

The GLC Story Oral History Project

Interviewee: Dr Diana Parkin

Interviewer: Josie Wales

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Location: The Feminist Library, 5 Westminster Bridge Road, London

JW: This is the interview with Dr Diana Parkin. The interviewer is Josie Wales, and we are at the Feminist Library, and today is Friday 17 March 2017.

DP: Correct!

JW: Great. So, to start with could you just tell me a bit about your background, such as your education and how you came to live in London?

[00:30]

DP: I'm a Londoner by birth. I went to a secondary modern that had – I failed the 11 plus – I went to a secondary modern school that had a grammar stream. Then in 1965 I went to the University of Kent where I managed to get a first class degree in Philosophy and English, and then what did I do? And then I did some graduate work, and then I got married and I had babies, and in 1972 I moved.... No I've gone past the whole GLC period somehow, haven't I? Oh, no I haven't.

Then in 1972 I moved to Oxford with my then-husband. And then in 1979 - I was a community worker then – in 1979 I moved to London, I'm getting back on track now, I moved to London. I lived in North London, in Hackney, and I got a job as a community worker in Tottenham, and I started working there in about...it must have been about 1980 actually I moved to London, I started working there about.... I was there for 2 years, so from 1980 to 1982. And I then went to the LSE to do a PhD, which I...I think I've got my dates wrong, I'll check them and come back to you when I can get my brain round that.... In about 1981 I left my job as a community worker and I went to the LSE where I was doing a PhD, which was called 'Gender, Class and Nation in Second World War Britain', and I was doing that full time for about a year and half, and then I saw a job advertised, and you can look at this later but this is a job description of the job I had at the GLC, and you can take a copy of that, which was as a Women's Centre Coordinator. Is that enough on the background?

[02:50]

JW: Absolutely. Did you have any political involvements prior to your work at the GLC? Or, how did you come to be interested?

DP: Yes, yes. I was a revolutionary political activist from the age of 16, which is to say 1962, and I was a Trotskyist at that time. I was in the International Socialists. And then I went to university in 1965, and it was the... we were the first year at the university and there weren't many other people on the far Left. And the year before I went to university I actually left the International Socialists and I was an anarcho syndicalist, so I was in a thing called the Syndicalist Workers' Federation. But in 1965 I went to university, there were only 500 of us, and there was hardly anybody on the Left at all, so that was, I was, that was very difficult. I'd go on demonstrations and things, but I wasn't politically active, very much. The Women's Movement had about started, and so I did go to a consciousness-raising group in Canterbury, and I remember *The Female Eunuch* being published and it having an amazing impact upon me. Prior to that, when I was at school, I read Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, so, we didn't use the term 'feminist' then, but that's what I was. I would say I supported Women's Liberation from the age of, from about 1963. So I was already a political activist, but then after I graduated I then got married and I had children, and then there was a period when I wasn't politically active 'til about 1972 where I had moved to Oxford and I re-joined the International Socialists...No, I'd re-joined the International Socialists at Canterbury, that's right, in 1970. In 1972 I

moved to Oxford, and in 1974 I left the International Socialists to be part of the Workers' Socialist League, which is again a Trotskyist organisation, and then I was...I then went into the International Spartacist Tendency, which is a journal, a women's journal, women and revolutions, up there. And that's where I, I had left them by 1981, by the time I went to work at the GLC. And from the time I was working at the GLC I saw my work as an equality practitioner, as I came later to describe it, as being the major way of expressing my politics, rather than being in a group.

[06:02]

JW: Perfect. OK, so you really felt like your work in the GLC very much tied in with your political beliefs?

DP: It absolutely expressed my political beliefs. The Livingstone administration at the GLC was an expression of my political beliefs.

JW: And in that respect, how do you feel that the GLC was perceived by the public then? How would you describe the political atmosphere more widely at the time?

DP: Well at the time, society, as ever, was extremely - and Londoners - were extremely polarised, because Margaret Thatcher made it very clear she was going to abolish the GLC, and I would say the majority of working class and oppressed peoples living in London were supporters of the GLC. So it kind of had a very similar feel to the Brexit thing. But there would be other people who were, "bloody Lefties", you know, "giving money to lesbian crèches, we don't want any of that", so there would be some of that. But the majority view of Londoners was in support of the GLC, particularly because of some of the wider things the GLC did that weren't about equality, things like Fares Fair, which was about making sure that London transport, which was under the control of the GLC, that the fares were kept to a reasonable level. And various other initiatives were very widely supported by the general population.

JW: Ok. So let's talk more about your specific role within the GLC.

[07:46]

DP: Ok, you can read this thing later, but I was the Women's Centre Coordinator. I worked for the Women's Committee Support Unit, which at that time employed 72 women, and my job was to manage the buildings that were owned by the GLC Women's Committee Support Unit... **[recording paused]**

JW: Slight interruption. So you were working with the Women's Committee Support Unit?

DP: Yes, working in the Women's Committee Support Unit, but my job was to manage these two buildings that the Women's Committee Support Unit owned. One was an existing building, which was called Hungerford House, which is just on Hungerford Bridge, just above the Embankment tube station, which at that time housed two women's projects: A Women's Place, and what was then called the Women's Resource and Research something, which became the Feminist Library, where we are sitting today, and those were existing before I got there. And then the GLC Women's Committee bought Kingsway Hall, which is on Kingsway, off Wild Court and, oh, next to the Mason's...and it was a very, a very huge building which was going to house a number of women's projects. It had a seven year lease, and this was a six-storey building, which was being converted to

be an arts space, a meeting space, and various offices for women's organisations, and two workplace nurseries. And I was the centre coordinator. At that time it was being converted, so there were some groups in there, but mainly it was about developing it, but the GLC was abolished so it didn't come to fruition.

JW: So that project didn't, that was, that came to an end?

DP: I think Camden took it over. I was too distressed by it to find out what happened, but it had a bit of a longer life. London Women's Centre, it was called. But I didn't stay there the whole time I was at the GLC.

[10:07]

JW: What did you do afterwards? What were some of your other projects?

DP: So I worked there for about a year and half. I think there was a lot of things that were wrong about the Women's Committee Support Unit, which I'd like to come back to. But I then moved to work for a thing called the Programme Office, which is an odd title, but basically that was a project, a radical project within the GLC whose aim was to make parts of the long-standing GLC, parts of the GLC, the traditional parts of the GLC work to the Livingstone radical agenda. So our job was to say to people that every unit, like the transport unit or the planning unit, had to have goals, and a certain proportion of those goals had to be for women, disabled people, or black and minority people. This is all before the law requiring anybody to take positive action for equality, so it's a real frontrunner, it was well before the various legislations like the 2002 Race Relations Amendment Act, it's a real frontrunner. And our job was to meet with different departments every month, in monthly monitoring meetings, to find out how well they'd done. So they'd say, "Oh, we've achieved all our targets". And we'd say, "Well how much money have you spent? How much of your capital budget have you spent?" And they'd say, "Oh well we've only spent 10% of it". "Well how can you have achieved all of your targets then?" We just completely kept them to what they were supposed to be doing, and they hated us. So I worked on that, and I also worked on producing the GLC's final report, its last report, and this document I've also brought with me, 'Working for London: The Final Five Years', which you can look at later and you may want to take bits to copy. I think you have the GLC's last annual report, I couldn't find my copy, and I've given quite a number of my material to Gail in the past. So I worked there until abolition.

[12:26]

JW: Ok. So, coming back to your role holding people to task, in effect, for their work on equality, why do you think there was that resistance or push back against the work that you were doing?

DP: Oh well the GLC had existed back, you know, for a hundred years, and London County Council before it. And then it was a very, kind of, monolithic bureaucracy, and the white men who dominated it, they'd done this and known what they were doing, and done better than anybody else for years and years. Who were we upstarts, you know, to, "long-haired lesbians", "men in beards", who were we to come and tell them what they ought to be doing? And they were committed to retaining the status quo. And Livingstone's administration, it wasn't just him, but that administration was about changing the balance of power so the GLC was acting for the people of London, particularly the oppressed people of London, working class, black and minority ethnic, women, and

so on, and so on. And they didn't like it. And it made them have to do a lot of work.

I'll give you one example, a concrete example. This workplace nursery that was in the London Women's Centre, it was actually quite dangerous for children to be in the same building when the building was being converted, for example because workers were going up in lifts with buckets of hot tar, and - they weren't supposed to be in the lift but they did, on occasion, sneak in – and there were children in there. So the men in the architects' department who controlled the project said, "Oh it's not safe, we'll have to close this nursery down." So there were working people who were dependent on having this, I think about 40-place workplace nursery, so we said, "Well you can't close it down, so we'll have to find another place to move it to." So I was charged with finding another place to move it to, and I had to work with people called the Valuers, and they said, "Well there isn't anywhere, there isn't anywhere". And then they said, "Well, there's car parking outside the Festival Hall. Well, I thought, "What about that?" And they said, "Oh no, no, we can't put it there because the coaches park there for the Festival Hall concerts." And so we got this workplace nursery moved into a portacabin on this old car park, and the teeth of these, the opposition of these men, who were the people in charge of car parking, and the other men. And in fact I had to approach Livingstone himself personally to get him to write to the head of the architects or the parking people to say, "You will agree to this."

[15:18]

So we were working in this very peculiar kind of pincer way. There was Ken Livingstone and Valerie Wise and the other politicians, and then there was this lump of middle managers who were being quite hostile, and then there was lots and lots of us radicals operating at the bottom, and we would sometimes work together, because quite a lot of us, as political activists, knew Ken. I didn't myself, but other people did, you know, had been active with him on this, that and the other.

[15:50]

JW: So this resistance towards those kinds of projects like, obviously childcare, was that something that you felt was some kind of backlash or pushback against the wider Women's Movement? Or did you see any, I don't know, connection between being a woman in the GLC, and working with the Women's Committee and Equalities, and the sort of wider political...

DP: Yeah. We very much saw ourselves as working with the wider Women's Movement. So, for example, there were three organisations that did have offices inside the Kingsway Hall, the London Women's Centre, even while it was being converted. One was the National Abortion Campaign, whose role is evident from the title. And another one was an organisation called Women and Computers, and another organisation called Mycrosister with a 'Y', who were working to promote women's issues in computing. And we saw what we were doing as very much as part of the wider Women's Movement, and so the Women's Committee Support Unit would have consultation meetings for women in London to set the programme for what the Committee should be doing, and we as officers inside were working alongside that.

[17:25]

And so certainly this was a sexist, racist, it would have been homophobic if it had, kind of, been conscious enough, but the gay and lesbian issues were very buried, and it certainly, it was certainly

antagonistic to disabled people, to access issues, and so on. So it was very much, not just women's issues, but it was resistance to all of that. Not all of them, of course there were some people who were won over, or were perfectly good.

[17:58]

JW: So were there any projects in particular, like you just mentioned, supporting women in computing, were there any projects that you worked with that kind of stood out, or that you really particularly remember?

DP: Well no because, my role was in relation to this building... but actually no, there was one in particular, which was this thing called the National Childcare Campaign, and that was campaigning for greater childcare for people, mainly women, in London. And there was another organisation, which I knew more later, but I think it was based in the GLC, called New Ways to Work, which was promoting job sharing. Eventually I was on the management board of New Ways to Work. The National Childcare Campaign was a very good project.

[18:59]

JW: So New Ways to Work, was that about helping women into part-time roles?

DP: Yeah, job sharing. It was about job sharing... Job sharing was the key thing, but it was also about people being able to have shorter working, being able to not have to work a 40 hour week, or being able to work 40 weeks a year, and being able to have term-time only contracts and those sorts of things. And it was about saying why it was beneficial to organisations to have people job sharing even at senior level because you've got, when one person was on holiday or off sick the other person would be there. And also two people are thinking about things overnight and come back in with solutions, and how it was much better for the organisation as well as being particularly beneficial to women with children. Yeah, it was a good project. And I was just speaking to a friend last week, who had to resign from her management position in a voluntary organisation in Bristol because they wouldn't let her job share, so the battle's not won.

[20:12]

JW: No, indeed, Ok, so you talked a little bit about the structure of the GLC, so that there was this branch of managers who were quite difficult. Could you tell me a little bit about how decisions were made within the GLC?

DP: Yeah, the decisions were....oh for the benefit of the tape, but I'm sure you know this anyway, being a local government organisation decisions were taken by committee. So policy decisions would be taken by committee, and there would be sub-committees, and key people at that time would be the Chairs of the committee. But the officers would be working, at what we used to call, working to the committee, so you'd produce a report for committee, which would go to the committee. So officers actually had quite a lot of influence, because you would write the report and you would structure how you saw it operating. Here is another, it's an example of a GLC report, which was actually on homelessness in London, but a lot of the time, how things were implemented or whether a report would come to committee this month or next month, the officers had a lot of say in that.

[21:28]

The Trade Unions were also quite influential. At that time it was, it wasn't UNISON, it was NALGO and NUPE. National Association of Local Government Officers and the National Union of Public Employees, they were very influential, as was the Fire Brigades Union, because the Fire Brigade was run by the GLC, and I can say something about the Fire Brigade as well, if you like.

JW: Yes, please do.

DP: Well one example, I mean this wasn't something I did myself personally, because I was running these buildings, but obviously I was interested in whole wider things and I used to go to the committee. And I can remember very clearly going to the committee of the Fire...was it called the Fire Authority or the, the Fire Committee anyway, and there was a discussion about the wage, height restrictions for women, or rather for anybody. You had to be over 5 foot 7 in order to be able to be an operational firefighter. I later did equalities work with the Fire Brigade in Bristol so I kind of remembered this issue. And actually 80% of women at that time were under 5 foot 7, so this was a really, a real piece of indirect discrimination, and I can remember them making the arguments at the committee, and one of the big arguments was about what's important is actually how much your chest expands, rather than your height, and how you could have the relevant... because you've got to be able to breathe quite well to be a firefighter. But that, when I was there, at the GLC, that battle wasn't won, it wasn't won until some time later, and they reduced the height. But people also used to say that you'd be in the lift at the, the Fire Brigade had a separate building on Albert Embankment, and you'd be in the lift with, and I'm actually 5 foot 7 and a half, you'd be in the lift with men firefighters and you'd think, "Well, he's shorter than me!" And men would get in, because they could stand on their tiptoe and be measured as being above, but they didn't let women in. And there were only six black firefighters in the whole of London. By the end of the GLC period there were a hundred, I mean it's a really, really important change, that.

[23:53]

JW: Do you think that was a direct result of the work that the GLC did?

DP: Oh yeah, they... In this thing, 'The Final Five Years', it talks about how what... Again, remember that the law you're working for, you're working with the 1976 Race Relations Act, which just says 'Thou shalt not discriminate'; it doesn't say you've got to positively do anything. So the GLC were absolute forerunners in setting targets for the recruitment of black and minority ethnic people into the Fire Brigade, and women into the Fire Brigade, and women into non-traditional trades, and women into senior management. So they would set targets, and they've got them in there, the targets that they set and how they did so. And in our monthly monitoring meetings we'd say, "Well, how many people have you recruited in the last period", and they'd say X, and, say it was it was a senior level position, what percentage of those were women and black and minority, and then they would think, "Oh god, we'd better do something about it, or those awful people from the Programme Office are going to come and nag us." So, it worked.

JW: Are there any other examples that you can think of where you saw a real change in the people that were being recruited?

DP: Oh yeah, a massive change. The actual employees of the GLC... I hadn't been there in the early

days, but people who had been there in the early days... you'd go into the canteen, there was a very good canteen, and they had different sort of little stands, and they had different minority ethnic, as it were, foods, different kinds of food, Caribbean foods, curries and things, and they said, "Well in the olden days, we never had that." And the head of the Programme Office was called Reg Race, when he went to work there he said all the people working there used to come in after lunch with Harrods carrier bags and he thought, "That's no good." It shows that they were kind of sloanes, you know, upper class people, and he said, "I don't think you're going to be very happy working here", and he persuaded them to leave. So people of the "wrong" politics were persuaded to leave, and did leave, and most people you met were really radical, yeah. I was kind of seen as a middle-of-the-roader because there were very, people on the very, very far Left. Well as you can gather from my history, I'm not a middle-of-the-roader, but...

[26:29]

And there would be other things, I mean there are other things in here, but not that I had direct personal knowledge of... Oh well the grant, but the grant giving function, there was a Grants Unit, as well as the Women's Committee Support Unit and the Ethnic Minority Unit, which gave massive amounts of grants, and they gave grant aid to an amazing number of really good radical organisations around London to make a difference. And people used to say to me, like Leftist friends outside of the government used to say to me, "Well, why are you doing this?" And I'd say, we're turning the stick and we're shifting resources and power to outside this institution to enable people and communities and organisations to be able to more strongly fight for themselves, because we didn't think we're supposed to do it for people, we wanted to enable other people to struggle. I saw that much more after the GLC when I was head of the Women's Unit in Ealing. I don't know if you know an organisation called Southall Black Sisters? Well, we, in Ealing, we grant-aided them, and that was all about we were giving them resources so they, as a community, could do things, and that's how we saw it. How I saw it anyway.

JW: So you had a budget that you were allowed to use to provide these grants?

DP: Yes

JW: How was it decided which organisations were given grants, and how much?

DP: Ok, well there was a process... I'm talking about the Women's Committee Support Unit because of course there was a Grants Unit separately, and even in the separate one, which was like the main stream, there was a form you had to fill in, and it would say, "How will your project benefit the interests of women, or black people, or older people?" So you had to, kind of, say something, and if you put nothing you weren't likely to... You had to tick the boxes, and some people who weren't doing anything for women or black people would be clever enough to think of something to say, but generally people were kind of giving

For example, the Arts and Recreation grants used to go to English Opera. They used to be like, "Here's a bunch of money, let's give it to white middle-class people." And then after that it was, well you've got to prove that you're doing something for other people. And so they would have to do that. So then there would, people would apply, there would be a deadline date, and officers would read the applications and score them about whether or not they really were trying to meet the needs of oppressed groups, and whether their project made sense, you know. Maybe some of them

were bonkers ideas to do things that would never in a million years come off the ground. And then the Grants Officers would write a report to the Grants Committee saying, we recommend that this, this and this such-a-body should get a grant, and we'd also say why somebody else shouldn't get a grant. And then the committee would make a decision, and generally they would go along with what the officers would say. But sometimes they would say, "I don't like the look of this" and they would ask questions, and the officer would have to explain it, and they might throw somebody out or put somebody in.

[30:09]

I have actually got, at home, and I nearly brought it with me, what's clearly a grant application by something called the Older Women's Forum, or something, which has got all the categories. Would you like me to scan it in and send it to you?

JW: That would be fantastic. Ok, so officers would review these applications and make recommendations. Was there, was that done in consultation with other officers? Or was it kind of, could it be decided on a fairly personal basis?

DP: No it couldn't be personal, because one of the things that happened...I'm sorry this report isn't a very good example, this committee report, because generally the committee reports...this one's got the recommendations. And at the bottom here it would say: Legal Considerations, whether there was any legal considerations, whether the GLC had the power to do whatever it was; Financial Considerations, how much money you'd have so spend; Women's Considerations, Disability Considerations, and Ethnic Minority Considerations. And the author of the report, in this case it would have been the Housing Department, had to send the draft of the report to representatives of these other bodies, and they would have to sign it off. So there were whole times when we, in the office, I remember in the Programme Office saying, "We haven't had any observations back from legal", and you couldn't put the report forward to committee until it had been, the people, like legal or finance, had said it was OK or not OK. So you did really have to consult with other bodies. So it wasn't just an individual thing.

It's a bit hot in here, is it? Can you stop it a minute? [Recording paused]

[32:09]

JW: So in that way then, what kind of relationships would you say you had with these different departments? Was there a sense of cooperation?

DP: Yeah. Yeah, there would be... I was a bit isolated when I was working in the London's Women's Centre, because I was actually based some of the time up in Holborn in that centre, and coming in not very often. But once I was down in the Programme Office, you were constantly running along to the Grants Unit to get their views on this thing, and going to see people in the Ethnic Minority Unit, or Personnel, you know, you would work a lot. And then we...I was a NALGO steward... Because by this time abolition was... when I first went to work there we hoped that we might defeat it, but abolition was coming along, so we would be cooperating about... through the Union particularly, about abolition. I'm not saying there weren't tensions and things, but mainly we knew we were all rowing in the same team, you know, and there was a very palpable enemy just across the water, in Westminster. And we had a banner across the front of the GLC which was counting down the days to

abolition, which they could see from Westminster, it was very dramatic.

JW: So just before we move on to talk about abolition then, you mentioned that you wanted to come back to some of the things that you felt were wrong with the Women's Committee. Could you elaborate a bit on the problems, or the...

[33:55]

DP: Yes. It's not many years since I've thought about it, but there was a whole culture at that point in the early '80s, which I think has come back, in some ways, of late, which is where people had to be really politically correct, and people were being berated for not being, not being right on enough. And a key issue was race. And the key...what was happening a lot of the time was, people would accuse other people, who were radicals, or liberal, or people who were clearly not fascists or right-wing or really racists, of being racist. And there would be almost trials of people, and people, women a lot, would be reduced to tears because they would be regarded as racist. It's happening in a project that I know of in Bristol, now, it's happening, where particularly white people would take up the mantle of speaking on behalf of African-Caribbean people, and berating other white people. So it's very well-critiqued in a pamphlet by a man called Sivan Sivanandan, 'Race Awareness Training: A Critique'. And so people, you would all be expected to have race awareness training, and you were expected to beat yourself up for your racist thoughts. And that was incredibly divisive. I can remember Linda Bellos...did you go to that talk in the East End? She's involved in this project, do you know who she is? Oh, Linda Bellos is marvellous. Linda Bellos is a black, Jewish lesbian about my age, and she was the leader of Lambeth Council after the GLC was abolished. And she is now an Equality Practitioner, works a lot with the police. She's got tremendous guts, she makes me look like a shrinking violet. She was a black woman working in the GLC, and I remember she happened to be sitting, her desk happened to be next to where mine was in the Women's Committee Support Unit, she'd been to some meeting and I said to her, "How did it go?", and she said, "Oh it was the usual thing: Get honky". So the whole drive was to attack the white women in the unit, rather than attacking male power structures. And accuse, to disarm, disable white women by saying that they were racist. And this is Linda, a black woman saying that, there was an appalling way of going on.

[36:47]

And there was a very... At the time the structure of the Women's Committee Support Unit, when it was set up, was stupid. There was one Head, who was called Louise Pankhurst, and there was no kind of teams or anything. And so she was supposed to manage these 72 women, so they then reorganised it and put it into teams, which was much more sensible. But people got very hostile to having managers in between them and the top of it, and it was an incredibly divisive kind of atmosphere. And the other thing that happened was the incredible naivety. I'd worked in local government before, I was a community worker in Haringey and I'd been a community worker in Oxfordshire, and I understood local...I described to you how decisions were taken in local government. The committee, the elected politicians, they make the decisions. Your job as an officer is to present stuff to them and enable them, and you could, obviously you could say, you could point out some problem with aspects of it, but you know, you're like a Civil Servant. And a lot of the feminists working in the GLC thought that they ought to be able to determine the policy, even though they were only the paid help, if you see what I mean. And they didn't understand that they had to allow the politicians to make their own decisions. That was even more the case when I went to Ealing, there was a lot more of that. And there was a real kind of head-in-the-sands kind of thing.

So it was actually an incredibly unpleasant place to work, the Women's Committee Support Unit. But the Programme Office was lovely, I mean there were men and women, a lot of gay men working there particularly. So that was a real pity, because one doesn't want to think this, you know, that women would behave badly to one another, but it was the case. I actually wrote an article about it, this phenomenon, about ten years later. The article was called 'Women's Units at a time of change', and I haven't got a copy of it anymore, but I think it was probably published by the University of Birmingham, INLOGOV, Institute of Local Government Studies, and I went round and interviewed a number of women's units about this kind of phenomenon, about the women working in women's units thinking that there ought to be a collective, and there oughtn't to be a hierarchy, and them being incredibly vicious to anyone who happened to have the misfortune to be appointed as the head of such a unit, because it's very difficult to have a collective inside a local government structure because decisions need to be taken quite quickly.

[39:53]

JW: So in your experience that was a problem unique to the Women's Unit, or did you see it elsewhere in the GLC as well?

DP: That's interesting. I don't know the answer to that. I don't, I think in the Race Unit there would be different tensions, but I don't think this one, it was to do with the feminist notion that we ought all to be a collective, and the personal is political, and we ought all to be able to make all the decisions ourselves, and there ought to be no hierarchy. But I don't think that kind of line of thinking would resonate with race practitioners or disability practitioners, but you'd have to ask some of the, I hope some of the disabled people who worked there are going to be interviewed.

JW: So, would you like to go on to talk about abolition then? What are your particular memories of that period coming up to abolition? You said that there was a countdown and you all knew it was coming; how did things change during that period?

DP: It's quite interesting, I actually started to keep a diary in about the October before that, and I was looking at it thinking I ought to bring it with me, but I think I'm going to type up what I wrote in it and send it you. It turns out only to be about five entries, but they're long entries. I re-read it the other day, and it was incredibly difficult because there's this clock ticking and one of the things in our office we were doing, we were trying to see that we could get as much of the GLC resources as we could out to community groups or to other London boroughs before the midnight hour. But it was very difficult to do that because people that you needed, like I said about how legal or finance had to give you observations on your report, they would be leaving, and you'd ring up and say, can I speak to so-and-so? No, they've left. Well, who's taken over? Well, no one. You know. So it's like trying to bail out a sinking ship. And half the bailers have gone. So it was incredibly stressful, and it also led to people... people were so stressed that they would start attacking one another, you know, not physically, but... And also there was a whole lot of, there was a whole lot of, our office was trying to assist the process, once we knew abolition was definitely going to happen we were trying to assist the process of transition, because a whole load of functions were going to the boroughs, and so you wanted to be sure that...I'll give you an example, my husband at the time worked, he was a Director of Construction for Lambeth Council, so he had a lot to do with various buildings that were owned by Lambeth Council, and there were a whole load of buildings that were transferred over from the GLC. And one of the buildings that was transferred over was the GLC's orchestra. Was it called an orchestra library? But anyway, there was this whole big building full of trombones, and

violins, and trumpets, and nobody had decided what was going to happen to it, and there was no place for it to go. And so he said, well I think Lambeth should take it. And here is a kind of buildings maintenance division takes over responsibility for this orchestra, because it could see it was really important. And there'd be things like that where you didn't know what was going to happen to various kind of crucial functions....Yeah, I have got the documents which I can send you. Things like, about plans for London's flooding. Who's going to take responsibility for that? And there was a wonderful diagram which was the GLC, a block like that, it was really like Brexit, you know, this is what runs things now, and then where all the things have gone, and there's thick, thick lines running out to umpteen organisations, and people wouldn't know what was going where. And so that was incredibly stressful if you were working to try to make sure, you know, that London wouldn't flood because somebody was taking over responsibility the day after abolition for whatever they had to do.

[44:43]

And at the same time as you were doing that there would be other very... other people on the far Left who'd say, you shouldn't have any truck with talking about what's going to happen after, we should resist to the last person! You know, kind of pie in the sky merchants. So it was very exciting, but terribly stressful, and distressing. I do want to say something about the miners' strike at some point, because this is all, it was not alone as a thing, because there was the Thatcher government's attack on the miners, on the GLC, and attack on various local authorities, who might not have set a rate, and they would be charged with illegality because they hadn't set a rate, and you know, there was a whole load of other battles going on, so it wasn't alone. So you felt very embattled, but also terribly excited, because you're trying to prevent it being... Once we couldn't any longer prevent it, I mean we did a lot of stuff, it was, again, very similar to now, very similar, stuff about working with the House of Lords on amendments to this thing called the Paving Bill, which was going to abolish it. So you're working, people would be going to see various members of the House of Lords, which at that time seemed even more bizarre than it does now, trying to rescue things. And then also other things, like I was involved, because I was involved in the Building thing earlier, designing leases. So this building and Kingsway Hall, another Women's Centre, we worked... Michael Mansfield, who's a really good progressive barrister, was working to have leases which could extend it as long as possible, so all of that was going on.

[46:42]

JW: So, you said previously that initially you had hoped to prevent abolition. How did you, what kind of steps were taken in the effort to resist?

DP: Well there would be lots of demonstrations, and this poster outside the front. And petitions, I'm sure. And there was quite a bit of, one questioned if it could not go through Parliament, the abolition bill, I don't remember the detail but again, this things about hoping for the Lords...And there would be some small thing, at committee stage, some small thing would be gained and so on. But I don't know that much about that bit.

JW: Ok. Shall we talk about the miners' strike now then?

DP: Yes, the miners' strike from spring '84 to spring '85. And...the GLC became, it became the People's Palace, it became a place where political activists, people would have meetings and all sorts

of campaigns, you know the Palestinian Solidarity would have its meetings in the GLC, and it was open in the evenings, people would be wandering in and out. And the miners were practically living in the GLC, sleeping in bits of the building. And there was a caravan outside, which was the... Women Against Pit Closures had a caravan, they were Yorkshire women, and they came down, and of course they were doing a lot of collecting, all of that. And then people would be collecting food, it was, it's like for refugees now. And also informally, not public knowledge, us radicals in the GLC, we used to use the GLC's resources, we used to photocopy leaflets and things, you know. And I can remember, I'm going to say this but I don't want you to record it, I don't want it to be published. Piers Corbyn...
[recording paused]

[49:09]

JW: We've started again.

DP: So yeah, it was a resource for campaigns and struggles, the GLC. I'm actually so sad, it was so good.

JW: So you seem to have overwhelmingly positive feelings then, about the GLC and the work that it did.

DP: Yeah, I mean this is the period that we're taking about, the last five years, I'm taking about that period. Though in the beginning of this booklet, Livingstone does point out that good things were happening before, it didn't just kind of begin in 1981, there were some initiatives that were quite positive before then.

JW: Are there any that you want to mention?

DP: I'm not familiar enough with them, but we'll talk after about whether you want to, it's a bit big for photocopying, what you want to do with that.

JW: So after the GLC was abolished then, what did you do then?

DP: Well, one of the things, when I was saying about how people were feeling about the upcoming abolition, people were not clear whether or not they would be made redundant, or whether they would be, I've forgotten what the term was, whether they would be passed over to some successor body. I mean, if you worked in the kind of flood defence or something, you probably would be passed over to the incoming flood defence people. But there was a number of successor bodies, which were set up, of which one was called the London Strategic Policy Unit, and that took all the radical bits of the GLC. So it had a Women's Equality group, a Race Equality group, Police Monitoring group, popular planning, transport, I can't remember what else. And they were probably a couple of hundred people, of whom I was one, and a lease was taken – I don't know how it got funded, but anyway – a lease was taken at the end of Vauxhall Bridge Road, and it existed for about 2 or 3 years. And it was seen as the GLC in exile, because people thought, 'there'll be a Labour government, it will be reborn'. So they were kind of carrying it on. And there were a number, it, the London Strategic Policy Unit, I'm looking round her vaguely, because I gave, I had more stuff from that, that I gave to Gail, and that continued a lot of the same kind of initiatives. But it was a very badly run organisation, and it was all, it was kind of existing in the hope of the GLC being reborn, so it was a bit unsatisfactory. So I then applied for and got the job as the Head of the Women's Unit in the London

borough of Ealing, which was better.

[52:15]

JW: Do you think, I mean, you mentioned about functions were passed on to the boroughs, was the work you were doing in Ealing, was that kind of similar to the work you did at the GLC?

DP: Yeah. In fact, I know she's going to be interviewed by this project, my friend Nadine Finch. Does that name ring a bell? She's now a judge, for goodness sake. She came to work, she worked in the police monitoring unit at London Strategic Policy Unit, LSPU, and she also came to work in Ealing, she actually worked for me in the Women's Unit in Ealing. And she had been very active in a project called London Women, London Irish Women, and in the end, a report that she'd begun work on in the GLC, and done a bit of, I think she began it in the GLC...no, she wouldn't have done, no she probably began it in the LSPU, the successor body. I mean LSPU was the child of GLC, it was just a GLC kind of baby. Anyway, so she began that work there. Because in the GLC she'd been in the Programme Office, so she wouldn't have been working on that, and it was published by Ealing, so it transferred over. And there were a whole load of other things...well it was mainly that we were informed by the ethos. So for example, I remember that there was somebody who also worked in Ealing who was a women's coordinator in the environment department in Ealing, and she'd been in an organisation called Women and Manual Trades, which was funded by the GLC, which was about trying to increase the number of women carpenters, painters, plumbers et cetera. So she'd been doing that in the voluntary sector but funded by the GLC, and then she came to work in Ealing and brought that kind of stuff there, and working in a department that did building maintenance. So this kind of ethos followed through, and it would have been true, Ealing wouldn't have been exceptional, it would have followed through to other progressive boroughs like Islington, Camden, and so on.

JW: So the relationships, working relationships that were formed within the GLC, people were able to continue them?

DP: Yeah, I don't know how long but kind of after a while, the "Oh no, it's never going to come back", kind of petered out after probably about ten years or something. But then also, I don't know if you were going to ask this, but I think - this a wider point - I think that the Race Relations Amendment Act and the positive duty to promote race equality, and then the Disability Discrimination Act, the positive duty to promote disability equality and similarly, the women's stuff, that is an ethos that was very much fed by the GLC. And a lot of the people working on those kinds of things would be, either worked in the GLC or would have been influenced by the GLC.

[55:33]

So then much, much later, I was again abolished - the Tories abolished me twice - I was abolished in Ealing. I then became an independent equalities consultant in 1990, and did that for 20 years working, particularly in the last bit, around using the law, the Equality Duties law, and I felt that I was doing the same thing, keeping on doing the same thing. And then I went to work as the Equality Practitioner for Avon Fire and Rescue Service in Bristol and again, there was a whole lot of stuff that was, a tradition that was carrying on. I mean, my daughter got ill and died, and then I stopped working, so I don't know to what extent that's true now of people, but I know of people whom I've known in the equalities field down the years who would probably feel that there's a continuity, a continuity but which became, which had this positive uplift with the Labour government, but then of

course we're all smacked down again. But then we were smacked down in 1986, and you always have to be optimistic that something will happen, things will get better.

[57:05]

JW: So in your, for you personally then, you feel the legacy of the GLC was continued in your own work?

DP: Yeah

JW: Are there any other ways, and we can speak more broadly now, talking about London as whole and thinking about communities in London, are there any other ways in which you saw that work being carried on, or you can see the impact still today, perhaps?

DP: Well I left, after I was abolished in Ealing, I left London and went to live in Derbyshire, and then I lived in Devon, both of those were rural, and then I lived in Bristol. So I'm not living in London anymore, so it's hard for me to see that.

JW: That's fair enough.

DP: I mean Bristol, though, in Bristol, in Avon Fire and Rescue Service I consciously referred back to work that I'd done in the GLC with the Fire Brigade and with things that had been tried there. And that was, I was there until about four years ago, and only for about three years, so it's a long time.

JW: And were people aware, then, of the GLC in areas outside of London?

DP: In somewhere like Bristol, kind of very urban...but when I was an equalities consultant I was going all round the country, to Kirklees in Yorkshire, and people working, like I might have a client who was the Equalities Officer who was asking me in to help them do something or do some training, they would be aware of it. I don't know the average chief officer in Kirklees Council or Walsall would particularly, but...

JW: I mean, today, part of the reason for this project is to revive - you know, talking about the GLC, many people in my generation have never even heard of it. Why do you think that it has been sort of forgotten or, people just aren't really aware of the things that happened?

DP: It's interesting, because of it happening at the same time as the defeat of the miners' strike, and it's a similar defeat for the same reasons: Thatcher wanted to defeat this opposition, not Thatcher but the capitalist class wanted to defeat, and the miners' strike, people know about the miners' strike. But I think local government, and I'm saying it in that kind of 'ugh' tone, is not, doesn't grab people, it's not in the least bit, that horrible term, 'sexy', people are not interested in local government. And you've got to understand what the powers of local government are, what it can do and what it can't do and why it's different from the private sector, and the whole, it's not Cameron, but the whole Tory, well it, Blair did do quite a lot of privatising. The shift of the balance of resources from the public sector to the private sector in the last 20 years has been, and undermining, you know, all the cuts are undermining the public sector, so it's kind of disappearing, though people don't know about, really, it. They know about hospitals, because everybody kind of gets ill, and their nan goes in there and all that, but local government, people don't have a grasp about what local government does in general. And then the GLC as a metropolitan authority, being different from the

boroughs, having different powers from the boroughs, is quite a complex story. The structure of it is quite a complex story, and then this Livingstone administration, again you've got to understand quite a lot of stuff, I think, so it's good you're doing this because it's quite a complex story.

[1:01:41]

JW: So just to go back a bit then, obviously the miners' strike was a huge political news story at the time. And obviously the abolition of the GLC was very significant for you. What kind of sense did you get at the time that Londoners, or other people that would be affected, was there any resistance outside of the organisation itself towards abolition, that you can remember?

DP: Well there'd be demonstrations and Trade Unionists would come on them, but there weren't riots in the streets or anything. I can't remember, so it can't have been very marvellous, otherwise I would have remembered.

JW: Yes, I suppose if the functions were being spread out then perhaps people were, you know, reassured.

DP: Well, one of the things, the Fares Fair, which was capping tube and bus fares, the fares started to rise and people got distressed about that, and it's a bit like now how people get distressed about something which is a consequence of Brexit, but they have voted Leave...people who voted Tory minding because the fare's gone up on the tube.

JW: You have made quite a few comparisons to Brexit. What do you think that we can learn from the work of the GLC that is relevant today?

DP: I think I'm going to actually look in here, I seem to remember something I read in here, I was reading it on the train, which is 'Working for London: The Final Five Years', and I think it's something that Ken Livingstone said. Right, he says that, "During the past six years the GLC has introduced some of the most innovatory policies in local government, for two reasons: because of the strategic function of the Council to deal with London as a whole, and because of the financial and staffing resources which the GLC enjoyed. Both of these factors allowed the Council to take initiatives that other public authorities could not do; for example, the construction of the Thames barrier, or the creation of an £82m grants budget for the voluntary sector." And then he talks about establishing the first Women's Committee in British local government, the creation of the Ethnic Minority Committee. And he says, "I like to express the hope that local authorities, successor bodies and the people of London will be able to use this book as a reference point for their own activities."

So I think it's important to know the kind of things that the GLC did, and to use it as exemplars of what could be done, I mean, that cynical kind of grunt there, it's because the scale of the defeat of the radical project is very immense, and it keeps on getting worse. But on the other hand, people keep on not lying down. I mean, just take an example, the Women's March against Trump. I mean you think, "That's it, they've utterly smashed us, we're done for, this complete shithead as a President", but people just keep on. And I've always thought that one of the jobs of an elderly Leftie is to carry a candle through a dark time and give examples of how things were possible, and what people can do, in order that people of your generation and those to come will take it up, "Oh well they did that, you know". And that's why history's important, isn't it, that you're carrying on the lessons of good things from the past.

[1:06:04]

JW: Absolutely, and I think that's quite a nice place to end.

DP: Yes, it does sound like I was doing quite a deliberate finishing off.

JW: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that we haven't covered?

DP: I think I just want to say a bit briefly about the building, and you know where it is, the old County Hall. And where there's now the London Aquarium, and a swanky hotel... But the outside, of course, because of listed buildings and all that, looks entirely the same. And I went to the London Aquarium with my grandchildren and it has still got, I don't know whether it's part of the listed-ness, it had this amazing parquet floor; polished wood, long, long corridors of polished wood. And it was just huge, it was so big when you went in there and it was just such an impressive, impressive huge big building, and the fact that you went in there, and then all along the walls there would be posters and – not in a kind of scruffy kind of way – but inside glass cabinets, with political stuff in. It was just, it was our place, and at the same time as it, as a building, the building next door, practically, was of course the Festival Hall, because the GLC – I'd forgotten 'til I read this – was responsible for opening up the Festival Hall. You used just to have concerts in the evenings, hard to imagine, though I did go there in the '50s to concerts, you know, all that buzz inside the Festival Hall foyer, that was due to the GLC, and so it just made a great difference.

JW: Yeah, I mean that's one thing that I was really interested to learn about, because I go to the Royal Festival a lot and, you know, there are so many events there and it's such a great place where you feel like you can, you know, just go freely. It's a really great community space.

DP: Yes, and it wasn't like that before. Definitely, I can remember it not being, if you see what I mean.

JW: Any other memories?

DP: No, I think we need to look at some of these bits of paper and decide what you want to do about them

JW: Ok, well I'll stop the recording there.

END OF INTERVIEW [1:08:31]