

The GLC Story Oral History Project

Interviewee: Peter Dawe

Interviewer: Deborah Grayson

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Location: Dalston, London

DG: could you introduce yourself and tell me a bit about your background?

PD: yes, thank you Debs. My name is Peter Dawe, I've lived in Walthamstow since 1970 and I was a GLC member for the neighbouring constituency of Leyton from 1981 to 86. At the time of being a GLC member I was a full-time teacher in a comprehensive school in Chingford which is in the north by Waltham Forest. I previously fought two general election campaigns for Labour – I went home to my West Country area of West Dorset to fight the October 74 election and then in 1979 I'd fought Chipping Barnet. I come from a West Country Methodist background, I'm a lay preacher of that church and still am and indeed I started my public speaking in the Tolpuddle church where of course the martyrs came from, although the building is a later one than the one they built.

DG: so it sounds like religion and politics were part of your upbringing

PD: yes, very much so, my dad was a Methodist lay preacher and was an active part of the Methodist Union of teachers, he was a Head Teacher at the Dorsetshire secondary modern school. So that's the background I come from.

DG: and what was your education like?

PD: I was actually born in Luton and went to an infant school there, and for the last two terms of infant school my dad got his second headship in Dorset so the last two terms were in local state schools. The secondary school I went to had once been a public school but it was a VA grammar. Then I came to London to read modern and mediaeval history at UCL, and followed that with a PGCE at the Institute of education

DG: so that's the point when you came to London

PD: yes I came in 1966 to study at UCL

DG: and what was that like?

PD: it was something I wanted to do, I mean I was far from unfamiliar with London from day trips and it was *the* time to be in London wasn't it? 66 onwards, swinging London – and at the same time it was really good to be taught by some of the leading historians in their period. It was a great time at one of the highlights of my life

2:46

DG: and what else happened for you in the 70s and 80s?

PD: well the main thing of course is that I met my wife Janet at church in 1971 and married her year later and had two children. Martin was born in 1975 and our daughter Elizabeth was born in 1980. So I had an ordinary family life and an ordinary job as a teacher. It was a great place, I think London is always a great place to live and institutions like the GLC have helped to make it so

DG: and what schools were you teaching in?

PD: I started teaching in St George Monarch's when it was a 14 to 18 boys comprehensive, it had previously been a leading London grammar school. Then I went on to become head of year in Chingford in the north of the borough, and then I returned to St George Monarch's just after the GLC in 1988, it had then become a mixed sixth form college, it was very multicultural

DG: where were you living?

PD: I've always lived in Walthamstow, I was in digs for the first few years till we married, then we

lived near Blackhorse Road station and now, and from December 76 in fact, we've lived very near Wood Street station on the Chingford branch

DG: what do you like about living in the area?

PD: it's an odd thing to say but it's very easy to go *into* London and very easy to go *out* of London. We have the railway to Liverpool Street five minutes from home, we can go onto the motorway network, the M11 is five minutes drive from there. And of course we have all the benefits of Epping Forest right on our doorstep

DG: in terms of politics, we talked about it in your family growing up, how did you feel about it as a young person?

PD: I can't remember ever being other than Labour, or my father being other than Labour, with one exception – we voted tactically to the Liberals in February 74, to which there was only one answer – by my standing as a Labour candidate in the second election of that year. I joined the Labour Party in July 67, I was working on a part-time job in the County Court Dorsetshire, Dorset County Council, and several of my colleagues there were going to the Tolpuddle Martyrs rally, so I joined them and when I got there they asked "would I like to join the Labour Party?" And I joined then and remained ever since, it's almost 50 years now

DG: you were involved in the Labour Party, were you also involved in the unions?

5:48

PD: not to the same extent, I've always been a member of the NUT [National Union of teachers]. I was involved before I went on the GLC with the community health council, a community relations council in Waltham Forest, and I've also been very active as a Methodist lay preacher. I celebrate 50 years of that next year in 2018.

DG: and were there any people who particularly inspired you?

PD: yes indeed. Obviously with my Methodist background Donald Soper comes to mind, and with our family connections with East Cornwall the Foot family, both brothers Isaac and Michael, they were inspirations

DG: what was it about them that inspired you?

PD: very much the way in which they use the political system to challenge injustice, putting forward a rational case – and obviously there's the Methodist connection as well with both of them

DG: so you were in London in the late 60s and 70s

PD: yes

DG: and what was it like being part of the Labour Party in London at that time?

PD: in the – I wasn't active in the party in London until I started working in the autumn of 1970. It's the old story, you go along to the Labour Party branch meeting and a month later you end up ward secretary – at least that's what happened to me. At the time, Labour had very few local authorities in 1970, and there was a lot of excitement at winning Waltham Forest back in 1971 which has been Labour held I believe with only two exceptions ever since.

DG: so what was the local party like?

PD: it was a very mixed party, in the sense that you had people who had been in all their lives, and

you had younger mainly professional people like myself who are moving into the area, many of us who were in the public sector. All of us were very committed to racial justice and to extending educational opportunities.

8:10

DG: so the 1970s has a lot of turbulence, and at the end Thatcher won. What are your memories of Thatcher coming in?

PD: insofar as there was turbulence inside the Labour Party, Waltham Forest was largely spared that. There was to some extent a generational struggle, I suppose there always will be between the young more radical members and the older members at the time. Regarding race relations, Waltham Forest has never had the urban troubles that affected other parts of London twice in the 80s and more recently in 2011. I put that down to the fact that there has been relatively little far right organisation, except they did try in 74 under the name of Waltham Forest Residents Association, who were really the National front, but apart from a very very high vote in the GLC elections of 77 they didn't make much impact. Similarly the borough council, in its quiet way, did a lot through what was then called the West Indian supplementary service to actually bring the needs and understanding of the multicultural community into policy-making

DG: so the National front was using a front organisation?

PD: yes, there has been well documented by Martin Walker in his book simply called *The National Front*. They fought wards mainly in Walthamstow and Leyton and I know for a fact that one of my neighbours was induced to be a candidate – a most pleasant man otherwise, they obviously were conning a lot of people. But they did force the Labour Party in Waltham Forest to look at its organisation and that is why believe we won back the Labour seat which the Tories had won in 1977 by 191 votes. End with the help of my colleagues we were able to turn that into a majority of several thousand (?) In 1981. Similarly, Labour held on very well and I believe lost only one ward in the 1978 elections. Going back to your original question about Thatcher, of course I fought the neighbouring seat to her, she thought Finchley, I fort Chipping Barnet in the borough of Barnet in 1979. I think that that she was appealing to very base instincts, which cost Labour votes. For example the sale of council housing, and the promise to avoid us being, quote, 'swamped' by immigrants. That did make an impact. But again Waltham Forest, we did hold onto the Walthamstow seat, which was only lost briefly in 1987 election until Neil Gerard regained it in the 1992 election for us.

11:43

DG: what was the reaction, during the night she was elected, I guess you are waiting for your results?

PD: yes indeed as we were going in for our count in Hendon town hall all the camera crews were leaving, yes I do remember that night

DG: and what was the feeling like?

PD: we were pleased to hold onto a clear second place in Chipping Barnet but obviously were disappointed with the overall result. It hadn't been helped of course by the Winter of Discontent which had preceded the election. Had we gone to the polls in autumn 78, my own reckoning would be that we might very well have had a hung parliament which was better than we got in May 79.

DG: so Thatcher and the Conservatives came in in 79

PD: yes

DG: and you became a GLC member in 81

PD: that's right

DG: so what happened in those two years?

PD: I was applying for further promotion in teaching, I'd had several interviews where I was runner-up, and I can tell you exactly how I became a GLC councillor. In early 1981, the election of course was to be held at the beginning of May of that year, the candidate for Leyton had withdrawn from the candidacy and I had a phone call one evening saying "please give your reply within 48 hours whether you want your name to go forward" – because I was well known at that time in Labour Party circles and Waltham Forest, as I had been the Vice chair of the local government committee in the mid-70s which oversaw the selection of candidates for the 1978 election. I thought about it, put my hat in the ring, and of the six people shortlisted I was lucky enough to be the person selected by the party members

DG: and you continued working as a teacher?

PD: as I did right through until the late 90s when I took voluntary redundancy. Unfortunately when I'd finished my masters which was part of the redundancy deal I had a cardiac arrest, survived, but took early retirement from the teaching profession – though I have had a part-time job since then in the early 2000's

14:34

DG: but this must have been a busy time for you

PD: oh it was ridiculously busy – I'd be teaching until lunchtime, and then perhaps four afternoons a week I drive straight up to County Hall for a committee meeting or a full council meeting. The full council meetings went on till quite late at night. One thing about County Hall was that there were excellent refreshment facilities so one could have a meal there

DG: and what about the build space up to that in May 1981?

PD: a very busy time – I was an experienced candidate, as I said I'd fought two Parliamentary elections by then. I also knew the local press from my involvement in the local community with other organisations. So I did a lot of canvassing and a lot of press statements the local papers, most of which were taken up. But it was really due to the enthusiasm of the members in Leyton who were absolutely shocked that an East End seat could be lost to the Tories in 1977 – so a busy and enjoyable time

DG: so then Labour won

PD: yes

DG: and could you describe that initial process when Ken ended up being leader?

PD: tremendous excitement of the count – I mean we went from a small Tory majority to a massive Labour one. I can remember going up to the group meeting, and a group of us who wanted Ken in met in a committee room beforehand to choose a slate of candidates, many of whom were not known to me as a course I'd been involved far more either where I was Parliamentary candidate or in Waltham Forest rather than London wide. And yes it was a very exciting time indeed

DG: and what do you remember the process where Ken became leader?

PD: well I remember being approached by him on the telephone and I thought, well this is the time for a new generation to come forward. And many of us were in their 30s or some even in their 20s, and they wanted to take office – and the rest, as they say, is history.

DG: and what was it that you found exciting about Ken?

PD: I think Ken was very dedicated, and still is, to the service of London, I found him very witty, I've always found him extremely personable

DG: and I can't remember the name of the person he replaced

PD: his name is Andrew McIntosh, later Lord McIntosh

17:27

DG: so what was the contrast between them?

PD: it's the contrast between the old and the new. Andrew represented a sort of Fabian social democratic approach, and Ken, the group of us were very diverse, were broadly on the left, from the Tribune group including myself, and people to the left of that

DG: and what did you know about the GLC before and what did you think of it?

PD: I knew a lot about it, I thought the Labour administration of 73 to 77 had achieved a lot, particularly in transport, with the bringing in of concessionary fares, which then and now are broader than in other parts of the country. We had an excellent GLC councillor in Walthamstow in Robin Young, who was also Haringey Council, and he was there for eight years and he gave us very informative reports every general committee once a month of what he was doing at County Hall. Regarding the Tory years, with the housing crisis in London I was absolute shocked that only 35 houses were built, council houses, in the year before the election – it seemed to me completely out of touch with London needs

DG: you talked about London being an exciting time – what sort of thing excited you?

PD: I think a lot of groups were forming, particularly in the ethnic minorities in our borough. And it was really good to work with them when I was elected and then I was able to get them grants to support them in their work. I think of the Indian Muslim Federation, and various other groups like that we were able to support.

19:43

DG: so tell me about the committees you got involved in and how that worked?

PD: well we were asked on which committees we could serve, and I chose obviously the Ethnic Minorities Committee, I believe we were the first local authority in the country to have one. I was very much involved in what was then styled race relations work in my own borough, and in my own church as well. The other committee, main committee I was on was the Transport Committee – I must confess to being a lifelong transport enthusiast and I was very much at home there, it was really exciting to bring in the Fare's Fair scheme, the zonal fares on the underground and buses, the overnight lorry ban and many other causes dear to my heart. I also served from the beginning on the Lee Valley Regional Park authority, where the GLC put up the majority of the money but did not have a numerical majority on the members, and that was very good as well. We managed to be involved in the environmental movement particularly to save Walthamstow marshes from gravel extraction,

and I worked very carefully, closely and carefully with a Hackney based group led by John and Jane Nash of the Save the Marshes campaign. We also saved the Leyton marshes and it's really good now to walk down the Lee Valley and see it as a fantastic nature reserve, and the alternative would have been absolutely horrendous with lorries going in and out, in and out all day. I did also chair for two and a half years the Race and Housing Action Group in Tower Hamlets. This was a group of myself, GLC officers and representatives of different communities in Tower Hamlets. There's a story behind this one. The GLC's predecessor, the LCC [London County Council], had built council houses before London boroughs in any form existed. There was interparty agreement I believe that in the 70s and 80s these should be transferred to the Borough councils. Tower Hamlets was the only borough where I believe we had housing when elected in 81. We worked with the Tower Hamlets on a joint management committee, but this did not work. It is my judgement looking back as one can – and at the time – that there was institutional racism in the provision of housing, and some of the views expressed to me outside of the meeting by Tower Hamlets councillors, Labour councillors indeed, pointed in that direction. So, the decision was made, presumably by the Policy Committee at GLC, that we would resume control of our housing until it was handed over in 1985, as it had to be, and that we would set precedents by ensuring that the voices and the aspirations of the local community – particularly the Sylheti Bengali community – were heard. And it was a great experience working with these communities to actually ensure that their needs *were* looked at in the provision of housing, from everything from the size of housing to policies which would push people forward on housing waiting list.

DG: So, um, so what was it, the Radical, it was the Action Housing Network –

PD: It was the Race and Housing Action Group for Tower Hamlets

DG: Race Housing Action Group.

PD: That's right.

DG: And so this was a separate thing from Tower Hamlets Council?

PD: It was a GLC advisory group which advised both our Housing Committee, on which I didn't serve because I had limited time off work, and the Ethnic Minorities Committee on which I did serve.

DG: And it basically, you developed new methods for allocating housing, or doing consultation, or...?

PD: Yes generally, I mean we're talking now over 30 years ago so I can't remember every single detail, nor did I keep all the minutes of meetings, but yes generally I think that would be a fair resume of what we did and tried to do.

DG: so I've seen some publications, some of which I got from you and some from elsewhere, about housing allocation in Tower Hamlets

PD: yes indeed. There was a scandal about that which was brought to our attention at the council by a pressure group whose acronym was SHAPERS, I forget the full spelling out of that SHAPERS, obviously it was Spitalfields, in which people were denied housing or appropriate housing and I think that was one of the spurs to setting this group up

DG: and what about the ethnic minorities committee, can you tell us a bit about that?

PD: yes indeed, it's probably best remembered now for its grant giving to local groups across

London. People criticised us for throwing public money around, that is not true, we had – as well as the officer's report on the organisations for every grant we gave, there was also a supplementary report from the finance department of the GLC which was (something), and the legal department. It was really good to see so much money going into organisations, that's what we are best remembered for, but there were other things as well. During the time of the election of course the troubles took place in Brixton, and during our period in County Hall, later again in Brixton, and of course in Tottenham, Broadwater Farm estate. We had our own experts to look at this situation and we agreed with a lot of what Scarman said about racial disadvantage, but we were first to point out the problem of institutional racism as well in many organisations, not least the Metropolitan police. And it was good to see 16, 17 years later that the MacPherson committee came to the same conclusion and that steps have been taken by the police since then in the last 18 years

DG: so when you say you got experts in, what kinds of things did they do?

PD: they helped us write the papers, to a large extent. We also had a subcommittee which if my memory is right was called the antiracist programmes subcommittee which was a body representing various groups ranging from the British Council of Churches to the Institute for Race Relations and other groups, Bernie Grant for example was member of that, I'm sure he's well known to most (something) and is remembered by them. This group did feed in like the Tower Hamlets group a lot of useful insights and knowledge, and helped us produce those publications which related to the situation of black and Asian people in London

DG: and what were the consequences of those reports?

PD: the consequences of the reports were that we became I would say the leading authority in looking in a new way at the whole situation of community relations in urban areas, and much of what we did stands to this day. It's an old story isn't it, that what is once considered really way out is later considered the norm, and I believe that is the case today as we see so much change which has been made in the last 30 years

DG: so when you say there was a new approach, what was the old approach?

PD: I can't speak with much authority of the old approach because I wasn't there. I think it was very much a process simply of saying well, if you put enough money to a problem or if you give enough people education that will do. There's truth in both of those things of course, but it was far more getting down in contact with the communities, a question really of listening, analysing and then acting on what you heard and thought about

DG: so what sorts of things got acted on?

PD: well obviously the housing allocation, that's one that comes the immediately to mind. Looking also at our employment policies, looking at where for example we advertised our jobs and our opportunities. *The Voice* was a newspaper, an Afro-Caribbean newspaper which I remember we used to advertise in quite extensively

DG: and what about the workings of the committee, what were the meetings like?

PD: they were very good-humoured and I'd like to put on record that the Conservative group and the solitary Liberal member of the GLC who was on the committee were entirely constructive throughout, I'm sure there were people in all political parties who were concerned about what was happening in London at the time. Some very, very gifted colleagues indeed – Ken by choice chaired it to show the importance of that committee. Paul Boateng who later went on to become a cabinet minister and ambassador to South Africa was our vice chair, amongst the members was the chair of

the staff committee John Carr who has gone on to do so much good work in child protection on the Internet, we had people of extreme high quality indeed. And to their credit the opposition also put forward some very high-quality people to serve on the committee. It was a privilege to work with them.

DG: do you remember how often the committee would meet?

PD: yes, except for obviously the breaks for Christmas and Easter, and the lengthier one that was the summer recess, all committees met every three weeks in the afternoon

DG: and how long with those meetings?

PD: it varied. Sometimes we'd have many reports, very detailed reports, lengthy discussions, we sometimes would invite members of groups to come and address us, so they were lengthy meetings, but they were most enjoyable and informative to sit through. On the other hand, I remember one meeting when in half an hour we had given out half a million pounds in grants

DG: so you were also making decisions about grants?

PD: yes indeed, yes as I say that is what we were probably taken to task for by certain newspapers at the time, but we stand by that, and many of the organisations, I can speak only of those in Waltham Forest, for whom I and Paul obtained grants, are flourishing to this present day and are remembered, we are remembered by people from those groups right to the present

DG: and you say sometimes people came in to speak to you

PD: yes indeed

DG: do you remember specific people?

PD: they were mainly representatives of the organisations who would come and address us. It's 30 odd years ago so I can't remember exact names, no

DG: and what do you think you are most proud of in your memories of that committee, the Ethnic Minorities Committee?

PD: I think the sense of empowering, recognising and respecting different groups in London. Thirty years back there were different attitudes towards people from different groups which seems to have broken down over the years and I'd like to think the work we did played a large part in that. Certainly the way that local authorities and other public bodies provide services and devise employment policies reflects the aspirations we had at the time

DG: and what about any kind of difficulties, or things looking back you wish you had done differently?

PD: I think it's the old story of any elected member that you are there for four years, in the event it was five years because of abolition and we had the extra year added on. Sometimes you wish you had more time to educate people, who were not racist but were concerned about what was going on. I think there was a genuine concern, perhaps we were running when other people had yet to be taught how to walk

DG: and what was the relationship with the civil service within the GLC, the officers and employees?

PD: now I was not a committee chair or a member of a policy committee, so I can make no comment on that. I found the officers helpful and polite and highly professional at all times

DG: and we've said a bit about the Labour Party

PD: yes

DG: so there was the Labour Party in your local area...

PD: yes

DG: there was the Labour group in the GLC...

PD: indeed

DG: and there was the national Labour Party...

PD: and the regional party between the two

DG: so could you talk a bit about the relationships between these different parts of the Labour Party?

PD: the local party I had good relationships with – I reported back every month to the General Committee, which is the governing body of the Leyton Labour Party which had representatives from the different ward parties and some trade unions on it. I always gave a written report which my PA would type up for me at County Hall – yes we still had typewriters then – and would then photocopy for the meeting. I believed in keeping in contact with the party throughout, particularly when we were going to make controversial decisions. I took a full part in that party's life, I spoke to branch meetings when asked, I assisted in the 1983 general election in Leyton and generally involved myself in the social life of the party as well. So the relationship there was good. The party particularly appreciated my links with the local press and I ensured that everybody, party members or not, who took the local paper, as people did in those days, was able to see what I was doing and hear my views on what we were doing. As regards the regional party, the regional party did have representatives on the GLC group – Ted Knight the leader of Lambeth Council was one of them, and the other one was Arthur Latham, who had been the MP for Paddington I think it is until 79, and either was or was going to be the leader of Havering council. So we had that link. As regards the link with the National party, the National party did support us particularly in the time of abolition, to my memory. There was a controversy within the group in February 1985, a minority of members wanted not to set a rate in a form of protest. Had we done that that would have been illegal, it could probably have cost us our homes in some cases, because of surcharge, and in that time of turmoil the National party did send Larry Whitty (check) along who was then the General Secretary of the Labour Party. Again I wasn't at the upper echelons of the group simply because I had a full-time job and a young family to support, so I wasn't privy to any behind-the-scenes discussions at regional and national level

DG: so the regional Labour group, what was that, what area was that?

PD: it was coterminous with Greater London

DG: and can you, just because some people listening might not be familiar with the stuff around rates, so when you say they didn't want to set a rate what do you mean?

PD: the rate, which is now of course the council tax, was the main form of income for any local authority, along with a government grant, and as a form of protest against abolition and other things a minority of Labour members wanted to break the law. Which I didn't and Ken Livingstone didn't. So there was a split, which was short lived, we met on Thursday afternoon in the evening and the meeting had to be adjourned in the early hours of Friday morning after which incidentally I was

teaching a few hours later, and we resumed I believe on Sunday afternoon and we went into the Sunday evening. The Conservatives would vote against setting a rate simply for tactical reasons to show the split, but when the chief executive said you've got to vote this time, implying you've got to say what you really mean, it was surprising how they came across and voted with the Labour group

DG: and they voted to set a rate?

PD: yes indeed. And in the event when abolition followed fourteen months later we were still awash with money

DG: and can you explain a bit more as well why your houses would have been up?

PD: yes there was a system then called surcharge. Had a rate payer, or more likely a Tory -controlled council taken us to court – as they did over the Fare's Fair decision a few years earlier – and won, which I think in all probability they would have done, we would have been personally liable for the money which was not collected. And as far as most members were concerned, your house would go.

DG: I don't know if you – but I've heard people talking about taking inspiration from Poplarism, what happened in Poplar in the 1920s, was that something that you remember being talked about?

PD: I'm generally a great fan of George Lansbury who was a Christian socialist, but it was in a different context in those days. It wouldn't have been a case of being put in prison, as happened in Poplar, as some sort of protest like a sit down strike or something like that. The law had been changed so that the assets of ordinary members were at risk. People did not want to break the law, the law should be campaigned against, in many instances we took legal advice on any of our decisions, particularly in the Ethnic Minorities Committee to go up to the limit of the law, and we did, but cross that line, no

DG: just for people to understand, I mentioned the Peoplar thing but people might not know it, could you describe what you know about it?

PD: yes. It was in the 1920s, the council was led by a councillor called George Lansbury who was a very prominent member of the Anglican church, great pacifist, who had already resigned his parliamentary seat to show solidarity with the suffragettes and lost a by-election on that, I believe 1912. At that time, the richer boroughs were refusing to have their money raised to be transferred into the poorer boroughs in London, and of course Poplar in the East End was extremely poor at the time. And so the Council did refuse to set a rate, and some of them were put in prison, including Lansbury himself. The government did in the end stand down and they were released after a relatively short period of time. One thinks of the building workers almost exactly fifty years later when they were released for breaking the Industrial Relations Act.

DG: so you mentioned before about controversial decisions, one of them was setting the rate

PD: yes

DG: so what other decisions did you feel, for example, that you needed to tell the people of Walthamstow?

43:39

PD: yes, in the grants field we were not only dealing with race relations in my particular work but we also had the Women's Committee and we had a general grants committee as well. In some instances you needed to persuade your colleagues in Waltham Forest that it was right to support feminist or homosexual groups. We took a lot of flak particularly on the second one, both in the press, and

indeed I'm ashamed to say, from people in the churches in Waltham Forest, who otherwise were in general agreement with the stance we were taking on race relations and the peace movement, for example.

DG: so what kind of things did you try and do to persuade people?

PD: individually I would speak to them, and I would obviously take these issues up by letter or, in the case of the party, through the General Committee I would address these matters. But again we seemed to be quite a peaceful place in Waltham Forest and there wasn't all that much criticism, at least to my face.

DG: I'm just going to go back a little bit, could you describe the Fare's Fair campaign because obviously it was a very big thing, and some people won't know about it.

PD: this was the main issue for us in outer London. Fares in London were very expensive compared with other capital cities, and indeed cities in this country. One thing that we promised, and the thing I believe in outer London we promised, was to cut the fares by 25%. Those fares of course were the London underground and the London red buses, then publicly owned – it did not affect the mainline rail services all of which then were under British Rail. It was very popular, it was a thing which sold itself on the doorstep because in outer London particularly where there was no link with education, as there was an inner London, it was *the* issue. And I'm sure the large number of people who turned out to vote and turned around the situation in Leyton, amongst other places, actually reflected that. So we were shocked when Bromley took us to court on this issue, we believed we'd acted legally, we also believed it was the main issue in the election, particularly in outer London, it was genuinely popular. We also at the same time brought in zonal fares, and we brought in what was then called the capital card, later called the travel card. We were taken to court by Bromley, it went through a series of courts in these way things do to the Court of Appeal, and then to the Law Lords, and notably, notoriously Lord Denning, who upheld what the Tory council wanted. They argued that there were no tube services in Bromley, and so they were paying more for getting less. We maintained that we had the right to do this, and indeed when London transport was transferred from being a nationalised industry to an arms-length body linked to the GLC Margaret Thatcher, who was then the environment spokesperson in the House of Commons, said that that means that if they have an election which goes a certain way – then she absolutely predicted what happened in 81. I think it was our first confrontation, and in the event we had to put up the fares – but a year later, again due to the legal expertise we were able to buy in, we were able to reduce the fares. But the principles we brought in in Fare's Fair still stand today – if only the level of fares had remained the same

DG: you talked a bit about equal opportunities, could you describe a bit more about how the GLC was trying to achieve equality?

PD: within our own institution we looked to widening our staff base, and this was achieved through advertising in appropriate channels, by looking at our own staffing policies under John Carr, in the provision of services we wanted to ensure that all needs were covered as far as possible, and we did our best work in that direction. In our arts programme, which was under the chairpersonship of Tony Banks, we broadened out the organisations to which we gave grants, we set up a special unit on race relations in the GLC, we had our own officers who advised the Ethnic Minorities Committee and they were representative of groups in London, as well of course as being fully qualified in their own right. And I suppose the name which was outstanding was of course Herman Ousley, who later went on to head the Community Relations Commission, as I think it was called at the time, and now is a member

of the House of Lords in his own right.

DG: and how successful do you think those policies were?

PD: I think they were, because today we take filling a form asking your ethnic origins, your gender, as just part of the normal procedure, particularly in public bodies, but I think more generally. I think the attitudes have changed, there are still people who need to change, there are still areas where further change would be desirable, but compared with the late 60s to late 80s as I knew London then, the London I've known from the 90s to date, yes, there has been a change, and I think that we took a pioneering part in that work of generally, of equal opportunities

DG: and what about celebrations and the festivals, did you go to those?

PD: oh yes, very much so, there were very – Thames Day was really fantastic, that was great, which had everything going on along the south bank of the Thames near County Hall. Various rock groups playing as well, including those from the 60s who I could remember and no doubt my fellow members at the time. And a fantastic fireworks display in the evening, yes those things were very much remembered and appreciated. We also did events tied into different years, we had A PeaceYear, which I think was 86, and we had a year to celebrate London against Racism, and there were extra celebrations with those, that was really good

DG: do you remember any particular bands or performers that you saw that you liked?

PD: no, I do remember seeing various 60s groups, but not my own particular favourites, because I was into soul and R&B more than pop at the time – but Jerry and the Pacemakers played I think once, I remember the Tremolos played in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, I can't remember the others, but I'm sure they were there

DG: so, tell me about Thames day, was it a one-off, did it happen every year?

52:58

PD: it was, that was every year – I cannot remember whether we initiated it or whether, like the saying 'GLC Working for London', it was inherited by our predecessors, from our predecessors

DG: and what did the festivals feel like?

PD: it's good to see so many people in the summer in London enjoying themselves, coming from all over London, and I suspect beyond as well. And of course that has now continued, and we have the Mayor of London with the various firework displays to this day

DG: so was this a contrast with the GLC before 1981?

PD: as I say, I don't know, in outer London we tend to keep ourselves a bit to ourselves, unless we go into central London to work shop or to go to the theatre

DG: so thinking about those years working in the GLC, how did people get on at work?

PD: at County Hall? Yes, I found the relationships were very professional, people have drawn obvious comparisons with Parliament – there are excellent facilities for members, a restaurant overlooking the Thames for members and a bar attached to it. The relationships between individual people were generally cordial across the parties, it was almost like a club atmosphere, it doesn't mean that because you're nice to people, as you should be a believe, doesn't mean that you won't still strongly disagree with them and make that public, but as a personal relationship it was a very civilised place

to be

DG: and did you make friends there?

PD: yes indeed I did, some of whom I'm in contact with this day, but many of whom, indeed some younger myself, have died.

DG: would you say a community formed?

PD: very much so, yes, I think that probably was always there, because I only did that one term of office, which in the event was the final term of office for everybody, but I think it did have a history of being like the place on the opposite bank of the Thames

DG: what did your friends and family think about you being in the GLC?

PD: totally supportive, and one of the good things about County Hall was its facilities were open around the year bar bank holidays, and so I was able to bring up my two young children and my wife to lunch when we were in London, which they enjoyed looking at the boats on the Thames. And my wife after getting babysitters would often come up for the evening meetings of County Hall on the Tuesdays, and we were able to invite someone along for a meal as well, usually someone linked to the Labour Party in the borough, and of course our friends as well. My parents were both alive then, very much alive, my father was also pleased, and mother was also pleased to come up to County Hall and to meet people and find out you don't believe everything you read about them in the Daily Mail

DG: so what was being said about the GLC in the Daily Mail?

PD: well we were considered extremists, they used the phrase on one occasion of "the most odious people in the country", and generally took a very hardline right-wing populist stance against the things we were doing. Their main line as with other critics at the time was one of ridicule

DG: what influence you think that had on people in London and outside London?

PD: I would have said surprisingly little, because I think the message got across that by removing local democracy you are removing the influence people can have through their representatives and removing some of the identity of London itself. So it's come as no surprise that there is a consensus that there is a need for London wide government, which we've had from the time of the Blair government to the present day.

DG: so there were negative views about the GLC coming from the right wing press, but were there other negative views you encountered coming from left-wing organisations?

PD: well there are always going to be people who say you're not left wing enough, but we were concerned with practical policies and practical politics, and some people would never fully agree with what we were doing because they have their own strongly held ideological beliefs

DG: and what about the relationship between the GLC and other radical councils in London?

PD: the relationships with Labour councils were generally good at that time, um, our main critics were Westminster, Lady Porter was out to get us, and look where she ended up, well she ended up involved in scandal herself about manipulating housing to enhance the Tory vote in Westminster and had to flee the country I believe to Israel

DG: and what about practical relationships between the GLC and local councils?

PD: again, I wasn't involved at that higher level but my experience in Waltham Forest was that they

were supportive of what we were doing, we in turn recognised that day-to-day management of housing was better left the borough level where they're in contact with local people

DG: so thinking about internationally, what was happening internationally at that time and how did it relate to what was happening at the GLC?

PD: it was a time of course of the Falklands war, it was a time of an intensification of the Cold War, Greenham common, the planting of the American missiles there, and in fact the GLC, the Labour group was very much involved in the peace movement. We had a Peace Year, we raised awareness about the dangers of nuclear winter, and we also did provide some facilities for a group called Women for Peace on Earth who had a conference, because we were all asked would you mind if people use your offices over the weekend, to which I said 'of course not, well done'

DG: and in terms of processes and practices, do you know what inspired them, were people looking at city government elsewhere for inspiration?

PD: We certainly... adopted things, and expanded things which had been started elsewhere. I believe that Lambeth Borough Council was the first to have an explicit ethnic minorities Council, and of course South Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council, which was continuously Labour-controlled from 74, had pioneered the low fares policy, and so we were able to adopt, extend and improve, what have been started elsewhere in this country. But I can't answer any international comparisons, except we would quote the level of fares in other capital cities compared with our own to make our case.

DG: so thinking specifically about abolition, what are your memories of that period?

PD: it was quite a long period because it came out of the blue in 1983, during the course of the General Election. It wasn't expected, we could have foreseen something because of the dispute over the Fare's Fair policy. The Conservatives were split in Parliament, there were those who saw the need for a London wide authority, because remember it was Macmillan's Conservative government in its London Government Act of 1963 which had set up the system of the GLC and the London boroughs. And then the Heath government in the 1972 Local Government Act which had set up a similar arrangement of Metropolitan County Councils and Metropolitan Boroughs in the West Midlands and parts of the north of England. The Tories on the GLC were mainly against abolition and lobbied their own party very hard, and it's to their credit that we should remember them. There were various resolutions passed through the full council meeting of the Tuesday evening, the Tories themselves had set up and they will give you details no doubt this, their own lobbying regarding government. It came as a great shock when it finally happened. Four members, three Labour, one Tory commie stood down '85 on grounds of principle, saying we were only elected for four years, as a protest. In the event, two Labour seats and one Tory was held, but one seat was lost to by Labour to the Social Democrats. It was London's loss greater than our loss, we didn't have a direct voice and the 32 boroughs obviously didn't have the same authority as one elected body, with specific roles to do regarding London's transport planning, arts and various other things for which we held responsibility.

DG: can you tell me about that last few months of the GLC?

PD: well, the last few months were really making sure that our legacy would continue, giving out what grants we could to organisations, ensuring that certain services were preserved, I can't remember offhand which ones. We did argue, our colleagues in inner London did argue for a directly elected Inner London Education Authority, and that did happen although only lasted for one session from 86 to 90. We wanted to go out on a high note so we had final meeting of the council which was

also linked with again with one of the festivals you've mentioned, and the general attitude was 'we'll be back'. Well it did take a good 10 years or more, but of course at the beginning of the 21st century London has a directly elected mayor, and are directly elected assembly which is supplemented under the proportional representation of minor parties as well, so the case for London government, we were right, and it has been proven.

DG: thinking about the impact of being involved in the GLC personally, how did it impact on you?

PD: very much so, it's one of the highlights of my life along with my university education. Of all the things outside of my family, which has been very happy in its own right, I'd say it's the thing I most remember, and may even be remembered for. It was like having another university education – you had all the atmosphere, you had all this learning about London, and all this ability to actually change things for the better, and I think we did a good job. Had we been working with a Labour government, I think it would be an even better story, but the people voted in 79 the way they did, and I'm sure many people by now have analysed why they voted in that way.

DG: and how has that experience shaped what happened afterwards, what you did in your life after?

PD: I, during the course of the election, the GLC's life, when I entered it I was the National Vice Chair of the Christian Socialist movement, in 1980 I became the chair on a voluntary basis and remained so for the next 10 years, which involved me meeting very interesting people, going to interesting places, and getting the Christian Socialist movement – which now sells itself I believe as Christians on the Left – to affiliate the Labour Party in 1988, and I remember going with our General Secretary Elizabeth Hogg and Lord Soper to hand over the cheque to the Labour Party headquarters which was then in Walworth Road. I became very involved as a school governor and I also continued in education until I took voluntary redundancy when our sixth form College lost a lot of money in the late 90s. I did suffer cardiac arrest the following year so I have not been able to return to full-time work, but I am now very active in the community and school governor, as a magistrate for over 14 years, and indeed for the last eight years I've been on the body which interviews people who wish to be magistrates for all the courts in north and east London. So I've been involved in the community, and yes I'm still taking church services, four every quarter.

DG: and how did the GLC of that time impact on London's communities?

PD: owe very much, very much, as I say the legacy is around us. As I drove, as I came on the train here this morning to be interviewed by you Debs, the train is still in zone four, I'm now of an age where I can actually enjoy the Freedom Pass I voted for others in the 1980s, those are two things. We drove over Walthamstow marshes, alive with wildlife and people walking around, not gravel pits. When I got off the train at Hackney Downs it has a plaque there celebrating the work the GLC Committee did in the name of Dave Wetzel which brought back many memories. And as I've already said, at some length no doubt, the impact we have made not only on transport, on the environment, and on ethnic relations have remained and grown. But what was considered once controversial is now considered the norm, and I think that is the success of anything. Look for example at the controversy when I was in my pram about bringing in the National Health Service, and how only this morning the Conservative Secretary of State said the National Health Service is one of this country's greatest achievements. That I think speaks for itself, it speaks for itself and the GLC achievements as well.

DG: so can you think, that's some of the successes of the GLC, what might have been some of the failures of that time?

PD: as I've said already I think at times expected to run when people had not yet fully yet learned

how to walk. I think looking back – but it's so difficult to speculate, it's not what someone who is trained as a historian should ever do – but I think that we could have handled the relationships with government in a different way. I was there in that position, high enough to influence that

DG: what you think would have happened if the GLC hadn't been abolished?

PD: we would have had lower fares to start with, and consistently, and we would have had direct representation in those missing years from 86 to the early 20s.

DG: and why do you think this history has been forgotten, or is not so well known?

PD: it's difficult to say whether it has been forgotten, I think for those of us who were around at the time and involved at the time it has been remembered, but of course younger generations have come along for whom Margaret Thatcher is as much history as Winston Churchill or David Lloyd George. So I think the story needs to be told, needs to be looked at objectively, I don't think history teaches us any lessons, it would be heretical of me to say that as one who originally came to London to study history, but I do think people can find some common threads between the problems of the 21st century and those of the 1980s.

DG: and what can we learn from the GLC that is relevant today?

PD: I think one thing which struck me both at constituency level, and working with the Tower Hamlets Race And Housing Action Group, is the importance of people who are making decisions to actually go to and listen to the people who will be affected by those decisions, because they have an expertise which is as valuable as the expertise of professional experts

DG: is there anything else you would like to raise or mention?

PD: I'd like to thank the people of Leyton who actually elected me, the party members who supported me, and above all my wife Janet who supported me throughout this period, and didn't mind me going off to all these meetings and filling our house with all the committee papers.

DG: thanks very much.