

MNM/25 Steve King

Recording of an interview with Steve King conducted as part of the Bernie Grant Trust project 'Marginalised No More', (2019).

Name: Steve King

Interviewer: John Roberts

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00:02:24 (MNM_25(2))

Transcript: None available

Summary: King describes how he used to play bridge with Bernie Grant and other members of the Labour Party; being elected to Haringey Council on the back of anti-rate-capping; Grant's role in the Tottenham community and the borough of Haringey; the way the tabloids portrayed Grant and Haringey in a negative light; equal opportunity schemes in Haringey in the 1980s; Grant's awareness of institutional racism and his fight against it; the inclusion in the Labour Party Manifesto in 1986 of establishing a Gay and Lesbian Unit; Section 28; his experiences of being Grant's deputy leader; (2) when Grant become an MP in 1997

Note: digital material is stored in the digital drive and can be consulted in the researcher's area.

APPLY TO ARCHIVIST

0:05 - John (Interviewer)

Good morning. My name is John Roberts, and I am one of the Bernie Grant Marginalized No More Heritage Ambassadors. Today is Tuesday, the 10th of September, and I am at the Bishopsgate Institute in Liverpool Street, which houses the Bernie Grant archive, today, I'm meeting with Steve King, who was the deputy leader of Haringey council to Bernie Grant between 1985 to 1987 Steve will be talking about policies and challenges which faced Bernie and his leadership team during that period. Good morning, Steve.

0:41- Steve (Interviewee)

Morning, John.

0:44 - John (Interviewer)

Steve, can I first of all just touch upon the fact that I understand you were previously a bridge player and used to play bridge with Bernie. Are you able just to share a little bit about that?

0:58 Steve

Well, yeah, very briefly, previously is right, I don't think I've played since Bernie died, which is a real shame, so I'd be hard put to pick it up again. But no, we discovered we both had an interest in playing bridge, and found a couple of other comrades, Roger Harris, who was on the council with us, and Isabel Pandofsky, who at one point was chair and I think, Secretary some other of the Tottenham Labor Party, and we used to meet fairly regularly in one of our homes and play of an evening with food and drink and play well into the night. And, you know, it was, it was really good. Bernie was a brilliant player. He was a card, I mean, I learned over the years that he'd been playing cards, and he was a true card player. He really did know his cards back to the front. So it was always, it was always, you know, you always have been a chance of winning, if we were pairing with him. But we moved it round. So everyone had a crack.

1:55 Steve (Interviewee)

And it was very, very enjoyable. And we discussed politics, obviously, but other things as well. And it's a shame it's sort of all folded after a while, when Bernie started getting really ill, I think, with some one of the because we used to smoke at the time. Of course, all of us, except for Roger, who was a health fanatic, and, yeah, it was good, he really was good player.

2:23 - John (Interviewer)

Thanks very much, Steve sharing that insight. Okay, can I move on to the time of time, I guess, as leaders of Haringey council? So I understand that myself and Bernie were elected in April 1985 looking at archive material?

2:46 - Steve (Interviewee)

Yeah, it was as a result of the rate capping campaign, which is something people don't talk about. It's sort of disappeared. It was, I mean, it was much the same time as the miners strike, of course, and was, in many ways, obviously, far less newsworthy and dramatic, but its consequences have been, have been very, very deep. It was a proposal by Thatcher's government to put a cap on the amount that the Council could set a rate, which was a precursor of the what we've got at the moment, the council tax, but the rates had been around for hundreds of years, and were a pure property tax, and in that respect, very, very sound as a revenue raiser. Because whilst people dodge that, they can dodge their taxes, income tax and all the others. You can't dodge a property tax because you can't move the property

3:49 - Steve (Interviewer)

but of course, this is anathema to the Tories, and so they'd spend all their time trying to get round it and change it. In the end, they came up with this following a press campaign. You again, it was instigated by the by the press, as a response to the our victory in the GLC in 1981 and Ken Livingstone's administration, and then the number, and then the number of councils, local councils who followed from 82 particularly like Haringey taking up a lot of the policies. And

it was a time of cuts from government, central government, as always. And our line, the council's line, was to, you know, rather than cut services or jobs, we would raise the rates, as did many others. And of course, this called a huge stink with the Tories who can bear the thought of their paying more tax. And so they came up with this proposal that the government would take the power to fix a cap on the rate. And there was a huge campaign to begin with, a very successful campaign by all the Councils with. With the GLC as well, and the other metropolitan councils at the time against this, and it was very broad. But as the time went on, the numbers of people involved in the campaign got fewer, as the Councils found that the way they lived with it, the policy that the Councils agreed on, the Labour groups agreed on was that, rather this was obviously going to become law, that our response would be to not set a rate at all and take it from there. So conflict directly with the government, and there was a lot of Argy bargy about this within the councils, including ours, and the local party was fully involved, and the policy that of the local party to not set a rate then became the policy of the labor group and the leadership at the time, Angela Greatly and George Meehan resigned, so we had to have an election. Bernie was elected, as leader, and I was elected as deputy leader, and the rest of the cabinet followed were not cabinet. Wasn't a board cabinet. There was no cabinet. It was chairs of committees were elected after that. So that was the rate capping. Eventually, we all succumbed, except for Lambeth and Liverpool, where they held out and actually got fined and disqualified, but Haringey knuckled under in due course and set a rate from there. So it sounds like that was a particularly significant time for Haringey in terms of rate capping, I guess, in terms of your ascendancy to the leadership,

Steve (Interviewee)

Well, in straight rate capping terms, as I say, the effects of that have been long, very deep and still going on, because it really set the precedent for the government to take over a local government more than it ever had before, when it got involved in directly setting its financial basis, and then they scrapped the rates altogether and that ridiculous poll tax, and then the councilor. But anyway, so, but the Harringay was one among many. What made it significant, in fact, with the aftermath, was Bernie being elected as leader, the first black leader of a council in the country, and that immediately put Haringey and him, or him and Haringey onto the front pages. And that went on and on. It didn't, didn't cease.

7:49 - John (Interviewer)

Okay? So aside from rate capping, I mean, what were the other I suppose, main topical challenges during, during the time. I mean, you know, in your first year, for example, in 1985 aside from rate capping. Was there any other significant policies that came to fruition during that period, you can recall?

8:09 - Steve (Interviewee)

It was interesting because Haringay had got done well, our predecessors had run the council Well, we had good services and we had good local employment, and all the rest of it, plenty of it, but there were serious problems, particularly in the housing field, where a lot and Bernie was very aware of this, because he was a councilor before me. He got the council in 78 I think, for Bruce Grove in the middle of Tottenham, and he was the go to person for any black people who

had got particular problems and were getting nowhere and a lot of housing problems in terms of the management and maintenance of the council stock and more importantly, particularly the allocation of properties. So he was particularly concerned on that, and made it clear that, you know it was going to change.

9:09 - Steve (Interviewee)

He was also very much in touch with the with young black people in the in Tottenham and their worries and concerns, particularly over the relationship with the police and the constant harassment of stop and search and all the rest. And as we know, that all came to a head in October, which is what, six months after we got the job, and that really put us on the front pages. Obviously, Bernie was magnificent at the time. He rose to the occasion really well, the speeches he made, the people he met, and he didn't budge from his points at all, and the government produced a whitewash report, and he commissioned our own report, headed by, see, this is where I get into problems, Lord, we played bridge with him at some stages.

John (Interviewer)

Was it Lord Gifford?

10:00 - Steve (Interviewee)

Lord Gifford. Tony Gifford, that's right. Lord Gifford, another good bridge player, which really went in and the Broadwater. His Broadwater Farm report was far, far better, but that was later, so we had to put up with an awful lot of flak and awful problems in that period after the riot, in terms of the policies, as I say, though it was the housing one was important. I was chair of planning at the time, and my was my main focus. Although being deputy leader, I had a lot of other committees to chair and all the rest of it. That Was it really that for that first year, well, in the middle of the first year, and then Broadwater audience dominated everything.

10:49 - John (Interviewer)

So looking in the archive, one of the things I couldn't help noticing was the sort of bad press that Haringay encountered during that time, a lot of it aimed personally at Bernie, other points aimed at the council. You know, there was a lot of this sort of loony left talk, and you know, so many different disparaging remarks were being made in the press. Can you recall any of the particular instances that I'm sure there were a few where Bernie and yourself particularly felt, I suppose, under siege at the time?

11:36 - Steve (Interviewee)

I, nothing, not particular ones. I mean, it was constant. We were at a meeting in the civic at the time. We had to, well they did was one my mother got well. I used to send her all the press cuttings in that, which was we had to leave by the back door in my car, Bernie had a bigger car, obviously, but I just had an old Mini, a small mini, and we had to leave in that but they were around the back there, and there was a picture of my battered old Mini, you know, with us crammed into it, roaring off. So when it it was that sort of permanent sort of stuff Jeremy Corbyn is going through at the moment, you know, you just can't get away from it. And they just,

I mean, the fact that Bernie's marriage fell apart at the time, you know, much the same time, you must have come across the barmy Bernie moves in with blonde one,

John (Interviewer)

Yeah

Steve (Interviewee)

I mean, but that was, it was just constant and but he rose to it, and he, you know, he wouldn't back down. He wouldn't have it. And he was, he was really strong, and Sharon was terrific as well. So we tried to get on with the general day to day business with Broadwater, you know, important, but I think partly as a result of his start, so notice was taken of what we Gifford eventually came up with, you know, and it was proven beyond that, for example, that the police had lied about the lakes of petrol under, you know, waiting for them under which undercut. Their

13:08 - Steve (Interviewee)

they the moral high ground was a result of the murder of PC Blakelock. We had to put make clear our abreast of that at the same time and the behavior of the police after that. So it was, it was very, very rough, but the government did, as you said, Actually, earlier, where we talking earlier, make some efforts, and money was forthcoming for various projects. All took time, but, and we were blessed with a visit from the leader of the opposition as well. He had to be seen to be doing something, because, of course, he was, he was under pressure to condemn Bernie for whatever from the beginning, and Kinnock was such a weak and despicable man. He was quite happy to do so, you know, he came under, after a lot of pressure he wouldn't otherwise have come. Yeah, it was rough going, rough going.

14:06 - John (Interviewer)

So let's turn to the positive. So again, reviewing material in the archive, there are a number of initiatives that from Central Government Haringey, basically were given a huge thumbs up, one of them in respect of the equal ops, in respect of jobs within the council.

Steve (Interviewee)

I spoken earlier about allocation in housing and the way it had been skewed, particularly in the North of Tottenham, the famous Whitehall Lane estate

14:44 - Steve (Interviewee)

had become almost self self governing in terms of appointment, so the allocations to family members and distant family members and everything else is overwhelmingly white as a result in jobs. There were similar concerns that the. The recruitment wasn't reflecting the ethnic makeup of the borough, and that those black people who were employed tended not to be in the upper echelons. Put it that way of the council. So we did, in fact, again, but I think it's fair to say, following GLC examples introduced ethnic monitoring for posts or the whole equal opportunities, at the time, as it was known to ensure that all non ethnic ethnic monitoring, as I say, to make first of all, you had to register, find out how many people from minorities were there, what positions they were in, and then overhaul the recruitment process and the monitoring from from

there on in. And we did, I wouldn't say, we met a lot of resistance, but they were the person people working in the personnel department time were a bit chary about about it, really, they thought they were doing all right, but it was like a lot of the things, once you started pushing,

16:10 - Steve (Interviewee)

we got it underway. Yeah.

John (Interviewer)

So how did it come to Central Government attention?

16:33 - Steve (Interviewee)

Specifically, I have no idea. I could say we, you know, we got about we were criticized for that as well, because obviously we'd be depriving white people of important jobs, you know, I guess on the basis of the color and all this sort of reporting. But it was the GLC. Ken's GLC under Silke really got, paved the ground for all of this, as I say. So we weren't the only ones who were doing it. And the whole rate capping, subsequent era of the looney left was born of this. So anything, any policy that was vaguely new or had anything whatsoever to do with people other than traditional were focused on, and what problems they could make for us. So I don't know specifically why government came on that one.

17:29 - John (Interviewer)

And another initiative where it looks as though, again, was approved and praised by central government, was an initiative, or there was an award that was actually made to Haringey Council, the freedom of housing Information award. Do you recall that? Okay, this was where I believe Bernie introduced a policy which allowed housing tenants to see what was registered against them when they were applying for houses.

17:55 - Steve (Interviewee)

Yep, Yep. That's true. That was follow on from what I was saying earlier about the allocations policy. Yeah, I'd completely forgotten we won an award for it and quite right so.

18:05 - John (Interviewer)

So, so, so it's good to see that I suppose the public perception was swaying from from the sort of rather derogatory, loony left sort of banter that was in place at the time.

Steve (Interviewee)

What could you do? What could you do? What can you do? I mean, yeah, somebody in government obviously thought it was worthwhile.

John (Interviewer)

Okay, and then in terms of any sort of other groups that were supported during the time, I appreciate the fact that you were predominantly responsible for planning. But there were other, a couple of other initiatives and groups that research in archive material were part of Haringey. So there was the Irish and Afro Caribbean units as well. So there were various groups.

19:13 - Steve (Interviewee)

We set up, the whole panoply of small units working with particular issues. What the various groups and identities there was indeed, prior to us, our predecessor had actually done a very had actually set up a very good, a very good structure for black and minority ethnic people. We met regularly with the community representatives of various groups. Met regularly with with the leadership of the council. And a lot of work was put in on identifying the problems and so on and so forth. It tended to be consultative, and people were clearly needing more. So we set up the race equality unit for covering the whole Council with race equality officers in each directorate, the the Irish unit, um,

20:00 - Steve (Interviewee)

I'm leaving the lesbian and gay unit until later, because that came after the 86 election. So our initial ones was to set those ones up, And we, I have probably say, at this stage, rather than something, it did become clear in retrospect that last years, that with the particular points about housing and education I made by and large, it seemed to us as though the service is the standard. You know, traditional service were running all right, they needed work on them, which we were implementing, and not the root and branch change, which the equalities units were, you know, intended were put in place to actually do. And I think there was, I think we didn't concentrate enough on housing and social services. Particularly, I that's still that was in retrospect, and might be wrong, but I think it was because we the amount of time that was spent, particularly when we got to the lesbian and gay unit on the discussions and the issues were worth disproportionate when we was very much left to the individual chairs of committees to ensure that their service was done and various things. It's all part of the overall problem with governing anything, whether it's the country or the council, is priorities day to day, what you do, but certainly that's what we tried.

21:53 - John (Interviewer)

Okay. Thank you.

Steve (Interviewee)

If that makes sense.

John (Interviewer)

Yeah, yeah. Fine. And Sharon mentioned the fact that you, together with Bernie, were, I mean, you spoke about some of the racism that was experienced, you know, by some of the black residents, but within the sort of council or government, I know Bernie, at times, had a view that there was, like sort of, you know, a lot of institutional racism at the time. Are you able to share

any sort of examples of where he took that on, head on, either you know in terms of interactions with Westminster, or indeed, you know in terms of policies being set?

22:52 - Steve (Interviewee)

I can't think of anything specific. It was part of the overall approach to employment in the council. Work in the council, jobs in the council from, as I say, with the race equality unit on one hand, the women's unit on the other, which was another initiative set up to do that. But yes, he did. He was very aware, obviously, of institutional racism, and was particularly keen to make sure that any, you know it was located and extubated if and when. But I can't think of a specific example.

John (Interviewer)

Okay, and Sharon also mentioned about Section 28?

Steve (Interviewee)

in the year or so before the 86 election. We've done what we talked about with the various units had been set up and all the rest. And there was a commitment in the 86 manifesto to set up a lesbian and gay unit to with equal staffing and power as to the other equalities units to ensure there was and that was in the manifesto, and that's what, given the numbers it was ridiculous, the headline of the local paper at the time, which was actually by and large, a good local Paper, the Haringay journal, but it couldn't avoid getting its hands dirty with these issues. You know, the headline in election week was Haringay. You know at least well, Haringey, H, A, R, I N, G, E, Y, well, this was Harring and then G, A, Y, in big black blocks, you must have seen the page, and that really set the tone for and a campaign was set up to oppose the initiative. We set up the unit as we said, we would live in good order. After the election, they were very keen to get started, and there was a. And rumpus, because they issued a circular questionnaire to all the departments they were asking for all this information and all the rest of it, in which, without any sanction from the Labour group or the leadership or anything, there was a bit of a fuss about that, but nothing compared to the first being generated outside the Tories, obviously took the lead, and it so happened in 86 bit of a precursor to the national picture. Now they managed to capture the White Hart Lane seat, which had been solidly labor for a million years, because it was an all white working class council estate, but they actually got in there with their racist poison and took the seat and a few others, so they had some very unpleasant counselors who took the lead on this anti gay campaign. Homophobia is the word, and again, we weren't alone. Ealing, it's funny, looking back on these things, Ealing council went down the same road led by, I think he was the deputy leader at the time, but his folks, Hilary Benn, who,

26:10 - Steve (Interviewee)

anyway, Hilary Benn, so we weren't alone in this, but the Tories' seized on it. Seized on it because with a stick to be labor, of course, Kinnockran a mile, as you'd expect, and it did the fuss that they managed to generate over all this did eventually lead to a change in the law, the famous section 28 which abolish- banned the promotion of, I can't remember the exact word homosexual teachings or homosexuality, or appreciation of homosexuality, or whatever, which was a serious business, really, but it was just so ludicrous. It was. It was a precursor, you know,

as a sign of things to come, if you like, the hysteria that was whipped up over something so straightforward and simple, but it was, it just struck that, that deep chord of homophobia that unfortunately, has not gone away. And the government responded, which was an election tactic, because they knew they had to have an election,

27:20 - Steve (Interviewee)

you know, sometime for too long. So it was a very good, very good one for them. For Skinner, common defense, of course, as always, and it took a long time to get rid of but there were some amusing asphalt one, particularly about local campaign about this vicar. Well, Man of the cloth or I can't remember which I don't think he was a mainline church, but he was certainly a vicar of some sort or other, vowed to go on hunger strike until we and until we changed our minds and withdrew the withdrew the policy, and,

28:00 - Steve (Interviewee)

well, we didn't withdraw the policy, and we didn't hear of his death, thank goodness, obviously. But as I said, somewhere down the line there's probably he's probably moved to Australia, where his views would be much still popular. To be honest honest, should've said of that before the current anti LGBT business, but, but we were supported very strongly by the local party and by a lot of people in the borough and what's called a positive images campaign, because the centerpiece of the of the policy we were implementing was the was, it was indeed the promotion of positive images of gay people, men and women. And so they named the campaign. After that, we had a jolly good March somewhere, and a lot, a lot of support. And so, because there's always a bit wavering on things like this.

29:02 - Steve (Interviewee)

We stuck with it and, well, it was still in place when Bernie got elected and I left, and then I looked for the leadership there it is, and they finally, Blair, I think finally, at some stage, got rid of it. I of it.

29:33 - John (Interviewer)

Excellent. So can we move away from policies to start personal on a personal perspective? So obviously you worked as Bernie's leader during for a two year period,

Steve (Interviewee)

Deputy leader.

John (Interviewer)

a deputy leader, beg your pardon,

Steve (Interviewee)

Yeah, yeah.

John - (Interviewer)

and you know, are you able to share or are you willing to share any, any instances or disagreements, or indeed, I suppose, differences of opinion that you may have had during the time, and how did you find Bernie as a leader in general?

30:00 - Steve (Interviewee)

At His funeral, the big do in Ally Pally for his, about, on the day, Jeremy Corbyn, who was one of the main speakers, actually said that talking about Bernie, how much Bernie loved a meeting and would do this, which is completely not the case. Bernie hated meetings. He really didn't like them at all. He was we just wanted to get things done. I mean, obviously understood. So as deputy leader, I found myself chairing all sorts of different bodies and panels and doing this, that and the other two of Well, as I say, of all sorts. So I had lots and lots to do, and I try to think, No, we were very much in tandem on the issues at the time. I don't really think we disagreed big time on anything. I mean, he supported me when I led the chair of planning, led the opposition to the redevelopment of the Spurs ground, for example, not, obviously not the current one. This was, was in the 80s, but then it was nothing like the monstrosity now, but it did involve moving the whole ground to the high edge of the High Street, knocking down some listed buildings and generally causing mayhem.

31:29 - Steve (Interviewee)

It was ridiculous, and we were a bit worried that the Tottenham party would root for it, and that we would actually have trouble if we were going to win negotiation and whatnot, and indeed, where there were some, but Bernie, who obviously was a Tottenham member and lived in Tottenham, was very firm on the fact that you went, he took his boys to spurs and was subjected to racism, you know, insults and all the rest of it, was very aware that they were, you know, they were a handful of black people in the crowd, despite the fact that black people, with numerous black people in Tottenham, obviously, and that Spurs did absolutely nothing for the people of Tottenham.

32:16 - Steve (Interviewee)

And he was, he was a really good support on that one. That's, that's, for example, on my especially the planning, and we eventually forced them to back down, and the regime changed, and I just saw my role as supporting him in his famous speech in the street after Broadwater to, to the youth, the one reported as the police got a good hiding. And although I was there to back him up, just get the final support, obviously, general support. And it was a very good it was a very, very good line to take, because those cha-, young boy, young men, young boys, whatever, were all ready to, you know, march on Tottenham police station and attack it, you know. And Especially the police the police were in. This is a daft enough do thing to do at any time, and there were a lot more police then, obviously they used to keep horses at Tottenham Nick as well. So they'd have been ridiculous. But he managed to diffuse it with with by making it clear that, you know, stick with him, and he would take it through

33:24 - Steve (Interviewee)

which he did, and that's what he spent so much time doing. So while I'm telling you this, I'm just trying to think of where we might have disagreed on anything, and perhaps you found something in the archive.

John (Interviewer)

No, no. Not at all. It's just personal experience. I mean, you may not of.

Steve (Interviewee)

I liked Bernie enormously. He could be prickly. He could be prickly.

John (Interviewer)

Yeah

Steve (Interviewee)

And I think we were on a selection panel for something or other, and he had to go with me for picking one speaking on one cat. And I used to say to people, you know, well, if you haven't sat opposite Bernie grant and been called a racist by him, then you haven't got on with him. You know, you haven't worked with him. I stood my ground and said, Look racist, rubbish, Bernie. You know that? Blah, blah, blah,

34:20 - Steve (Interviewee)

this candidate, that, this candidate, so he could be prickly and he could be fiery, but, you know, we were friends as well as comrades as it were. And, yeah, I miss him to this day, I'll probably go, something will pop into my mind. It's not my style, which is why was a hopeless leader, really, for the six months I had the job, but much better, Deputy Leader, much better. Yes, oh, we did disagree with that over that, actually, after I became leader and we lost the general election, Bernie was now MP for Tottenham and all the rest of it, and he was a pragmatic person, and he said, Well, we lost the election, it's just going to get worse. Council's going to have to have to compromise. And I said, Look, we can, you know, we've got the party policy. I've always followed the party policy, you know, I will go to to the Labour group and put the party policy, which was no cuts, no redundancies, to maintain the stance of against the government, and

35:43 - Steve (Interviewee)

You know, he said, well, good luck, and I lost. So that was that. But that was very straightforward disagreement on tactics, really. It was inevitable, as our friend, fellow bookseller, Clive Bootle described them as the pucies, the pusillanimous center. You have a left and you have a right, and you have the center. The Liberals are classy. But in the labor center, the soggy center, the pusillanimous Center, this is all the way the wind was blowing and moved over to the other side, and that was it. So for the last three years, next three years, until I resigned over the poll tax, I did my business on the committees and in the ward. But then there were no leadership nothing, no Chair, committee chairs.

John (Interviewer)

So just to sum up your time working under Bernie in Haringey, positive experience?

Steve (Interviewee)

Yes, yeah, it was. And

36:56 - Steve (Interviewee)

if we could have won that 87 election, which was, you know, it wasn't impossible. It wasn't impossible. I mean, you know, then things would have been different. We would have carried on and under a Labour government. And I think life would have been easier than it became, obviously, but it was positive working with Bernie and with so much, you know, so many good, good things, which we've talked about. And yeah, I think so. I mean, it was a very, I mean, looked at and again, retrospect in car, it's ridiculous from my point of view. I mean, the greasy pole, you know, I really was up to the top and down within three years. You know, it's ridiculous, really. But yeah, we got involved in this, another interminable case. This was sexism. One of the women councilors complained about being abused, not physically abused, verbally abused, and what are bullied by the chair of the committee and the dustbin strike, never talked about the dustbin, but you must have come across that.

John (Interviewer)

Yes, Sharon did mention that.

Steve (Interviewee)

Oh god yeah the bin strike. Jesus. I think I'd become Chair of personnel by then, after the 86 election, the chap who'd done it years only larger stood down. So we needed a new one. So I was persuaded to give up planning and do that. And

38:40 - Steve (Interviewee)

we discovered that the one of the chair of the Borough, union the TNG then just been filled in his car allowance, or his car loan or something, or some something which was a bad offense, lot of money involved, and he had been a thorn in our sides for a long time. He was a very unpleasant man. And it was very difficult to negotiate with them, but we'd discovered this, so we instituted due process, which was to suspend him pending a full inquiry and investigation, etc, etc, etc, all of which, and they just went out on strike and Bernie very sensibly. I thought, well, I didn't think so at the time, but went off on holiday.

39:26 Steve (Interviewee)

It was partly a twinning trip, I think, to Jamaica, and also taking that one, which is fair enough. So he went off and this. And it was, it was, it was an emergency this. I mean, that was, that was, that was an interesting experience, a daily cry out. There were governments committee, the Cobra committee, or whatever they call it, you know, the emergency committee. So we had that every morning reports from here, there and everywhere. And what had the dust strike was affected? Would it spread to the rest of the Union? And then there was the march that was. Was that before he went or after he came back? I can't remember, but he was there. They were the dustbinmen all marched on, and they were all men, marched on the civic center. And all the people who worked in the civic center came out and stood out. So obviously we sent shouted

back at them. Most of them were black or of other minorities, very noticeable dustmen were overwhelmingly white. And we got, they got the national TNG, and so we negotiated, and we paid them a lot of money. It was we got rid of the procedure went through, and the bloke was fired, and appeals were lost, and that was it.

John (Interviewer)

How long did the strike last?

40:52 - Steve (Interviewee)

Few weeks? It was quite serious in terms of the rubbish piling up, you know, because we wouldn't, we were determined to stick to due process, where we said we wouldn't get in contractors we wouldn't, or when we wouldn't, all get anyone to take the stuff away, or the rest of it, we stuck firmly to the negotiating procedure. And the National officer, tng came along or us, and we kept talking back and front, and we just stuck. We did stick to our guns. And it got a bit difficult, because one of the, they, I mean, it really was just the dustbin union, really, they tried to get out there people who

41:39 - Steve (Interviewer)

ran the petrol pumps, capitalized petrol center do whatever, then for the school busses and things you see, well, they did succeed in closing it for a couple of days, which was bad because it meant that the buses didn't operate, which so that was extra pressure. But that didn't last very long, and the other union was far more, far less keen NUPE was far less keen in the branch, in the dust, in the depot, the big depot in Tottenham, they had to go along with it. But the Secretary of the branch, he was quite open. I mean, I spoke, remember speaking to that he couldn't stand the bloke who'd been suspended anyway, because he used to bully him and all, you know, and violent, but violently so he wasn't out there urging his men to come out. You know, he was arguing negotiation. So it was, yeah, we ended up the dead dog payment is what became famous. Because

42:40 - Steve (Interviewee)

having the mounds of rubbish having been there for some weeks, six or seven weeks, or whatever it was, they weren't very nice. So they were union were asking for money, extra money to clear, including, not that, you know, which was bound to include dead dogs, because people just throw their dead dogs on these piles, rather than arrange for it to be taken away. So the dead dog payment cost us a few bit, but it was well worthy in that respect, because they didn't have any trouble after that at all. But that was just, you know, that wasn't a disagreement at all. No, I really cannot think where well Sharon might I think there's somewhere, but.

43:20 - John (Interviewer)

Absolutely, sounds like a real, although it's a two year period, it sounds as though there was a considerable amount.

Steve (Interviewee)

There was, yes, there was an awful lot went on. Yeah. I mean, I don't suppose it's that different from any other council. The important thing was, at the time, we still had a lot of freedom.

43:42 - Steve (Interviewee)

The rate capping thing was to really the start, and that didn't take serious effect for a number of years, because the tourists haven't got the power, you know, didn't turn the screw immediately, but years went by after I'd gone they just squeezed and squeezed, you know, and took more and more to the center, and took white powers and all the rest of it, but we still had quite a lot of room for maneuver. That was the thing. And yeah, it was, it went on. Yeah, I really enjoyed my time on the council wonderful. And I really enjoyed working with Bernie, and I do that bloody Windrush business would not have got to where it did. If he'd been still around once it started to surface the bubble, he'd have been on top of it. He wouldn't let him get away with it. Important man. Force of personality.

44:42 - John (Interviewer)

And you you know, from from, from the limited history that I look through. I mean, it's amazing how, from the 1985 period where it was all you know, barmy Bernie and everything else, up to his death, you know how the view of government had completely changed.

45:00 - Steve (Interviewee)

Right around, yeah, oh, yeah, yeah, it did, and it became very much. Is there a toilet on this floor? Sorry, too.

End of Clip 1

0:01 - John (Interviewer)

So Steve, fantastic insight into your time working with burning on the council. Are there any other thoughts that you'd like to add before we wrap up at all?

0:13 - Steve (Interviewee)

Well, just briefly, I think Bernie became the MP, and then he obviously did the business there and gradually moved away from being barmy Bernie and all the rest of being respected, which was right, but it was he was very noticeable that Blair never gave him a job when we got in in 97 admittedly, he was, he was, he was ill by then, but even so Blair made all the right noises, particularly at Bernie's funeral. He never actually gave him, trusted him enough to give him a job which was which was not right, because Bernie was more than capable of running, of being a minister and running a department, and would have actually brought the focus on the issues that were central to its whole political being, discrimination against black people, across the board and down the years, particularly attached, in the current context, to black youth, because he was perhaps, didn't say enough of that in the interview, how from his start on the council, he'd been very much involved in the youth programs, the youth service we had, which it's all gone now because of the cuts, but Haringey had a good one, very good youth service. Bernie was very involved in that, particularly in Tottenham and young black men. So those particular issues,

he would have brought to any ministry and actually done something about them. So, yeah, I'll finish on that one really, you know, he died far too young, far too soon.

1:50 - John (Interviewer)

Excellent. Well, Steve, really can't thank you enough for your time today. Fantastic insights there, and thank you so much for your time. Really appreciate it.

1:59 - Steve (Interviewee)

Thanks, John. I've done thank you. I'm so glad you took that line after I let you down so badly in the beginning, going in completely the wrong direction, not at all. And I'm glad you prompted me along as well, because my memory obviously isn't, isn't what it was, No, it's good. Hope the project every success.

John (Interviewer)

Thank you very much indeed, Steve.