

The Train at Platform 5: An Oral History of Kings Cross Rail Workers Mickey Khan

Interviewee

Name: Mohamed 'Mickey' Khan
Year of birth: 1938
Place of birth: Kenya
Father's occupation: worked for East African Railways

Interview

Interviewer: Mark O'Loughlin
Summariser: Lorraine Lui
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Place: ASLEF (77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London EC1M 4NN)

Mickey Khan (b. 1938) started his career in the railways after high school in Kenya, following in his father's footsteps. He came to London in November 1970 and applied to be a **guard** at Kings Cross. After passing out from training school, he started working on empty trains, moving on to local services before progressing to mainline trains. His starting salary was £18/week, which he found 'comfortable', and he bought a house in 1972.

When he first started at **Kings Cross**, which was a convenient commute from his North London home, it was a busy station with eight platforms, with the area having a reputation for the 'ladies of the night'. Overall, he said that everybody seemed happy about working there, and he did not observe any unfair treatment. Compared to other depots, he felt more at home at Kings Cross as the people were friendly and a 'joy' to work with. The supervisors were approachable, and people were on first-name terms.

In a typical **workday**, he would check the trains prior to departure, ensure that everyone bought the right tickets, and make announcements – one of which was 'anybody found hiding in the toilet will be flushed out', as he found even rich people 'with American Express gold cards' hiding to avoid the fares. He used to get 5% commission for every ticket sold on the train. He jokingly called himself an MGB (rather than OBE), which stood for 'money grabbing bastard'.

He encountered many **fare dodgers**, such as a 'family' traveling with a doll in a pram to use the family railcard. With those pretending not to speak English, he would say, 'excuse me, is that your fiver on the floor?', to which they would respond, 'what?'. He said he wanted people to be honest with him as he would not mind helping those in need, adding that 'I may look like a cabbage, but I'm not that green'.

With **hooligans**, he said it was sometimes better to keep his distance and let them go, although he had few problems with football fans as he always took care to praise their teams. Although people said nasty things about his parentage, weight, skin colour, etc (including racial slurs where the offenders were fined in court), he said he did not take it personally and would just carry on. On the trains, he met **celebrities** and politicians like Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and John Prescott, who were nice to him.

With **strikes**, he said it was important to toe the line, and that some who worked on strike days were called 'scabs' by others and not spoken to for years. He did not really feel the effects of **privatisation**.

52 years since starting out at Kings Cross, Mickey is still working part-time there. He said he **loved his job** and had nothing to complain about. He said he always worked hard and put his work first, and it enabled him to live quite comfortably. Now, younger workers would come to him with questions. He hoped to work for as long as he could, and would recommend working in the railways to anyone.