

**Interview with Sally Groves by David Welsh and Rima Joebear on 25 March 2013 for
Britain at Work Oral History Project**

Sally Groves was an assembly worker at the Trico windscreen wipers factory on the Great West Road in Brentford working there from 1975 until 1980. She was active on the Trico picket line in the successful 1976 strike for equal pay for women. As the strike committee press and publicity officer, she played a key role in the dispute. The strikers returned to work after 21 weeks when the company finally capitulated, but the rise wasn't backdated to January 1 when equal pay became law. Sally said at the time, "That's because it's a negotiated settlement. You could say we got it despite the Equal Pay Act." She had previously been a social worker. After the Trico strike she became an AUEW shop steward at Trico and, later, women's delegate on Southall AUEW District Committee. She took on a job as a trainee tool setter at Trico until she left in 1980. She worked at other factories in West London before returning to social work in 1989. Transcription and Trico strike timeline by Tom Vague

(Looking at a photo of the strike).

That lorry actually stopped because he misjudged the distance of the factory gates. Two lorries had already swept in at huge speed. There was no way, if you got in front of them you'd have stood a chance. Yeah, he came to a halt but the police just dragged everyone away and arrested three people.

DW: Were you arrested?

No, I wasn't arrested but there were three people arrested that day. That one was July 29.

Alright, we'll have to come back to that, have you seen that photo? Are you in it?

Yes, it is Trico but it wasn't a conference, it was the last mass meeting on 15th October when we voted unanimously to accept the equal pay settlement. That is actually slightly bigger, it takes in more people.

Are you there?

There somewhere but not in the photo.

Actually some of the women at the front here never came down to the picket line. As you see there were a lot of older working at Trico at the time we went on strike. Some were not only in their 60s but even in their 70s. I think the oldest person that was working on the assembly lines before the strike was 82! There hadn't been any retirement policy but one came in later. Quite a lot of these women didn't come down on the picket line. They stayed out on strike but didn't take part and I guess were under pressure too from their husbands not to come down, you know what I mean. So although there were about 400 women on strike, (a little fewer as the months went by), it began to fall on about 50 or 60 women to do all the picketing.

RJ: Did that cause tensions between the women on the picket line and the women who didn't join?

Well, it could have done but you didn't see them except when they came for their strike pay and at the mass meetings. Each week once it was made official there was strike pay of £9 a week. We urged all the women to stay involved. But there were a lot of pressures on women which is why some didn't come down on the picket line. You know, there were some very young Indian girls who came all the time on the picket line but they weren't allowed to come down in the evening or at night for example. So it was only because there was such huge solidarity from trade unionists and the women's movement to help us on the picket line, (which now would be no doubt illegal under the anti-union laws), that we were helped to keep the picket line going - and later on the 24 hour picket going - in order to stop those very convoys.

DW: These lorries.

Not that one, that came in at about 5pm or 6pm, teatime, but most came in the early hours of the morning.

When they thought they might beat the picket?

Yes, that's right, yes, so that's why we needed the 24 hour picket. What was this in?

This was in something called Organising to Win, which was published in 1978. How much was it?

RJ: 60p in 1978.

There we are, Frances Pinner, Monica Harvey, me, and I forget her name, I knew her but I can't remember her name.

DW: So we've got two pictures of you.

They were all the Report photos.

There are a lot of photos.

I have got hundreds, I've got press cuttings and photos. I did buy some photos from Report after the strike.

RJ: Have you put them on your computer?

I've now scanned most of the stuff on to the computer in case it got destroyed or lost. I used to be terrified when I was first getting all the memorabilia together. I used to think if the house gets burnt down it'll go and then there's nothing, that's it!

DW: That is an archive The library would one day love to have that.

RJ: I'm sure you're in the TUC Library aren't you?

Well, I've said I'm going to let them have all my memorabilia, you know.

Digitally?

No, I'm going to give it all to the TUC Library's collections, Chris Coates I think.

DW: Did you see Chris just recently?

Yes at this meeting. For the first time for I don't know how long - I suppose it's about 30 years since I did any speaking about Trico - the local Ealing Trades Council put on an event for International Women's Day at which I spoke. Eve Turner and Oliver New organised it. You know him?

Yes, we used to work together on the same system on the underground, he's still on there.

Yes, he is, he's still driving a train.

And Eve used to be in our union branch Unite.

What locally?

In inner west London, Ladbroke Grove.

Yes, because that was when she was working what at, where was she working?

Well, I'm not quite sure how she got to the area.

Why that particular branch? Because she was working this way wasn't she?

We were a branch that had people they couldn't fit in anywhere else because she was doing all that welfare advice, she does a lot of welfare teacher training, they couldn't think where to put her so they put her in our branch, we were all a bit weird.

RJ: A mixed bunch.

That was their poster for it, for the event at the local pub.

So you were really at the forefront of the strike?

Well, I was one of the most involved. I was on the strike committee as the press and publicity officer. We've got all the strike bulletins. But Eileen Ward was a tower of strength during the strike. She'd worked at Trico for 15 years by the time we came out on strike, and Betty Aiston was at the forefront. They were both senior shop stewards. I hadn't been at Trico very long at the time. And then there were other people who were very involved. You know there were a lot of others who were always there on the picket line but not quite as involved.

Did you go back to work?

Yes, I think a number of us would not have ever gone back if we had lost. But yes, and I worked at Trico just a bit under 5 years. Yes. It was a strange way I came to work there because...

DW: We should start.

RJ: This is an interview that's already started with Sally Groves and interviewing Sally is Rima Joebear and Dave Welsh for the Britain at Work project on March 25 2013. Sally, you were saying the way you came to work at Trico.

Yes, it was quite strange really because before I worked at Trico I had qualified as a social worker and been in social work. Then I wanted to do some more study. I was married at the time and I was able to do so because my husband was working. But then we separated as things weren't working out very well between us. As a result I had to go out and get a job as soon as possible as I had moved out into a bed-sit.

It would have taken some months to find another social work post and, as it was a stressful time, I thought I'd just get another job. So I went down the Jobcentre. The day I went down I was offered the choice of two jobs. At the time there were many factories of course and the pay working in a factory was higher than in a shop and I didn't have any office skills. The best paid jobs were in factories. Well, there were two jobs they offered me that day. One was at Wall's ice cream factory in Acton and the other at a place called Trico Folberth in Brentford. Both were on the assembly line.

I asked what the starting time was at each. They said 7.30am at Wall's and 8.00am at Trico! Need I say any more! So I said I'll take the one at Trico. That's how I came to work at Trico. This was towards the end of 1975. It was almost exactly 6 months later, at the end of May 1976, that something that had been brewing a long while, erupted into the strike for equal pay. It had been boiling up for a long while really.

Before you came along?

Yes, they had been negotiating for about 12 months before. Serious negotiations had started the previous summer when the Equal Pay Act 1970 had come in but wasn't yet on the statute book. As you know Government gave industry and employers 5 years to implement equal pay.

Yes, many companies spent 5 years looking at ways to avoid it! Trico had not really taken any notice of it. So from the previous summer, the summer of 1975, there were some serious negotiations started by the union to try and implement equal pay. What had happened at Trico was that there had been a night shift but because there had been a downturn in the economy around 1975 the company suddenly announced, in September 1975, that they were going to close the night shift. They were going to have a new back shift, a sort of "twilight" shift from 12.00 noon until 10.00pm. The union managed to negotiate that the remainder of the men, five in all, should be offered alternative assembly work in the factory on the day shift alongside the women.

The day shift was worked by women only. So there were just 5 men (apart from the ones that went on to this new back shift) that came on to the day shift. That really triggered things, because then they were sitting alongside the women on the assembly lines. They were not on the blade line where I was but close by. At the end of our 40 hour week, if they achieved the same performance as one of the women because we were all on piece work, (payment by results you know), they came away with £6- £6.50 more than the woman working at the same speed.

That was dynamite. The women were furious. There had been one or two disputes with walk-outs from that department before the May but nothing came of them. The negotiations continued but it became quite clear that the management were really not going to budge. They gave all sorts of reasons. They said that the men were more flexible, because they had to be completely flexible on the night shift but the union pointed out that there had been a flexibility agreement for the women since 1969 on the day shift too. Everyone had to be flexible and move from job to job or from one department to another if the company required them to do so.

And they also said that the night shift rate for the men was temporary and it would disappear over time. Management said that when we had a wage rise the guys wouldn't get any wage increase and then eventually we would catch up with the men. So obviously the union, (our union was the AUEW, which is now part of Unite), said well that's equal pay in reverse! And of course that infuriated the guys as well because they realised they weren't going to get any wage increases for a very long time. So it came to a head on May 24th 1976 when there was a final meeting between our union officials, our Divisional Officer and District Secretary and the Trico management.

And at that meeting it was quite clear there wasn't going to be any agreement, and a Failure to Agree was recorded. The union had exhausted all the procedure; there wasn't anywhere else to go with it. And so there was a mass meeting called in Boston Manor Park at the back of the factory. At that meeting our AUEW Southall District Secretary, Roger Butler and our factory convenor John Inwood and Eileen Ward, (who was one of the senior stewards), spoke to the meeting. There were two items on the agenda; one was there was going to be a rally and lobby of Parliament on unemployment on May 26, on the Wednesday, so there needed to be a vote about whether the factory would agree to a one day strike for that and to support it anyway. The other thing was the report back on the failure to agree on the equal pay issue.

So on the first issue, in the end there was a vote for a half-day stoppage on the Wednesday. Trico didn't at the time have a very good reputation for supporting other issues that they considered outside the four walls of the factory. The factory was fairly organised; I suppose it had about 70% of membership organised into the union by that time but no one really had any experience of supporting progressive campaigns or anything. It was fairly insular. So that was finally agreed and then it was asked for the men to go back and the women stay because there'd been no thought of involving the men about the equal pay issue up to then in the factory by the Shop Stewards Committee.

The women stayed in the park and the report back was given that the company were not prepared to budge on equal pay. So our District Secretary Roger Butler said it was now obviously up to the shop stewards and the members to decide what they were going to do, not necessarily thinking that that would be there and then. He had to leave at that point to go to another meeting and John Inwood, who was the convenor for the shop stewards in the factory, sort of wound up the meeting because the hour of the dinner break had come to an end. Most people began walking back into the factory. I remember beginning to walk back in.

But some women, the women who had been directly working alongside these five guys, were so angry, they stayed in the park and called everyone else back. So all the women returned. There were about 400 women in the park and they said they wanted some action there and then. There was actually three proposals put to the meeting; one was for lightning strikes, one for one or two days a week strikes and then the last proposal was for all out strike action. Well, the last proposal was put first and it was overwhelmingly supported. So suddenly everyone realised that we were now on strike!

From that moment, you couldn't go back into the factory.

From that moment. Well, we had to go back in to collect our belongings. Walking in again I heard someone say should we clock out! Little did we know as we walked out, outside the gates, that we would be out for 21 weeks. No one had any idea. We thought it might be over quite quickly.

So what was the atmosphere like in the park that day and making these massive decisions?

Well, it was incredible. I mean there were feelings of excitement, confusion, anger about the whole issue, about how management was treating people, especially as there now was an Equal Pay Act actually on statute since the end of the previous year. Since the beginning of 1976 we were being told that in law women should have equal pay.

You were striking for something that was already there.

Lots of people said well why haven't you got equal pay when there is a law now? People thought that with the law we must have it!

It was your right.

Yeah.

What did the guys, the five men that were doing the same job, where did they stand do you know?

Yes, well, I don't think all five came out but one, two, about two or three of that five were out with us all the time from then, from that day on. They were great. There was a Welsh guy called George Jinks and another guy called Eric Fudge who's in some of the photos, who had been or was I think at the time a member of the Windsor chapter of the Hells Angels. He was quite a character and he was a terrific support. There were about I think eight, nine or maybe a dozen men who came out immediately with us. We're still debating exactly how many it was at the beginning. There were others that came out later, but the ones that came out from the beginning and stayed out with us were absolute diamonds.

I mean sometimes it's been posed as a strike of men versus women but of course it wasn't like that. Later it was made official by National Executive. It was made official almost immediately by District Committee who met on the Thursday. We came out on the Monday and they met on the Thursday and voted to make it official, but then it took until June 15th for it to be made official by National Executive. Once that had been agreed a second wave of men came out. They had said "It's not an official strike yet" sort of thing, but then they did join us. But that meant in the end

there were about 150 men who came out and there were about 400 women, practically every woman.

But we were still far outnumbered because Trico employed about 1,600 at the time. Some were in other unions and some on the office side of work. Some of these were supportive but weren't out on strike. But there were some very reactionary guys working in the factory, some of which were in the tool room and in the press shop and other places. There were some very unpleasant characters. There were some men, maybe only one or two, actually in the National Front, but there were lots of you know unpleasant ones very hostile to us.

DW: Even though it became official?

A lot of them still refused to come out and in fact at a later point Roger Butler, our Southall District Secretary, had a meeting with those men in the park. He was by no means a shy violet; he could stand up for himself but he said he was almost lynched by them. So those particular men would never come out and stayed in until they were laid off by management at a much, much later date in September. This was after many incidents had taken place. We had huge battles with the convoys the company organised of mercenary-style labour from the East End and with the collusion of the police. The police helped them get in and allowed them to have their number plates covered up and to cross the lights at red.

RJ: Did some get through?

A lot of lorries got through, yes.

The factory did carry on?

Well, there was a little bit of production. There was also a plant they'd opened two years previously in Northampton and there were about 200 women working there. That plant was still working and it was not unionised. During the strike there was contact made with those women and a lot of them joined the union but they were completely unorganised at first and they were working for a fraction of what we got.

But after the strike did it level out with them, did they get equal pay as well?

No, the equal pay settlement couldn't cover them. But a lot of those convoys were done to try and demoralise us. But the women were the main production workers, so there was very little production going on.

DW: So what were the men doing?

They were sitting around.

There wasn't a lot for them to do really.

Some had sat around for quite a bit before the strike! The women used to work very hard. It was very hard work on the assembly lines, very hard work. There was no sitting around.

Could you explain what your job was then?

Trico were not known as "the raining champions" for nothing! Trico made windscreen wipers. It had a virtual monopoly of motor accessory equipment in the UK at the time. The strike didn't help them with that. They could have settled equal pay and avoided the strike. The strike didn't help them because there were competitors but before the strike Trico had dominated the UK market.

I worked on the arms and blades assembly for the windscreen wipers. Trico was one of the biggest employers in the area employing 1,600 at the time of the strike even though it had been bigger than that in the past. It was situated between Firestones and Rank Audio Visual. The site is now occupied by Glaxo Smith Kline after Trico moved to Wales and the building was demolished. It was demolished, yes, the whole factory was demolished.

It had been there since the 30s?

Well, I think it was built around 1926 or 1928? The late 20s, and I think from about 1962 Trico concentrated all its production at this prestigious site on the Great West Road. But before that it had had people operating from lots of different smaller units around the area, I think it had been in about 14 different places. It was a prestigious site..

It is amazing how so much of west London was motor vehicle parts.

That's right.

You had Mulliner Park Ward, even Ford's, you had Ford out at Langley, Rootes, there must have been so many, it was a real hub of motor manufacturing.

That's right, yes. And of course next to us was Firestones at the time, which was a bigger employer, that of course is no more.

RJ: So what was the atmosphere like when you start the day, go in? What was the working day like, factory life? Did you get to chat?

Yeah, people would chat a lot, yes, there was always a lot of jokes.

Banter.

Yes, but it was hard work, it was really hard work.

Piecework.

Yeah, that's right, you couldn't just do things at your own pace, you had to work, you know under a lot of pressure. I think the women had always been treated with quite a lot of contempt in the factory, not only by management, who really looked down on them even though they had been known to say that the women worked faster than a machine! But the rates for the women were always kept quite cheap.

And a lot of the men also had that same attitude towards the women and that really showed up when the strike took place. You know the difference between those who came out on strike and those that scabbed on us and took the management's position. From the start of the strike management said they would take it to the Industrial Tribunal for a ruling on it, and that would be the fair way to go. But the union decided to boycott the tribunal. That was because the Equal Pay Act as it was then (until it was amended later on in 1983 when they brought in equal pay for work of equal value) was so riddled with loopholes. The equal pay cases coming in front of the Industrial Tribunal in the first six months had resulted in ludicrous decisions. There was no case law at the time. Each tribunal judge was just making a decision, you know with the other two on the panel, without any case law being established, because none of them had gone to any appeal by then. It was a lawyers' paradise and it was an employers' paradise.

So that was why the company was the first ever to be the applicant to the Tribunal, because it had always been the workers, the women taking cases. Trico was the first to do that. When they finally went to the Tribunal - because they cancelled their application the first time and started making financial offers to the union. But when they did finally go to the Tribunal in the third week of August the judge Sir Jocelyn Bodilly summed up saying he accepted we did exactly the same

work as the men but that therefore the company would have to rely on the “escape clause” in the act, which was the material difference. This basically was that the men had previously worked on nights, which was the material difference.

But I think it was an act of real political courage and vision that our union, at District level, made that decision to boycott the Tribunal and stuck to it despite huge pressure from the media and all quarters to go along with it.

DW: Because it probably wouldn't happen today would it, the same situation? Unions tend to go to tribunals much more.

Yes, and of course now you can take, they've won the right, to collective decisions, whilst then if you won at the tribunal it only related to you as an individual, not to the job. In contrast to us women AUEW members at Electrolux were out on strike for equal pay the year after us. They did not get the same support from their AUEW officials and went through the tribunal system and some of them won at the tribunal, or on appeal, and when they went back management changed their job title to something else, changed the name of it, and then told them ah yes but the job you were in, whoever takes that job will have to go to the tribunal again. I mean, absolutely crazy.

Why do you think the local district AUEW was prepared to back you?

Well, it was a progressive left wing leadership there at that time, and the whole of that District Committee, which wasn't a very big committee, were all progressive and prepared to fight for us. That was the difference because for example at Electrolux their officials said they weren't prepared to support them and it seems took a backward sort of craft position that it would upset the wages structure, which of course it did at Trico. But in the end our winning equal pay was the catalyst forcing the company to change. It forced them to give wage rises to all the other workers because the differentials were put out by us getting such a big increase. But it was all due to having a politically astute and left wing District Committee and Divisional Organiser.

Now, who was it? It was Scanlon at the time that was on the National Executive but a lot of the National Executive was fairly right wing and there was a lot of jockeying by our local officials to make sure that the National Executive continued to support our strike and keep it official. Five months is a long time and they were having to pay out strike pay all that time. Also If we'd had a different District Committee it might have said to us you must go to the Tribunal, that's what you should do you know, and that's what a lot of the media were telling us to do to be “lawful”! Some of the media was so angry when we boycotted the Tribunal. I remember, I don't know if she was a labour or industrial correspondent, do they have them now?

They've disappeared now.

I can't remember her name but she was either the labour or industrial correspondent at the *Guardian*. A journalist told me that this woman was so annoyed that we had decided to boycott the Tribunal that she wouldn't let the Trico strike be mentioned in her department! It was holier than thou that we should have gone down that route. And so they gave us hardly any coverage at all, not that they ever were that good on industrial stuff. I could write a book about the media and Trico. Incredible!

Yes, so if we'd had a different District Committee leadership who'd listened to the company and the right wing media we could have been forced to go to the Tribunal. We would have lost. Whether on appeal we might have won but it wouldn't have been a win for all the women, only the ones named; Betty Aiston and I.

This was the decision of the Industrial Tribunal ruling against us(showing copy of the original Industrial Tribunal decision). My name was cited and Betty Aiston, and the AUEW, though they shouldn't have cited the AUEW; it was meant to be individuals. So, can you imagine, I'm sure they did that on purpose hoping that if we did go to the Tribunal, if we had won or lost it would

have divided us against everyone else. If we'd won no one else would of course. If we'd lost we would have represented the defeat! But the strike became a struggle between the management and the union too because in the end the management, using the convoys, were out to break the whole union, not simply the women determined to get equal pay.

And as things went on and there was so much pressure put on us, it hardened everyone's resolve to stick it out. When you see dreadful things happening, like the police helping to bring in these convoys it made us even more determined.

Well, shall we ask you about that, because we've got a picture here of you with a lorry that you said had come through.

Well, it was trying to come in the gates here at Trico. That's the Great West Road there.

Just in the background.

They probably started bringing in these big convoys from the beginning of July or it could have been before because we didn't have a 24-hour picket before then.

And we had such tremendous support from other trade unionists. It was fantastic. It kept the picketing strong. Again that would be unlawful now. But this was the last occasion where they got through. We had prevented one convoy getting through at night; that was two nights before this. Then as I say it was usually in the night but on this occasion, suddenly at a tea-time, because a lot of people had gone home to have their tea, so there weren't that many on the picket line. They brought six more lorries. The police blocked off Boston Manor Road and the Great West Road to allow the lorries to come through. And they broke through and there was such a battle to try to stop them and then there were arrests of some pickets.

It was so appalling the way they treated everyone that even some of the guys who had been scabbing on us every day were disgusted by what they saw. They didn't see it in the middle of the night because normally they didn't work nights. But this time they were there. Some of them had been kept back to unload the raw materials that were brought in, and they refused to do it after seeing what had happened to us. Some of the guys that were still in the factory refused to touch the materials. They were so disgusted by it. And then the lorries came out later and the police tried to stop us and any cars chasing the convoy.

So what happened to you in this picture?

RJ: Why are you on the floor?

I threw myself in front to try and stop the lorry. You were just literally standing in front of lorries? Well, what we obviously had a right to do, we understood, was to speak to the drivers. You couldn't when they used to keep you back and let them sweep in at huge speed but they didn't even let us speak to that driver. Eileen Ward is there. There's another photo of this time that shows it better. Lots of photos were taken at that time. But she tried to speak to the driver. They wouldn't let her; they dragged her away. Yeah, so it was a huge battle.

RJ: Did anyone get seriously hurt?

No one was physically hurt, no. I mean if you tried to stop the previous lorries as they came in you would've been killed, because the speed they came in was very dangerous. And as I say, it's only because he misjudged the turn as he came through that he stopped.

So you're being dragged away here are you from the front?

Yes and then Eileen was dragged away. That's her brother Roy. Whole families worked at Trico at that time.

RJ: So who came to support you from other unions?

Up and down the country we had huge support, and to help us with the 24-hour picket, which was so difficult for us particularly as women and all the additional problems we faced as women. Different unions and groups came to help out on the picket line on different days. We had a rota. For example Ealing and Hounslow and Brent trades councils would be there on different days or nights; factories like Glacier Metal or, Acton Works took another day; the Working Women's Charter took another time. Everyone had a slot to help on the picket line. Even the Gay Socialists came and picketed! It was just amazing.

Was it people from up and down the country as well?

Well, yes, but those that came and helped with the 24-hour picket needed to be nearby, and then we had support from a flying picket. We had a list of people who could come out at very short notice. That was when we had a tip-off from inside the factory that another convoy was being organised. We were always waiting on inside information, which sometimes was wrong. But you were always in a state of tension about whether there was going to be another convoy organised for that night or not.

But then in terms of support, definitely we could never have won if it hadn't been for the huge financial support (£30,000 in all) that we raised and that came from all quarters. From people and industries that now don't exist such as the miners. For example the Kent miners gave hundreds of pounds to us and other miners from round the country and steelworkers and dockers and car workers and of course British Leyland, you know and various Ford plants. I remember British Leyland, their Combine Committee met to give support to us. Also Jack Dromey, (there in the photo). Yes, he's changed a bit!

DW: And with a beard. He was with Brent Trades Council.

Yes, he was secretary of Brent Trades Council but he was also on the executive of the Greater London Association of Trades Councils. For the first time ever the GLATC held a meeting at the very end of August; August 31. It was the first time it had ever had an emergency meeting to coordinate more support for a strike. The aim was to raise more support to black Trico products which was always difficult because companies switched to other suppliers - especially the car industry would do that - and to increase picketing and financial support.

So it was a very big meeting of all the trade councils round Greater London, of which there were far more then. So we did have huge support. The financial support was amazing. From having been completely unorganised ("as green as cooking apples") we began to send delegations all over the country. We sent delegations all over Britain in the end, you know to Wales, South Wales and obviously all round greater London, and places like Oxford and Fords Langley and everywhere..

But also up to Scotland. Peggy Farmer went up there and she said the reception they got was out of this world. They met Jimmy Reid and addressed a 500 strong Engineering Voice meeting. Actually it was Pete Craven, who was out on strike with us, (he worked in the tool room and he was on the District Committee) who spoke to that meeting and they visited Yarrows, Scotsoun Marine, Albion Motors and all the big workplaces. And then Sheffield, all round the factories in Sheffield. I remember going to Sheffield. There were all these factories then. I remember speaking outside at least two or three factories in Sheffield.

RJ: So you did it?

No, I didn't go on that many delegations, I did go but I had to concentrate on publicity and the strike bulletins and stuff. So there was a lot to do you know. We were more busy than we were at work!. We had to get up even earlier and it was even more tiring.

You had to dedicate your life at that time to the cause didn't you?

Yes, but at least a lot of people got nice suntans because it was the long hot summer of 1976 and so it came to be called the Costa del Trico for very good reason! It was boiling. It was absolutely boiling. Those pathetic creatures that went in every day, the scabs, into that boiling hot factory. At least we were out in the sun. It was pretty polluted on the Great West Road. But we were outside and they were working inside throughout that incredible weather. So the weather was on our side, as well as the trade union movement, which was amazing.

DW: I believe there was a play that was written about the strike.

Yes, that's right. I've got pictures of that.

Because on such a long strike I mean having been involved in longish strikes but never anything as long as that, it's quite hard to keep up your momentum and the enthusiasm.

Oh yes, it was very difficult at times. When the Tribunal ruled against us it was a rocky time. The company had banked on that to really break us. By then it was the third week of August. August 17th and 18th were the days booked for the Tribunal. We knew it was going to rule against us, but the company thought it would break the strike. They thought most of the women would walk back into the factory the following Monday 23rd August. They kept sending out these letters to every employee, piling on huge pressure. They were propaganda and designed to be quite intimidating. Letters sent first class to every single employee's home address, throughout the strike. But it didn't break us. But at those times we were worried.

We organised a mass picket on the Monday August 23rd which was a good thing. A show of strength and unity. It was just after that the company made these offers, having "told the world and his wife that we already had equal pay" as Bill MacCloughlin our Divisional Organiser said. They had been making offers over the weeks. So actually they destroyed their own case because if we'd already got equal pay, why make offers? But you know they kept making £1 something, £2.50p offers. But then after the Tribunal management suddenly told the men in the factory that they were laying everyone off from the Friday, September 3. Of course those guys, those scabs, were furious.

So management closed the whole factory then because they couldn't keep up the pretence of production. We came to learn that the Engineering Employers Federation had been subsidising, supporting the company financially to the tune of a million a week to keep it afloat.

RJ: For the workers, to keep the workers?

No, to help keep the company afloat. That was the Engineering Employers Federation. They are the big employers' federation, a very powerful federation, and those federations do, I mean they do keep companies afloat in such situations. But by September even their patience was running thin with the Trico management. It was never clear who made the decisions at Trico, and at first I think they kept the American parent company in the dark, trying to portray it to the American directors as a little "local difficulty"!

Trico's headquarters was in Buffalo, USA but it had subsidiaries in many parts of the world. In Australia, all over. It had a flag for each country where it had a subsidiary, all on flagpoles along the front of the factory. Someone who came and supported us decided to make up a flag on a stiff piece of cardboard with 'Equal Pay' written on it. One day this 'Equal Pay' flag was hoisted up one of the flagpoles. So for a little while there was 'Equal Pay' flying in front of the factory!

DW: Is there a photo of that?

No, there's not, that's one of the only things, there's no photo more's the pity. Then suddenly someone must have tipped the management off and someone came running out of the factory to get the thing down. It was wonderful and a great laugh while it lasted.

??DW: I wonder whether what your view, because obviously you know shortly after you get the Grunwick dispute.

Well, actually they came out on strike in the August, while we were still out on strike, so we felt quite an affinity with them. Yes, and then Jack Dromey was very involved in that, and actually there's a comparison. They had Roy Grantham.

Of APEX.

Yes and you could in a sense say there he was always going down the sort of the routes that government wanted. I don't think if we'd had Roy Grantham we'd have defied the tribunal. It was a stroke of genius to do that, because it would have defeated us if we had gone to the Tribunal. I don't mean you should never go to the Tribunal but, at that time and in that situation, it was the right thing and the AUEW Southall District Committee and Division said we had a right to negotiate equal pay and we had the organised strength to do it. If you haven't, if you haven't the strength or you haven't much of a union behind you, you have to go to a tribunal. Although now even that is very difficult as you have to pay. They've just introduced huge sums you have to pay to go to a tribunal, it's almost impossible now.

And I wonder if, one of the things about Grunwick was of course they never succeeded in finally getting the plant closed for various factors, but obviously you did, they had to close the plant in the end.

In the end, they laid off.

It was clearly your victory in a sense that they simply couldn't maintain production, whereas Grunwick they did, and I wonder whether, I think my view is that would be one factor why Grunwick lost. But also I think my feeling would be that having seen what happened at Trico, they were not going to let it happen again at Grunwick, and that's why in a way with Grunwick they piled in even more, I mean Special Patrol Group.

Oh yeah.

The way that was done was on a scale never before, except for the miners in '72 at Saltley Gate. But certainly it seems to me that they said well after Trico we're not going to have another defeat, because that might well open up the gates to something you know.

And of course there was the National Association Of Freedom, NAFF and John Gorst and all those got involved supporting George Ward.

RJ: Did they not have great support from the union to begin with?

I don't know, they would have done better if they'd joined the T&G. I think wasn't the joke that they went out thinking they wanted to join a union and have union recognition. They went out, looked in the phonebook and the first union they found was APEX! But I think previously there had been an attempt, not that year, but previously, to join the T&G.

DW: There had been but it wouldn't take off. Yeah, I think it might have been different if had they gone for a different union at the time, with Jack Jones as it would've been as the leader.

Yes, I think it would've been rather different if they had the T&G behind them. I mean, that was, yes so you know our union organisation was vital, and there was such an injustice about not having equal pay. It did help that there was a law because it highlighted what you had a right to. Even though we realised that if we'd gone to the Tribunal it would have completely defeated and dismayed everyone and actually would've only given equal pay to the ones who'd applied. The Equal Pay Act was weak at the time.

And did you have, talking about the actual organisation, did you have regular strike meetings?

Yes, we had mass meetings. We had very regular mass meetings. At first they were in the park, in Boston Manor Park. Although the weather wasn't hot just at first; as you see we're all in jackets but very soon it became fantastic weather, so we had mass meetings in the park. But then I remember on one occasion some of the men who were scabbing on us climbed over the fence and were very threatening towards us. So it was decided that it was not a good thing to have the meetings in the park because it literally was adjacent to the factory with very easy access from the factory. So we then started to have it in a local hall, and we had a meeting every time something had taken place. Yes, we had very regular mass meetings.

RJ: How did you keep in touch with each other, telephone?

DW: Without email of course.

No email, no phone, we didn't have any phones. We had a phone at the strike committee room. The strike committee was at the Griffin pub, so we used to be down there in the morning, every morning.

RJ: So the pub was supportive?

Well, they just hired a room to us.

The hall?

No, the hall was separate, that was for the mass meetings but we had the strike committee headquarters, we were there, you know the strike committee was there every day, yes, and obviously paid out strike pay and as time went on and we were raising the money, and the hardship was getting worse and worse, we paid out hardship money at the same time, at £10 a time. Hardship became a big issue for people and then there was a levy raised on all the factories in this area by the Southall District Committee and that paid out another £1.50 a week.

We had been earning between £30 and £34 a week (somewhere around that in bring home pay) depending on your factory performance. And so you can imagine that £6.50 difference between us and the men was quite sizable wasn't it.

What was the strike pay?

Strike pay was £9 a week. Yes, and that carried on because as I was saying there were great efforts to make sure that the strike remained official. If it hadn't been that would've destroyed us of course because you'd have just been starved back to work.

DW: I'll ask you about the picture here, you're here on the right hand side here and can you identify some of the others?

'Don't rely on Tribunals.' That's Frances Pinner, who is still alive and Peggy, who I'm in touch with and who was one of the stewards out on strike. She lives not that far away from here. Peggy said that Frances is now living down in Clacton. Monica Harvey there. I can't remember this other person's name and that's me.

So you had a number of marches clearly from that.

Yeah, we had two at the very beginning. The first one had a carnival atmosphere because it was just a spontaneous march around Brentford. All the local employers were thinking "Oh my god, we can't have all these women marching around like this" McVitie's was just up the road because people used to bring biscuits from there to the picket line and gates. (There was a back

and a front gate you see). And of course there was Gillette's, which has only more recently closed, but they always had a staff association, so they were terrified that their workers would start to want a union!. They'd always managed to avoid having unions recognised there from what I remember. There was BMW, oh yeah Booth's Gin was just there and Firestone's and Rank Audio Visual. Then there was our second march with all the local banners from the trades councils and district committee, etc. That was about 3-4 weeks later. You see I kept all the bulletins.

So you were doing the strike bulletin, was that once a week?

Well, I was helping formulate them with someone else who was a great supporter who came down to the picket line, who was in AUEW TASS, who was on Hounslow Trades Council, Vernon Merritt. He was so helpful with the bulletins, and people like Jack Dromey helped because a lot of them were run off at Brent Law Centre, where he worked at the time. Harriet Harman worked there too as a solicitor and gave us a lot of legal support. That's where they met actually, they met during our strike. They were both working at Brent Law Centre.

And were obviously drawn into your dispute.

Yes, well Jack came forward you know from Brent. Brent Trades Council. That trades council was pretty highly organised at the time.

You had.

Tom Durkin, yes, and I can't think of some of the other names but they were terrific, they did give a lot of support and of course organisation was so important.

So you got to the end of the strike and then basically Trico capitulated, gave in.

Yes, after the lay off they suddenly approached the union again and made another offer, which wasn't equal pay but then, in October, they approached again and yeah agreed full equal pay. In fact the final settlement was slightly more than equal pay. It wasn't backdated to January but of course we'd not got this through the Equal Pay Act, but we got the full amount and slightly more. Some of the men said they didn't get anything out of the strike but in fact they did, because the company had to maintain the wage differentials, between the skilled and semi-skilled and unskilled. So it actually triggered a huge amount of pay increases within the factory over the next year or two following the strike.

And you went on working there then for another?

Another just over 4 years, another 4 years after that and then I wasn't well. The guy I was married to, we got back together after the strike but then we finally did separate though we're still good friends I'm pleased to say. But I was off sick with depression. When I left Trico was during the period I was off sick.. Yes, I was involved later on. Eileen became the Women's Delegate on Southall District Committee after the strike. But Eileen died of cancer in the 80s not many years after the strike, which was very sad; long before her time. After the strike I became a trainee tool setter in the factory and was elected their shop steward. Later I was elected the Women's Delegate to District Committee.

Shortly after the strike, one of the women, Daphne, applied to become a forklift truck driver at the factory. When one of the managers heard the news he shut himself in his office. It was all too much after all the trouble he'd had with us women during the strike! We had come to realise that although we'd won equal pay the battle for equal opportunity had only just begun. We realised where our support had come from during the strike. From ordinary working people and our trade unions and not from the press barons or the rich and powerful. Yes that photo was taken by Chris Davies from Report.

And can we ask you in a sense about when you got to Trico, was it just that you joined the union way before any dispute broke out.

Oh yes ,nearly everyone joined the union.
Were you already union-minded, if I can use that term?
Yes, I was.

Where had that come from do you think?

Well, I think originally going right back it probably came from the fact when I did my social work training. I realised that there were such huge differences between people, through no fault of their own, that some people really had so little compared with others, and how exploited some people were while others had it very easy in life.

When I did my social work training, it was at the old North West London Polytechnic now Metropolitan Uni. It changed its name a few times but it was situated in Highbury Fields. I think they've closed that site but that's where it was. We had a sociology teacher who was a Marxist, Richard Kirkwood. He's retired.

He's retired but he's still around.

I read that he'd just retired only a few years back, I saw his name on something. He was quite an inspiration to a lot of us.

He's in the ECU, he's in the union retired section, what was NAPFI ECU.

What's he doing now he's retired?

Don't know, not sure really, but he's certainly involved in the union, continues to be involved in his union.

So that just started things off you know.

RJ: So you trained as a social worker.

Yes, but just before, when Colin, that was my husband, when we separated I was doing some studying or else I could've just carried on.

What were you studying?

I was studying to do a degree, I thought I'd never done one and I thought I would. But then when we split up I just had to get a job because I moved out, I moved to a bed-sit where I was throughout the strike. That's when I just went and got a job, I didn't want something stressful, but it was an extraordinary time.

It was an inspiration to meet the people I did at Trico and for all of us that were involved it was an experience we've never forgotten and yeah it's been life changing for us all.

Something to be proud of.

Yes, everyone who was involved says that.

And what did you go on to do after that?

I worked in a lot of different factories after I'd been off sick.. So I probably worked in the factories for about 10 years in all and then eventually, and this was after my marriage had ended by then, I went back into social work, into mental health, so that's where I ended up, in mental health work.

In the NHS?

No, I always worked for a local authority, but of course the NHS basically took over and it was in partnership but the NHS was the major partner in the community mental health teams. But I never worked for the NHS.

DW: Had you come from a union family?

No, not at all, no, I had one sister and I have to say she only asked me what the strike was about after 35 years!. So no. My dad stayed in touch with me while we were on strike, even though his views were very different but no, not from a union family.

Because sometimes it is.