merlyn Rees's decision to bring in the Special Patrol Group. I don't think so. I think it – no, I think that's a – if I [?was to] say "yes it did", then what I would be saying is that a Labour government is absolutely ideologically pure, really, it always wanted to do the right thing, but was only forced into doing horrid things because, you know, capitalist press barons told it to, but I don't think it's like that. I think they had those interests, you know, they talk always about the national interest: Ramsay Macdonald did that, Wilson<sup>14</sup> did that, Callaghan<sup>15</sup> did that. They all talk about the national interest, and by that they want to reconcile the interests of capital and labour. Well, that's their agenda.

53. **CT:** in summary, why was the dispute lost? [30:34]

54. **MD:** I'm going to repeat myself, aren't I? Well, I think that if a dispute goes on that long it's inevitable, unless there is a huge political movement and there are other things, that the momentum is going to fade. But if you add to that APEX's lack of support, the TUC's cooling off, and really a real lack of a strategic approach as to how to deal with the whole issue of recognition, because there were other recognition issues up and down the country, and there could have been some kind of unified movement which would get us out of the kind of Social Contract<sup>16</sup> mentality, because that was, in a sense, what the Labour government was all about: it was the Social Contract, and Grunwick was the absolute obverse of that. So I would say that it's a combination of – first of all, it's a remarkable victory that it actually lasted as long as it did, I think that has to be said. And that it got the support that it did. So I don't think the dispute failed. What it failed was – it failed in its objective in the short term, but it created, I think, a terrific degree of union consciousness amongst Asian women, not just there but elsewhere, and I think that's something which was lasting, absolutely lasting. But I don't think disputes can go on that long; I just think it's just too much, it's too wearing, and it's too wearing on the individuals as well.

55. **CT:** Some have said, look, the TUC just didn't have, as it were, the political vocabulary to know what to do. Their natural response was "we have Scarman<sup>17</sup>, we have ACAS<sup>18</sup>, where we resolve things as reasonable people." And we have an obdurate employer with his supporters saying "we don't have

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<sup>14</sup> Harold Wilson.

<sup>15</sup> James Callaghan.

<sup>16</sup> Agreement in 1970s between Labour government and TUC on wage restraint.

<sup>17</sup> Inquiry into the dispute chaired by Lord Scarman.

<sup>18</sup> Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

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to take any notice of that lot. What have they got to say? We'll just carry on. What are they going to do?" And they didn't know what to do when Ward just shut up and said "I'm defying Scarman, ACAS and all the rest of it. What are you going to do about it?" And that's where they thought "this is going to continue to embarrass a Labour government. If there's a choice between our relationship with a Labour government and a hundred Asian women and men losing a dispute, and the humiliation of that part of the labour movement, well, so be it."

56. **MD:** Well, I think you're right, but, you see, I think this Social Contract, the Social Contract is the issue because what the dispute showed was that Ward couldn't give two monkeys for any form of social contract.
57. **CT:** Sorry, I missed that; just say that again.
58. **MD:** That Ward couldn't care less about the Social Contract-type policies. You know, the harmony of capital and labour. This was capitalism red in tooth and claw, so of course he couldn't care less about ACAS and all the conciliation, and all the stuff that'd been laid on. Not interested at all. He was putting two fingers up at the Labour government, and they wanted to get out of that. They knew he would win that. What could they do? What could they do to the employer? They always know how to punish workers but they don't know how to punish employers who break the law. And that's what we're bad at: we should be saying that. How do you punish these people who are law-breakers? They get away scot-free like they get away with their tax evasion scot-free. It's always the poor that suffer, it always is. [34:49]
59. **CT:** Terrific, terrific! Let me just now –
60. **MD:** One of the lasting effects of the dispute, I think, was to – apart from increasing trade union consciousness amongst Asian women, and also of increasing the consciousness of the issue of race and the bringing together what had been hitherto thought of as separate spheres. After all, if you think about it, there have been black and Asian workers in the British trade union movement who were completely ignored by the British labour movement, British trade union movement, for donkey's years. And these were people who had enormous experience of struggle in their own countries against British imperialism and in building trade unions. They came to this country and they weren't considered to be fit to be involved even. And in fact the TUC – I know this [?is] work that I do – held them at arm's length because they thought they were terribly dangerous communists and all the rest of it. Well, these were very experienced people. At last some of the experience was beginning to be used and learned from. It wasn't only Grunwick: in Smethwick and other places, Asian workers, well, they'd already had, through the Indian Workers' Association, and so on. So I think that's one thing. The other thing is that, of course, from the strike onwards there was a steady increase in trade union membership until it reached its absolute peak in 1979. So this is something terribly worrying for the Tories, for the National Association for Freedom, for the government as well. The peak reached in seventy-nine: thirteen million trade unionists; closed shop agreements negotiated. Everywhere it was most concerning to Social Contract-types, you know. Was this orderly [industrial relations]? You could read it two ways. But then in seventy-nine, what's called the Winter of Discontent, which is a complete misnomer, blew up. But that was because what the government had done throughout, despite the increase in trade union membership,

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Approximate timings given in minutes and seconds in various places.

despite everything, it had pegged public sector pay for almost – both Tory and Labour governments – for almost a decade. I mean, it was what the miners' strike was all about. Whereas private sector pay had increased. So I wouldn't say it was necessarily a direct result of Grunwick, but I'd say that Grunwick was part of a pattern of union organisation and recruitment which was steadily increasing throughout the seventies until it reached its peak in seventy-nine, which was of course the apex of trade union membership, which of course really Thatcher was determined to smash. That was the critical issue; it wasn't just that – it wasn't anything to do with the strikes, it was really because she thought trade unions had much more power than they actually had. I mean, although, I don't think they had nearly enough power. But that's how it was played, and that's where I do think the media, who were fed this Tory line, played a major role in ensuring that there was support for this kind of hard attitude to trade unions. But I think there had already been a bit of a hard attitude, especially to public sector workers, throughout the seventies.

61. **CT:** But there are those that say, in this struggle and in many others, that the trade union movement boxed below its weight.
62. **MD:** I think that's true, and I think even in the so-called Winter of Discontent I don't think that that was – you know, the fact that there was rubbish in the streets, I mean, so what? It doesn't really prove anything. They could've done an awful lot more, I think that's absolutely right. [break]
63. **MD:** Well, on reflection about the media: I mean, perhaps it's a bit cynical just to say "well, yes of course the media is always as it is", but, on the other hand, one can't discount the role of ideology, and the fact that the ideology of the media is – often supports the state and vice versa, I don't think it necessarily influences the state because the state is a part of the – there's an ideological apparatus of the state, which is schools, which is everything, you know. So you just get this anti-union bias in everything, absolutely everything: films, the media in all its forms. I mean, after all, capital survives, and rules if you like, you know, it's got an economic, a political and an ideological dimension, and all three are interlinked. They're not all in total harmony all the time, but they're completely interlinked. And I think the role of ideology, the role of ideas, is incredibly important. I mean, if you're reading the *Sun* every day, or even the *Telegraph* – or any of them, actually, any of them, any of them – your view of the world is going to be tainted, unless you consciously embrace an alternative. And that's why disputes are so important because you can then see an alternative. It's why the Grunwick strike was so important, that's why the miners' strike was so important, because people who participated could see that there was something different. They saw reality rather than this pathetic reflection of unreality which passes for the comment columns and news reporting.
64. **CT:** Let me just stop and –

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