

The GLC Story Oral History Project

Interviewee: Nadine Finch

Interviewer: Ayeisha Thomas Smith

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Location: Arsenal, London

ATS: So this is Ayeisha Thomas Smith, doing an interview with Nadine Finch, it is 16 May 2017 and were in Arsenal, London, and this is for the GLC story project. Hi Nadine.

NF: Hi.

ATS: So, the first question is we're going to go into your background little bit, so could you tell me how you would describe your background, a little about your history and your relationship with London?

NF: Both my parents are from Ireland but my father was in the Air Force of we moved round the world a lot. So I've lived in London since I left university. Previously I moved around.

ATS: And what was your education like, you mentioned university?

NF: I went to university at East Anglia, Norwich. I did English and American literature. Later on I did law but there was much later, after the GLC.

ATS: Ah okay. And what else was happening for you in the late 70s, early 80s in terms of your family or personal relationships or work?

NF: In the late 70s I was working running the Adventure Playground Association in Islington. Previously I had been broadly speaking a youth worker and I was living, the late 70s I was living – in Islington they had a number of housing co-ops because Islington housing was incredibly poor. And what the Islington Labour party, the council did in the late 70s was to buy up a lot of street properties and try to renovate some of the estates. But they didn't have the money to do it, so what they did was they formed tenants associations who took the properties over and renovated them to a certain extent. But also I was living on an estate in Tufnell Park because there was another idea to put young people on the estates which were mainly elderly people. So we lived in Tufnell Park estates, Brecknock estate. We were mainly youth workers but we were put on an estate of old people.

ATS: What was that like?

NF: It was good actually, I enjoyed it. It wasn't a renovated estate but the accommodation was fine, it wasn't, no central heating, nothing like that, and that was quite good. And I was originally very involved in community groups, work around United Island, work around antiracism, Rock Against Racism, and then I came to the Labour Party in about 78, 79.

ATS: So that leads us nicely into how you became politicised, were you always politicised?

NF: A bit like Jeremy I was very political at school actually, so I was political throughout the 70s but not in an organised party, I've never been in any party apart from the Labour Party. But I was a trade unionist, from around, actually no I was a trade unionist in the early 70s in SOGET[?] come to think of it, I was in NUT, so whichever job I'd been in I'd been in my union. But then, when I was a playground worker and we had a play workers branch in NUPE and then in Islington I joined TNG, and I was on the, one of the committees. And actually that's, a whole load of us actually went into the Labour Party. But it was through community organisations and the trade union movement, that's when people moved into the Labour Party.

ATS: And what was it that drew you into the Labour Party?

NF: Because of the right-wing nature of the Labour council here which was very poor, very corrupt. It was controlled by the MP up here in Islington North, and a guy called Bailiss [?] who led the council, both of whom were very corrupt, they would say the Labour Party was full so people couldn't join. And I could only join

because I was a trade unionist because they couldn't stop trade unions sending delegates to the, what is called the CLP, the constituency Labour Party. So at the beginning which would have been about 78 there were only a few of us on the CLP and we were all trade unionists and were heavily outnumbered. So it took us a long time to actually manage to let them get ordinary people into the party, younger people.

ATS: And how did you achieve that?

NF: Very serious campaigning (laughs). It was quite interesting because obviously Islington was full of, and, people who were squatters, people in short-term housing, it had a huge amount of community organisations and that was the basis upon which we recruited for the Labour Party. So there were people who been organising in the community, they knew how to run the community because they were running tenants organisations, they were running playgrounds. So they had the organisational ability. So when the SDP took over Islington 82, 83, Islington lost all the MPs and all the councillors just about. But we won them all back within two years and that was through organisations And it was a mixture of Labour Party organisation and our community organisations.

ATS: So once you were in, what were your memories of some of the key events in the 70s and 80s, so what are your memories of Thatcher coming in in 79?

NF: Oh that wasn't very good, I can't – I think we were, we were shocked but also we were intensely involved in what was happening here so I think probably didn't have as much impact on us because we were locked in this battle to democratise Islington. And in fact in the 70s and 80s quite a lot of things were very local, so people's trust in the national Labour Party, so lots of people believed it was only possible to build stuff in the bottom and through trade unions. So we probably weren't, it was a problem but some things the Callaghan government had done, a lot of people couldn't support. So I think, I certainly remember that lots of people in the 79 election didn't vote for the Labour Party. I won't name them because they weren't supposed to not vote for the Labour Party but they didn't. Especially because the local Labour MP was very corrupt and people were prepared to vote for him. So then it became for me it became very much a Bennite campaign, and that would have started shortly after the 79 defeat.

ATS: And what's a Bennite campaign?

NF: Tony Benn's, people think about him only as a deputy leader but in fact he was the leading person to democratise the Labour Party. And he worked closely with community groups and trade unions, so for instance I remember chairing a meeting in Islington, because I was chair of the local government committee which was a kind of, it's a Labour Party committee that brings together the different constituencies in Islington. I remember coming to town hall – and this must be about 82 – and it was a huge meeting, loads of people came, people weren't necessarily Labour Party people, in fact my parents came and they weren't in the Labour Party. And that was interesting. And then some of us were down when he was going for deputy leadership which should have been 81.

ATS: So how did all of this change when Labour won control of the GLC and 81?

NF: You see I think it was a continuum, I don't think it changed that much because some of the people I'm talking about who I was involved with – for instance Jeremy Corbyn who has always been around on the left and is a very strong organiser was very close to Tony Benn – he was my shop steward in the 70s and we were both on the Greater London Labour Party executive.

ATS: And what's a shop steward, sorry?

NF: It's like a, the basic organiser in the trade union. So you have regional people but you have, in workplaces you have somebody and then you have local organisers. And that was a big issue in the 70s because what was – before that that only had people who were remote in offices and lots of unions decided to have people on the ground which worked very well. So the people like myself and Jeremy who were active were working with people, not only like Ken Livingstone, but other people like John McDonnell and Mike... who was the economist person. So they were all around in the Labour Party, so long before Ken actually won or they won, people were talking about policies, for instance, to get, our fight here in Islington to get a left person elected to the Greater London Council, it was a very nice bloke called Steve Bundred, because he was a kind of tipping point to elect Ken. So it wasn't, things were happening before Ken won which Ken could then build on. Because if you looked at the manifesto for Islington Labour party, council, in 82, it had many of the policies that the GLC went on to develop. And I'm pretty sure that Camden will have had the same, as well – I can't tell you so much about some of the other boroughs. So for instance in the Islington manifesto and 82 we had a police unit, we had a women's unit, we had race equality work. So the GLC was able to really build on work that had been happening in trade unions and community groups. And Ken was very good like that, he was very good at building on people strengths. And when we come on to talk about the GLC I'll explain more about that. So it was obviously very good when he and the left won the GLC because there were resources they could command. But the ideas they were pushing weren't necessarily completely new. And they were able to build on and the London Labour Party policy also dictated what the GLC did.

ATS: Okay, so how did you become involved in the GLC?

NF: Well, I was, because I was on the London Labour Party executive which created the manifesto for the GLC, I was involved in it that way. But I was working in Haringey and the, I'd been doing lots of work on women's issues there but they created a women's unit which wasn't really what I'd envisaged so wanted to move really. So I sitting on a panel, while sitting on the platform at London Labour Party conference between Jeremy Corbyn and a guy called Nurender [unclear] and they produced and advert saying there's a jobs in the GLC, what you apply? And so I did. So I hadn't actively looked for a job at this came along and it was in what was called the Programme Office which was the, it wasn't a creation of Ken's it had always been there, which is quite a good thing. So it was an office which made sure the elected council kept its manifesto promises but it was obvious very different under Ken. So we each, a team each had – I had Race, Women's and policing but you had to audit them for legal and financial as well as policy things. And it was very powerful office because some of the councillors weren't actually very left-wing and you had to slightly remind them what their manifesto was. I might have told you this before, but in one classic police committee, this guy from Newham, who was quite a nice bloke but not very sympathetic, kind of gave football as his area of interest which he really liked, so he'd vote along with Ken, he got asked a question by the Tories and he said "she told me to say that" [laughter].

ATS: So are there any kind of accountability bodies like that with the GLA today?

NF: No, what I don't think so. The GLA, the assembly our elected but the London Labour Party is very, like other parts of the Labour Party they were stripped of their powers under Kinnock, so there is a London Labour Party but it doesn't have the power that we used to have. So in that way it's not accountable, they're accountable at the ballot box every four years but they're not accountable in terms of the manifesto in the way they were.

14.30

ATS: So you mentioned the areas you worked on, could you go into a bit will detail about what that involved?

NF: So we would work closely with whoever was the chair of each committee. And there was a monthly meeting of that committee, and you'd have reports from that committee. And you be checking with the

finance and legal people that what they wanted to do was doable. And what quite surprised me actually because I'd worked in local government before, is actually, the old guard, we kept all the lawyers and the finance people although a few of them resigned but most of them didn't, but they were quite excited we do new things and they were really helpful and that was a strength, because obviously they had years of experience in finance and legal affairs which we didn't necessarily have. And they were usually very helpful, so you'd make sure that by the time it got to committee everything was watertight. I have to say that the, I think the women's committee was the weakest one, and the women's unit was the weakest one, it was, I don't want to name names, but they lacked a strong, they were too disparate and they didn't really have as political a focus as the other two units did. I mean race should be a much more difficult unit because... it will come back to me, the man who was running it was very good, faced potential, most race units London at that time had a lot of interracial problems, a lot of rivalries between different religions or different like Africans against Caribbeans or Indians against Pakistanis, but there was nothing of that because it was incredibly well-run – they were the first place ever to have an Irish unit and a travellers unit, and that was accepted by all the other people in the race unit. And if there were, there were a few arguments but it was always behind closed doors and nobody ever in public disputed which was really good, which meant they could have serious discussions about where they were going but they never – Herman Ousley, it was Herman Ousley, was a very good unit leader. And the police unit was incredibly well-run as well, and given that those two units had the most flak, there's jokes about the women's unit but actually the most flak and the most threats, there were threats and there was a fire actually in the race unit, a firebomb that went on, and some of the correspondence was really vitriolic, it was mainly, particularly against the Irish unit and the race unit and the police unit. But they managed to do very good things as you can see from some of the documents I gave you.

ATS: So where were those threats from, from the general public, or other groups?

NF: National Front was much stronger then, still, or it might not have been called that, it might have morphed into something else, but the National Front broadly speaking – the National front were very, very anti-Irish and quite often attacked Irish marches [becomes muffled] they were obviously, but the general public as well, interestingly enough the only grant we never got through was one for Troops Out movement, which was actually not an IRA front but people who believed in a united Ireland, but that was the one grant we could never get through a committee because of the huge amount of stuff in the papers.

ATS: So what was that?

NF: Troops Out movement which campaigned for a united Ireland, who were mainly Irish people and that's the one grant we never got through there was huge outrage in the papers. But the other parts of the GLC like the Industry and Employment was a very progressive group as well.

ATS: And did you work closely with them?

NF: Only during the miners strike actually.

ATS: And what was that like?

NF: That was good, well it was the Popular Planning Unit that I worked with I can't remember why, I think worked with that because, quite apart from my work with the GLC myself and the guy Nurender (?) who I mentioned before wrote this pamphlet called 'A Million Jobs a Year', which I think we promoted with the Popular Planning Unit, so that was coming at it from – there was also this other unit down in the basement which is now part of the aquarium, which I can't even remember its name but it was like a community liaison team, and they're the people who organised all the festivals and they went out and helped with community centres, they funded lots of projects still going like Hackney Empire, was a GLC project because Ron did lots of the 'Save the GLC' campaigns and his group were very very active, and towards the end we helped them buy

the building. And what I should say as well, the programme office where I worked was also in charge of some of the big capital projects, so we would have been involved with some of those like Coin Street and buying quite a lot of the big properties at the end for some of the community groups.

ATS: Are any of those still community led or owned today?

NF: Yeah Coin Street, you know where Coin Street, all those [unclear], while behind that and behind there that whole estate is community owned and was given to them about four hours before the end of the GLC, I remember it being signed. And then there are various, some of them have gone under, obviously Hackney Empire is still there, there was the Irish women's centre in Stoke Newington that until very recently was there, but they couldn't keep going, they get the grants to keep going. There's other bits and pieces around London which are buildings that the GLC gave to people which they owned.

ATS: So what were some of your highlights or proudest moments working at the GLC?

NF: I think the work around community inclusion, because it really was open door policy so you'd have all kinds of people come into the building to have meetings either with GLC councillors or with the community, from young people to all people, a huge range. I think some of the work around policing and race was really important.

ATS: And what did that look like?

NF: It's difficult to explain because when you saw those documents we were talking about lots of ideas which had support amongst a small amount of lefties, but actually proved to be very popular with people. The work around Ireland proved to be amazingly popular because there was such a big Irish community who felt completely excluded and discriminated against, but also a lot of the community festivals were very good way of getting, one of the most popular things was the community festivals, because people felt that not only could they come together and celebrate but they could also learn things, they would have lots of stalls and things, so people quite often would pick up leaflets there. And, yes it was a kind of trickle-down effect, but it was politically quite hard because obviously it was, the GLC was embattled, which in some ways it made it better and certainly very few people I know who worked for the GLC didn't really love it, it was exciting. But it was, I mean Kinnock never came to the building, he never walked across that bridge, so it wasn't just the Tories it was also the Labour Party hierarchy didn't like it. But most people who worked there really liked it, including people who'd worked there previously, because in our, in the programme office there were a few people who stayed a little while who were actual policy analysts, but nearly all the admin staff stayed and they loved it. And they liked the excitement, and these were people who had been working there probably all their lives, because many people, in that video I lent to you, they had come in as trainees and stayed the whole, because it was a place, in those days people stayed in the job for life.

ATS: And how long did you stay there?

NF: Until it got abolished.

ATS: And how long was that in total?

NF: Probably about two years at the GLC, but then there was a year and half afterwards at the London Strategic Policy Unit because when the GLC was abolished about 12 London boroughs took over the policy units for two years, which was very good because it meant that we could finish some of our work up, sort out some of the groups, so that was not only women, policing, but also planning, there was about eight different units, can't remember the others. And they worked very hard on legacy issues really, and passing worked over to different boroughs.

ATS: So we'll circle back to legacy, so in terms of the GLC as an institution, what do you remember about where power was situated or how decisions were made, more about the formal and informal structures?

NF: Well as I say they did accord the lawyers and the finance people, they didn't just override them because it was such a, because it had such huge budgets it would have been ridiculous to do that really. But Ken and John McDonnell obviously did have the power and there was a core group, I'd say about 20 councillors who really led the way because, not just because they had been selected by the Labour Party but also because they had the expertise in their particular areas. And then there'd be people like myself who were there, we would have been called political appointees really nowadays, we did apply for the jobs, but we were also expert in the areas they wanted to push forward. And certainly, it's quite hard for me to say because I was kind of the centre of it, because that policy unit was very central, so it was quite hard to tell what, most people I know really liked it, even people who were in more periphery parts, because I think as I said before because of Croydon¹ really, we had loads of money, because it had never been the intention to start some of these projects because one of the big priorities of the manifesto had been to make a fairer and cheaper public transport system, when Croydon took the GLC Court to court and the court stopped it then we had billions of pounds, so the small-scale or radical programmes then could just expand.

ATS: And so would it look like, did it mean that, would you describe it as quite democratic in terms of each part having their own budgets?

NF: Oh yeah, everyone had their own budgets and, but people who spent more effectively got more money. I'm trying to think in our office, in our office obviously people, I think most committees began with a kind of equal amount of money for their function, but some people turned out to be much more efficient at curating things, race and policing were very, on the policing side there were already a lot of police monitoring groups all around London who we were funding and other campaign groups on miscarriages, and the police unit was very well connected, and it was very diverse, that's one of the things to say about that, there was a great diversity of race and gender in that which meant they had better contacts outside. And the same was true of the race unit, very much so, so they were able to go out and find groups who would apply, not just their friends, but they had more contacts. The women's unit had people applying but because I monitored it, I always felt that they weren't as diverse and certainly not by class, which meant that they, and they weren't as careful, they funded a lot of projects that failed. The other two units were much more strong on monitoring so by the end people who were spending money effectively were getting more money.

ATS: So, you mentioned already that the senior Labour leadership and the Tories were very anti-GLC, but how did party politics play out internally for the people who were working there?

NF: Oh I mean, most of the people who worked there, even people who are probably Tories, enjoyed the work because they were given more responsibility. I was also a trade unionist which gives you access to a wide range of people, so I was in the joint shop stewards committee, to go back to what shop stewards were. Which meant that I was sitting in a body with firefighters and construction workers and my impression from that was that there was a real interest in the work going on, and actually they didn't perceive, unlike the newspapers they didn't perceive it as being a left Labour project, they perceived as being a good project. Because they were able, like the firefighters, okay some of them didn't like us putting, saying they had to have black women and black people in the stations, but they did like the fact we put gyms in there and we understood some of the stress they had, so there were good things for them even if they didn't like the women and black people. Yeah housing, Tories took housing away quite early on, thinking of other mainstream projects... I mean people were applying for grants who weren't necessarily left Labour people, especially the community events

ATS: So it was kind of a cross party

¹ N.B. she is probably referring to Bromley, who challenged the GLC's Fare's Fair policy.

31.14

NF: Yeah, but the Labour Party nationally didn't like it at all.

ATS: And how did that resistance manifest?

NF: Well lack of support, but it manifested, so when Thatcher decided to close not just the GLC, to close down Merseyside, whenever Manchester was called, I think there were about five metropolitan authorities she abolished, we didn't get much support at all from the national party. I mean the campaign was mainly run by Merseyside and London and the trade unions, and given it was [unclear], thousands of people were going to lose their jobs in those five places, they should have campaigned more. But apart from that the, the repercussions happened later actually because the national party really went for the London Labour Party and went for individuals, so most people who were active in what they saw as the London left were by fair means or foul, quite often foul, pushed off things like the national women's committee, the London Labour Party, partly because they changed the rules and made it less representative. So the repercussions, so what happened afterwards was in the years between abolition and 89 the national Labour Party managed to push out most of the London left off certainly national or regional positions.

33.38

ATS: The resistance from the national Labour Party, what was the basis for that, was ideological, was it...?

NF: I would say it was ideological, it's actually very very similar to what's happening now and a few of us are actually doing some research into what happened in the 70s and 80s, we're doing some research between 75 and 85 and it's – so now when people attack Jeremy supposedly on organisational grounds, like he's not organised and he's not a leader, actually it's not that at all it's that they don't like his international stance, they don't like his stance on Ireland, they don't like the fact he campaigned for Mandela and that was very much the same – and these are some of the same people of course, or their inheritors. And I think it was, because some of the things they really objected to was, for instance, because most of us at the GLC were very internationalist we'd have people like, we had people from Granada revolution there, and we'd fly flags like Palestinian flags or whatever flags, Nicaraguan flags, and that used to really wind up the national Labour Party so I don't think they changed. And I actually think it isn't, they couldn't really object to community festivals, they couldn't really object to what was saying about fares, they probably did object to the work on police and race but they would probably be more sensible than to say so, they certainly objected locally, the right wing objected to the work we did on policing here in Islington on the grounds that we were colluding with criminals. Ireland remained a very difficult issue and does now as you can see what said about Jeremy and the IRA, so don't think it was, I think it was ideological.

ATS: So just to talk a little bit about the GLC as a workplace, can you remember what they did particularly to make it more equal workplace and how successful that was?

NF: Well interestingly enough the old GLC had these things which I thought quite democratic, like, it sounds silly but you had a day a year to go on a work's outing, you had a day off a year to go Christmas shopping, but people quite often went together, so you'd go, we went to France a few times but everyone in the office including the secretaries and the admin people and everybody. And in that way it was quite equal, and as I say the trade unions were across the board so they weren't against each other, so you'd have the blue-collar and manual workers unions and the office worker unions working very much together which makes a difference. I don't remember there ever being any arguments about pay and things, or conditions.

ATS: In terms of representation, how well were minorities represented in terms of race, gender, sexuality and things?

NF: In the new units, very well. Firefighters obviously not, although there were lots – because I was involved in that – there were lots of the beginnings of things, and some of the stations were very helpful and some weren't. And it's taken a long time to make the firefighters different. Because I remember them voting against gay rights quite often and things. So I'd say it's difficult to tell about, it would take longer to change the more established units, because obviously if you have a new unit it's much easier impose, or at least advertise more widely and work out what you're going to have. And also I think the new units were more, the qualifications they asked for one more wide ranging. And also gave opportunities to, I'm thinking of these two young guys, black guys who were lawyers who worked in the police unit and that was I think their first jobs. And they had had some more experienced black lawyers come back from private practice, so that happened quite a lot of the GLC that to get things going, to get people in from universities and private practice to get things going, so we had some quite established lawyers in the police unit to start with, then they went back to wherever they came from but by that time the younger people were more trained up.

ATS: So would you say it was kind of a concerted effort with particular policies and practices put in place to bring in –

NF: Yeah, yes the personnel department, it wasn't called personnel, but the personnel department had strict policies about interviewing, we probably did much more equal opportunities interviewing than other people. Although people are Islington were still doing that then, they were doing that quite strongly. But I would say that probably took a lot longer to make the teaching profession diverse because people weren't even getting a training, although ILEA had some good – the Inner London Education Authority, which lasted a bit longer than the GLC – it had some very good policies on diversity. But actually its core employees weren't as diverse.

ATS: Okay, you mentioned previously the community festivals, and so were you part of organising them, attending them?

NF: Yeah I wasn't, I was involved partly cos of other connections as well as – yeah we gave money from our unit but also I was quite involved in the Fleadh which was up here in Finsbury Park which was a big Irish festival, which I don't know whether we, how much we funded it because that was done by an Irish promoter, I think we did give money to it but we didn't have to give that much money to it, but some of the others we did. One of the most successful ones, which had actually been going before the GLC, was the one in, Wandsworth Trades Council had always had this little one in Battersea Park and it became huge with the GLC, and it was very good. And one of the main guys who ran it Melvin is now the guy who runs Festival Republik, you know he runs huge festivals all over Europe, that's where he started.

ATS: And are there any other big celebrations you remember, like the 95th anniversary or Thames day?

NF: I don't remember Thames day, but I do remember the last day which was massive, huge not really celebration. There were lots, some people were walking from, most of the big things were actually demonstrations, like people would walk from Newcastle. There was a big celebration at the GLC, I remember a nurse's one, which ended up – because the GLC had all this space, because then we didn't have – I don't like the millennium wheel – we didn't have the wheel, we didn't have all that other rubbish. There was a huge space by the GLC which meant that there was a huge space for people to march to. So most big marches ended up there and then they'd have music and – I remember Ken on stage with what's his name, who is a very depressive 80s actor, I mean singer? Anyway, Ken looked quite uncomfortable, but not as a – I saw him at another one, at a fundraiser he had to introduce this Irish punk band in a club up in Willesden, it was a campaign that Ken supported but he was obviously fairly [unclear] because there were all these bouncing Irish

punks, and Ken cut off stage as quickly as possible. And so I do remember the last bit, the last bit was very sad, the last day, the last night.

42.40

ATS: So discussing that, when did you first learn that the GLC was going to be abolished?

NF: Well I think the Tories had been threatening it for about three years because there was a year's delay, so there must have been, the legislation must have been at least two years before abolition because at one point there was a year's reprieve, so I think they probably started talking about it three years from before, so practically from the beginning they were talking about abolishing it. And of course along with abolition lots of the, it was very hard some people who depended on the services, and people, some of the community who felt they had been validated by the GLC were definitely upset by abolition because they saw it as an attack on their community as well.

ATS: So were you involved in the anti-abolition campaign?

NF: Yeah. And that video I gave was part of that. Things kind of merge to each other about, because of my role in the London Labour Party and working there so sometimes I can't remember why I was there, but there were a lot of political activists working in the GLC so we probably wouldn't make a distinction between what was our job and what wasn't our job.

ATS: What did the campaign look like for you?

NF: Well it was, it built on the communities which we'd been working with, it had a lot of theatre and music and people involved, it was pretty localised and there was as I say the guy whose name isn't coming back to me, the guy from Hackney Empire, he was very active and he went round with his group, who were kind of theatre come music group, were sent round to the boroughs that we didn't think had strong local organisation. But it was pretty tactically planned. I think the GLC was very popular and certainly apart from things like the Daily Mail I can't think of anybody, and Thatcher and the national Labour Party, who wanted it closed really.

ATS: And were there points where you thought that it might not be, where you thought the campaign might win?

NF: No. The numbers are against us. I mean at the beginning they were hoping that the GLC would pull back I think because there was, you've probably heard this before, on the top of the GLC there were these big boards saying how many people were unemployed, which faced straight onto Parliament. That was only one of the many things. So they had this visual opposition across the Thames. But the GLC was never going to pull back, why would they really?

ATS: You've touched on it a few times, but what are your strongest memories of the last few months?

NF: Being extremely tired [laughter] erm we had a lot to do because we were trying to protect people's jobs and also the services. And we still had a lot of money, so in our unit we were charged with spending the money productively, and also I was on the joint shop stewards committee so it was a pincer movement, I think I said before, so I might have got this slightly wrong but I think if a London borough agreed to take, and we divided the remaining people up, like from architects down to gardeners, and put them in packages and said okay if you take this package of people on the same terms and conditions – which was quite easy then because most people in local government had the same terms and conditions, I think some of the GLC people might have had slightly better terms and conditions and I think that was one of the bargaining points – but we gave you

10 million you could spend in your housing. And everybody took it as far as I remember except for Hackney, so isn't and got another 10 million.

ATS: And why didn't Hackney take it?

NF: I to this day don't know, they didn't like the fact they hadn't interviewed the workers which was a bit beside the point really, because they were getting this money which they desperately needed for their housing as a housing was rubbish, and they were getting pretty skilled workers from an organisation which was very good in employment rights so it was, Hackney did take, they were on the left but they did take some funny positions. And that was Andrew Puddifet [?], you might have come into contact, he works in various kind of groups now, I think he used to work at Justice, but I don't know why he did that. And most of the people who moved worked there for quite long time wherever they were moved to, in fact a friend of mine has worked as an architect in Islington ever since. So it was quite successful, so nobody got made compulsorily redundant. A few people chose to take, a few older people chose to take voluntary redundancy, like one of the guys on that video, I thought he was [unclear] and he probably was that old, and he decided to sell around the world, that seemed a good thing for him so...

ATS: And so you mentioned there was a kind of party slash I guess wake afterwards, what was that like?

NF: It was massive and it was quite, it was quite strange because actually we were still working a lot of us, we were still, well certainly our office was still signing cheques for people like Coin Street, and people were taking things out of the building because, for instance the police unit, why the police unit has such good archives is that Paul Boateng signed everything over to us at the last minute so we could remove all the records out of the building. Now some of the people didn't manage to do that, didn't think about doing that, so some of the other units they kind of lost all their research. And some of it went off to LSPU and that was safe, but then after that it kind of evaporated. As I say I don't, the women's unit stuff ended up in somebody's attic, which is a pity because people might want to look at it. I think the race unit staff went somewhere, I can't remember where, and I don't, I'm sure that Hillary took the popular planning unit stuff.

ATS: And what are your memories of the final night celebrations?

NF: It was really sad, I remember it was, they were playing films against one end of the building I remember that. There were lots of bands, but as I say we were working half the time so I don't really remember it that well. And then we all moved, while LSPU started, we must have had somewhere to move to so I think we started straight away. So I think in terms of the policy it was sort of seamless, and we were working with London councils we knew well, so it was actually quite an easy handover. But after two years the money ran out.

ATS: And how, in the immediate aftermath of abolition how did that feel for you, I know you were still working but did it feel different before?

NF: It's difficult to explain the 80s, the 80s was an incredibly crowded decade and because, what I have found talking to younger people is because most young people are more used to single issue campaign perspective, in the 80s there were single issues but people were involved in a load of different things, so although the GLC was a very important part of the 80s it was just part of the things which happened in the 80s. So there was all the work on [unclear], there was all the work on the miners strike, so the miners strike was over by then, yeah, so the minor strike was finished. There would have been lots of other campaigns going on, so quite often if you ask someone like me it's difficult to actually, we were just very busy and we were... I had moved to Hackney by then so was probably involved in local stuff as well. So it was, I would say it was probably worse for the people who'd worked there all their lives, because we saw it as part of political activity to work there, and people went back to academia, they went back to where they had been, I stayed up this policy place for a year

and half. It probably affected some of the councillors quite badly, the ones who didn't stay involved, you see a lot of them did stay involved. Mike Ward's the person I forget about, Mike Ward, the London enterprise board they carried on going for a while and he was chair of that. Valerie Wise didn't do much after the GLC, obviously people like John McDonnell did and quite a lot of people like Steve Bundred went into local government as an employee, so most of the leading councillors probably were still active afterwards.

ATS: So looking back on the GLC now, how do you feel about its significance or importance and have those feelings changed over recent decades?

NF: I think it was very important, it would be very good if it had gone on because it gave, it really brought together trade unionists, activists, academics, councillors in a very productive manner and I think it could have gone on to do much much better things as well. And it was a real waste, some of the loss of expertise, and the facts people just rewriting [?]. And the GLA wasn't the success of the GLC, for instance the, their police committee has never ever asked anything from the police unit so they haven't learnt from anything, any of the research, anything and I don't think that the race advisor at GLA learnt anything from Herman, he could have done that sort of thing that he didn't. It was a pity that there was no connection apart from Ken. Because Ken's people around him weren't people that worked the GLC, while there are a few people in GLA who had worked at the GLC but not the core people, and it was a very different organisation and very small and didn't have much money.

ATS: And so how did the, what kind of lasting impact did the GLC have on London's communities?

NF: While I think it had a huge effect particularly on the Irish and black community because it did validate them. And it's quite hard to explain from now because later on, well very shortly after that, at the end of the 80s I worked in Ealing and I worked as a community development officer, I did some work with some Irish women who were kitchen staff and people like that. And I went to talk to them and they were, because they were all Irish, and they said that they were, before the GLC they had felt really afraid of going anywhere except for the Irish club, and they had felt beleaguered, and they said since the GLC they had a much better ability to express themselves, and I've heard black people say the same thing because the support for theatres and theatre groups, although it was not that expensive it did actually highlight people. And quite a lot of the theatre groups survived. And also some of the policies, the policies that they thought was stupid on, like, we funded Gay's the Word, the gay men's bookshop and one in Islington called Sister Write, and that got a huge amount of adverse publicity but of course it's become commonplace now. The same on lots of the issues, I mean some of the things the police say now are things that we were saying about the police, so a lot of the things which the GLC said which people think are completely ordinary now, they certainly didn't at the time.

ATS: So would you say it had lasting cultural impacts?

NF: Yes, and policy impact in terms of diversity and that side. Because of course the GLC couldn't do much about housing or, you'd have to ask, I think ILEA the education wing did have some impacts. Of course that was all lost when they got abolished, because what they were good at ILEA, then ILEA was based on the inner London boroughs, and obviously some were much poorer than others and they were very good at trying to compensate for that and actually putting specialist teachers into the poorer boroughs, or giving more money to Hackney or Tower Hamlets. Of course that all went when they got abolished.

ATS: So looking back what would you say were kind of the biggest successes or failures of the GLC?

NF: I think the biggest successes were democratising, giving people, people thought they had ownership, so they thought, they did come in the building they did come to big meetings and it wasn't just political people it was pensioners and things like that. And lots of the ideas came from below not above, obviously there were

policies and manifestoes but most of the councillors were very keen on people like giving them ideas and trying to process those ideas, not all of them but most of them.

ATS: And the failures?

NF: Failures... Well I don't know if we really had enough time to fail! It's interesting because when people attack the GLC it's difficult to see what they say as valid, because they'll probably say that we spent too much time on minorities which wasn't actually true, I know because I've seen the budget. We spent a lot of minorities but just because no one else was doing it, but the bulk of the budget was going to what it always went on and there were lots of, I suppose we haven't really talked about transport. I wasn't really involved in the transport, but the transport policies were quite progressive, even the ones which were unsuccessful, I suppose Fares Fair was a failure.

ATS: And what was that, Fares Fair?

NF: Well this is why we had all this money because, I think he was called Dave Wetzel had this idea and I think the London Labour Party also said, it was a bit like the early version of the Oyster card, it wasn't quite as sophisticated but you could, which was going to benefit people by having kind of, by bringing the overall fares down. It was ironic because actually Croydon who opposed it, probably the people in Croydon would have benefited from it more, people had to travel a long way and that got blocked by the courts so that never happened. But apart from that very few things apart from being abolished were really blocked.

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

NF: The, I think we would have gone on developing policy really well, there would be less money because we wouldn't have had a windfall from Fares Fair so we probably wouldn't have been able to expand the grants programme as much. But on the other hand some of the groups we funded didn't succeed, well that's not surprising people don't always succeed. I don't, what I don't know politically is that, obviously at the end of the 80s with Kinnock there was a real division that Kinnock caused in the Labour Party. Now I don't think that would have affected the GLC, there was an accommodation between the different people, all of them weren't as left wing as, in fact there were only, it was probably a minority who are actually left-wing on the council in the Labour group, but they were much better organised, so I don't think it would have really affected them. But who knows, in another GLC election you might have got people elected who weren't sympathetic, but I think the actual policies and policy development would have gone on.

ATS: So what are some of the positive aspects of life in London today that part of the legacy of the GLC?

NF: Well I think the openness, compared to the rest of the country, if we discount people like Croydon there's much more openness about race which I think has something to do with what was said at the GLC time. If you step outside London people's attitudes are much worse, because you have to work on it – I'm critical about New Labour because I think, we could see it coming in the northern heartlands that people are blaming black people or European people, and it should have been challenged but it was let go. And the GLC did challenge people like that and it works, quite often when people challenge they back down because... Rock against Racism was a very interesting experiment or group because they did regularly challenge the white racist youth, and the white racist youth did quite often backed down, and once they saw the music and they thought they were fun and tough they usually turned over to Rock against Racism. But if you leave it just festers. So I think that's a major legacy. And I think the policies have trickled down partly because individuals have taken them elsewhere, and also some councils have taken them elsewhere.

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ATS: And would you say there any negative impacts of the GLC in London today?

NF: Not really because without a London authority, a meaningful government, the GLA is there but I think it's really got the power to do much, London has become more, more unequal really. It's difficult to say because London is very mixed, I mean Islington itself was very mixed, but I think... since in the old boroughs like Tower Hamlets and Newham which, and one a bit further out, were always not only questions about racism is also a question about corruption, and unfortunately Newham is still very corrupt on the Labour Party Council. And the GLC was tackling that really because when you had councillors coming together they could say to each other 'no no you can't do that', whereas being left to themselves they are doing that. So, I've been quite shocked about what's happening in Newham which is exactly what was happening in the GLC and we had to fight against it, that's another good thing about having coordination across a city, you can actually try and persuade people to be better than they are.

ATS: So part of the reason for this project is because lots of younger people in particular don't know about the GLC, what it was or how it worked, why do you think that's the case?

NF: Partly because, part of the reason for abolishing it was to close down what it was doing which was ideological it wasn't posing any electoral threat to the Tories. It was posing an ideological threat because there was no threat from Kinnock really, Kinnock didn't really oppose in the same way that Blair didn't really oppose, they weren't, they had soundbites and they had arguments but didn't actually oppose and that's what the Tories wanted to close down, they closed it down. Sorry what was the beginning of that question?

ATS: Just that lots of young people don't know about it.

NF: Oh yeah. And I'm quite surprised that they don't but then you did enter the 80s, 90s which was very individualistic and I think there was a huge gap and it's very obvious, it's very obvious Momentum, it's very obvious when you go on demonstrations there is a missing generation about 15 years worth of people, like Momentum both here and I went to a Momentum thing up in Liverpool, it was probably evenly balanced between young people, broadly speaking young people, and people broadly speaking my age, there was nothing in the middle. And I think that's another reason why the tradition wasn't carried on because the people who came in, and obviously Thatcher really went for the London, any left councils, and some of them to get surcharged, Lambeth got surcharged thousands of pounds, individuals, so I think what happened is that the left-wing councillors didn't go into councils, one because they couldn't see the point because they wouldn't be able to do things, and so the people going in weren't really sympathetic to GLC ideas, and they saw them as the loony left.

ATS: And so what does it mean to you that it was forgotten in some ways?

NF: While I see it as part of the lurch rightwards, the more interesting question is what is happening now, and why is it suddenly come back? I mean a significant amount of the supporters of Jeremy are people 55 and upwards, they are people who were affected by things like the GLC, but it's interesting that the young generation suddenly, you know there's always been some young people, but they've usually been the children are people who are lefties, but suddenly there's loads of them. And that's very interesting because, it's interesting to know why.

ATS: So in terms of where we are now, what are your future hopes and concerns for where we go from here in light of the lessons of the GLC?

NF: This is a whole book! It concerns me, is that the undermining of Jeremy from the PLP people is very similar to the undermining of the GLC by Kinnock and people. And its ideological and it is also racist in some ways, because the big issues then were support for what are seen as people who wanted Ireland to leave the union,

and black people who took power in their own hands, they were the two people that the mainstream party found very difficult to deal with. But nowadays it's also, I mean race was a problem for the Blairites, and it was a big issue in Brexit which wasn't dealt with properly by them. So it's interesting, I think the same issues are coming up again, and just hopefully the Labour Party this time is more robust and also the, obviously the membership is high, momentum is good, it's brought a lot of people back into the party who know how to organise. But people who have this thing about leadership which I think is an old-fashioned concept, and they can't forgive Jeremy for his views on Ireland and internationally. But I don't think all is lost, the same with, I'm not very pro-America but I am very encouraged by Bernie Sanders and the amount of people in America who seem to be taking action, I was used to think that America was a lost place really.

ATS: Okay, that's a nice hopeful note to end on. Did you have anything else you want to add?

NF: No, that's good.

ATS: Great, just finishing the interview.