Interview with ANONYMOUS by David Welsh on 2 July 2010 for Britain at Work Oral History Project

DW: Interview with ANONYMOUS for the Britain at Work Project. The date is the 2nd of July 2010. ANONYMOUS, would you like to tell me first of all about how you came to join London Transport and when.

ANON: My seniority date was 1978 at the time I was working in the accounts department of a small medical publishers. Very old-fashioned. And very, very formal office for very, very little money and I went to the London Transport Recruitment Centre in Baker Street to try and get a job as a bus conductor and I was told I was too tall. And asked if I wanted to be a guard. I didn't actually really know what a guard was but I said yeah, OK. And after an interval I got a letter telling me I'd got the job. I think this must have been about July '78 or something because there was a very long wait but I got a letter telling me to go down to Chiswick and pick up my uniform on a Friday, no it was Gunnersbury. Picked up this grey polyester suit, blue polyester shirt and a clip-on tie and a cap and then I had to turn up at White City railway training centre at five to nine the following Monday. Which I did. And there was then three weeks training in a classroom with a different instructor every week. First week was fairly easy going and we had a avuncular instructor who looked a bit like Father Christmas, had a big white beard, and he was called Mr D.W. Buckland. And by the Thursday of that week you were qualified to be what was then known as a railman, I think. I think it was the end of that week you were sort of sent off to practice sweeping the platform or whatever, and I was sent to Camden Town, the Northern Line. However, things didn't quite work out as planned because there was some sort of cock-up. I had no idea what was going on but I later worked out what had happened was I had been shoved on a train as an emergency guard when it went empty up the Euston loop, connecting the Northern and the Piccadilly. Now I didn't have a clue. It was like, 'Get on there, son,' I didn't have a guard's key. I wouldn't have known what a guard's key was if I saw it, but I was shoved on this train, went up to Euston, what I later found out was the Euston loop, and I was on a stationary train in a dark tunnel wondering what was happening. I eventually got off that train too late to get the last train home and I had to walk home from Camden Town. Then the second week, the more serious stuff started. And I can't remember the name of the instructor but it was "rules and regs", the training starts off with explaining how signalling systems work. And the thing that sticks in my mind is that we were told the "rulebook is a catalogue of mistakes". Hence, after Moorgate trains were … the signalling system was set up so that trains had to go down to less than five miles an hour or whatever before reaching the great wall at the end of the line. Which of the two they did not. Interestingly, when I was trained, we were told that the stop signal behind the train would be a safe braking distance behind the train in front. Years later, when I went up for my motors, they used the overhead projector things with the transparent gels … when I went for motors it was following an accident, I think it was westbound Holborn on the Central, the word 'safe' had been erased from the transparencies they put up on the wall, and it said a 'braking distance'. And then the third week, we were introduced to the delights of the mainline pipe and the train line pipe and the EQ (Electro-Pneumatic) brake. And I was sent off to Golders Green on the Northern for a day's practice. And what do they call the drivers' instructor? I don't know but I remember him. He was an old boy and I remember him saying to me he'd had some good ones and some bad ones, but some of the bad ones were white, and then he gave me this kind of meaningful look, and

said some of the black ones were really quite good! And I saw Morden for the first time in my life that day. Last, actually, come to think of it. And then you had a guards' exam, which was an oral examination, open ended. I really don't remember much about it.

DW: You had a couple of people with you? It was two or three people at the same time?

ANON: It was three of us, yeah. Three. I remember hardly anything about that.

DW: Did the unions come in during that time?

ANON: Yeah. NUR came in and ASLEF came in. And in '78 … maybe it was the Callaghan government? Anyway, the NUR was one of, if not the only one, one of very few unions in the TUC that was supporting the government imposed wage restraint. So I joined ASLEF. And also we were asked … I mean the reason we were … yeah, first week. They used 'The question and answer method of instruction' so the instructor was trying to get on. The poor guy had to ask about six or seven people, "Why did you join this job?" And everybody just sort of waffled and it was really getting pretty boring, and he finally got around to me, "Mr ANONYMOUS, why did you join the job?" And I said, "For the money!" And the instructor breathed a sigh of relief and then proceeded to tell us about the wage structure. Which was … my take home pay when I finally got it, after working my first week, was more than double what I was getting in the office. Seventy-nine quid, I think it was? Also at the training school we were asked to nominate which line and which depot we wanted to work at and I had absolutely no understanding of what that meant, so I at that point lived at the bottom of Gray's Inn Road and nominated the Central Line because Chancery Road was my nearest station. So having nominated the Central Line, I was then told to report to Neasden, which was another place I hadn't heard of hitherto, as additional station guard. I think it was 5 am one week and then 3 pm the next week, additional station guard. The interesting thing was that the first northbound train to arrive at Neasden was at 5:30. And that was the beginning of finding out what the job was really like. Neasden had a lot of people who'd been on the job a really long time and we referred the SM as the Yard Master. And there was a nice SM Yard Master called Jack Nelder, and I at one point turned up for my additional spare 5:30 at about twenty past nine, and he said, "Oh, ANONYMOUS! I was sure we'd see you sooner or later." He was a sweetie. But there was about twenty of us, additional spares, 5:30 one week or 3 or something similar the next week and we would just hang around the mess room, and occasionally you'd get handed a piece of paper and sent off to pick up a train. I just missed out all the guard training.

DW: Yes, what was the training? Did you do …

ANON: I can't remember.

DW: Do you remember where you did it?

ANON: Yeah, well, I did it on what was then the undivided Bakerloo and Jubilee. Remember nothing about it.

DW: And you had a test at the end do you remember?

ANON: No.

DW: As emergency guard. Where they get you to try the handle.

ANON: I don't remember that at all. Sorry. No idea. What I do remember is when my very early days … what we were doing mostly was covering guard motormen who were travelling for their job. And at one point I was briefly rostered by a driver called Fred Ridout who was redoubtable. He was real old school, and you could tell the old school because they still had their old-style Metropolitan Line uniforms which were incredibly good quality woollen uniforms --

DW: They were still surviving?

ANON: -- dark navy. Oh yeah! And yellow piping around the cap and the lapels and stuff. We were sent out to get a train out of the sidings at Stanmore, with the snow on the ground at god knows what hour of the morning. And I climbed on the back of the train and left the cab door open, Fred Ridout went ape! It was such an incredibly stupid thing to do because a train standing in Stanmore sidings overnight was quite cold enough already. But he was a nice, calm man and took the railway very, very seriously and went to HMSO and got every single accident report as and when it was published. And people had a lot of respect for him. Neasden was a huge depot because it was both Metropolitan and Jubilee. Much to the confusion of the Yard Masters there was about a hundred and twenty Patels. Just because there was loads and loads of Gujeratis in north west London and they really had a lot trouble telling them apart and it would be like I.P. Patel, P.A. Patel … I was rostered with … for quite a long time I was rostered with a driver called … I think he was called Des Brown. He was Barbadian I think… he was a nice guy, and looking back on it, he was extremely tolerant. In later years, I used to groan when I heard you had a station guard coming because they just didn't know how the job worked but he was kindly. And another incident I remember …two incidents really stick out in my mind from that period. One was I was on nights and there was somebody … two guys who worked in Neasden yard on the engineering side and they got on the … why they got on the back car of the train when you get to the yard from the front of the train I don't know, but they were in the back of the train and they were smoking and I went and asked them not to smoke, and the guy spat in my face. I put in a written report to the area manager and my ASLEF SC3 (Sectional Council 3) representative and got a reply from management, no reply whatsoever from my SC3 representative, **Name removed** of ASLEF. And it was just … that was just sort of … sorry, I lost the thread.

DW: What were your duties as a guard?

ANON: Duties as a guard consisted of opening the doors when the train was fully in the … first you open your guard's door, you've got a position at the leading end of the car at the rear of the train, you open the guard's door, you look at the platform and once it's safe you open the doors for the passengers, once they're all on you close the door again, you push the button which gives the driver a bell and tells him it's safe to continue and you were known as guard/ emergency motormen. In the event of some mishap befalling the motorman, you were then supposed to drive the train until the next point that you could be relieved. And it was essentially extremely monotonous and you were … according to the rule book you were not allowed to read, but in fact what I did was read all the time.

DW: Between stops.

ANON: Between stops, yeah. And you just sort of got … if I didn't have anything to read, the monotony was just really pretty appalling. I mean, I did read. And passengers would

leave all the daily newspapers on the train except the Financial Times, which was like hen's teeth, the Guardian and the Morning Star. Otherwise you could read all of them. I haven't looked at a tabloid newspaper for years but I used to be completely familiar with all of those. And you just looked forward to getting to the end of the line where there was a tea point, at which point you could fill up your tea can and have a drink. And also, being a smoker, I really looked forward to getting towards the end of the line, or in the early days of the run when there were no passengers in the car so you could smoke in the no smoking car. I remember once doing a split shift when I was working at Baker Street doing a really rotten split shift on the Bakerloo Line which was back and forth between Elephant and Castle and Queen's Park sidings. And there was one particular passenger who'd got on at one of the stops south of Queens Park. Coming south from Queen's Park you can usually count on having the rear car of the train empty all the way to Marylebone but there was one particular passenger who'd get on and it would be the second or third stop after Queen's Park going southbound and he had his favourite seat which was right next to the guard's position, and every day he got on my train and he came and sat next to my guard's position which meant I couldn't sit down and put my feet up on it and read the paper. And I tried everything, I tried putting the guard's bag … towards the end of the week I tried putting my guard's bag down on the seat where he liked to sit and he just sat in the one next to it and fixed me with this stare all the time until he got off! After some time of that, I eventually got my nominated depot which was White City on the Central Line which was absolutely horrible. First of all because it was a real hassle to get to White City from where I lived in Holborn and secondly because I was rostered with a driver who was one of the most boring men I've ever met in my entire life. He was really seriously dull. His son-in-law was a driver as well and I subsequently worked with his son-in-law in Baker Street and I got the impression his son-in-law shared my opinion of his father-in-law. And secondly because there was a bar at White City and there was a drinking school involving at least one of the SMs so I used to get put on a train to Hainault or bloody Epping or somewhere so that the guard could go to the bar and have a few pints with my SM. I didn't like that. Previous to getting my nominated depot, I'd be … a new depot at Baker Street Jubilee had opened up. Because it was a new depot, apart from the very few people who actually nominated to work there, it was the most junior guards and the most junior drivers who were sent there. And an awful lot of us re-nominated and decided to stay at Baker Street. And Baker Street Jubilee for me was a bit of a special depot. After a few years we finally got it running our way. We had what were known as fiddles. That is to say you'd come in for 1:00 spare … Baker Street Jubilee had the latest number one duty in the whole combine, I think it was 6:21. So if you were 1:00 spare and there was a driving turn at 13:00 and a driving turn at about 13:10, 13:09, something like that, and if they both came in, you took off either number one … there was either number one or two duty was all the really rough turns. A rough turn at Baker Street Jubilee meant doing tunnels. Baker Street, Queen's Park, Elephant and Castle, Queen's Park and so on and so forth. All underground and 1938 stock, so in the summer, unbearably hot and just really monotonous and bloody dull. So if you were 13:00 spare and the running turns came in you'd go and take off the number one and number two and do the last tunnel and they get to shoot off a half hour early. There were two of the SMs there who would actually give you the job. Most of the time you volunteer for it but quite often if you didn't volunteer for it the SM would give you the job. Later when I was a driver and I had one under, that's exactly what I was doing. I was one o'clock spare and I was taking off a guy on early turn and I picked up a train, Baker Street Bakerloo Northbound, and I got as far as Marylebone when a woman fell into 'the suicide pit'. And it was a better place to work than everywhere I ever

worked elsewhere on the system. Different times I worked on East London Line, Piccadilly Line --

DW: Why would you say it was the best place or the best depot for you?

ANON: Number one was good SMs. We had one who was called **name removed**, who was an alcoholic member of the National Front but he would … like if you talked to him and said, 'I really need to get out of this,' he'd try and help you get off the train a bit early or whatever. If you came in late, you'd find someone who'd covered for you and … yeah. You could … You didn't … Yeah, if you came in late, the spare man would've been put on your train and gone up to Stanmore and back or whatever and you would come in late, nip up to the café and get a bacon roll and a cup of strong coffee and be in a fit state to pick up your train when it came back. And then the spare man would get off the train, call you a c@#t and you'd owe him a favour. People looked after one another. And the other one was a man called Roy Blackett, who was Barbados, yeah, and a very, very thick accent and an absolute … he was a really good SM. And it was more about looking after other people. And the other thing was that we set up our own branch of ASLEF on the basis that we were a new depot and needed a new branch. ASLEF didn't really like it. And the moving spirit behind this was a man called **name removed** who was an incredibly incompetent guard. And looking back on it, a bit mad. We sort of had our own branch. And there were quite a few people who were inclined towards the left. And it got to be … After a few years, there was a bit … you just didn't get kind of racist talk in the mess room at Baker Street Jubilee. Because the racists would get shouted down. I mean, in my last year on the job, which was spring '86, for the sake of a change I'd done a mutual exchange of home depots,, with someone who was on the Piccadilly Line and I went to work at Wood Green on the Picc. And on the east end of the Piccadilly Line there'd been this journal called 'Picc Up on the East', which was kind of rank and file paper, A4 folded in half. And the east end of the Piccadilly Line had a reputation for kind of radicalism. And I remember being absolutely astonished at the amount of racism I heard in the mess room at Wood Green. I was also naïve enough to when I first started there I started doing fiddles and I took someone off their last trip out to Cockfosters and then I realised no one's going to do it for me, so I stopped! It wasn't like Baker Street in that respect.

DW: And going back to your ASLEF … When you say ASLEF did for the tape, really … did the ASLEF branch meet outside of working hours, didn't it?

ANON: Yeah, it met outside of working hours in a pub so after people had had … and I always used to think it was about a pint and a half into the meeting, it sort of became fairly clear that this was going to go on until closing time and not much was gonna get done. It was … yeah. And there was this very strange sort of structure. We didn't have anything equivalent to shop stewards. What we had were known as sectional council representatives who were paid their rostered turn as drivers but were actually full-time union representatives, which in many cases meant that they … there was either a pub or a drinking club in Villiers Street, Embankment, which is where they seemed to spend most of their time. And **name removed**, who I mentioned earlier, was part of … there was sort of an Irish clique at the Elephant, which was his support base. And in terms of representing the … just the day to day representation of the train crews, his performance was, in my opinion, poor.

DW: So much support for the union representative.

ANON: Yeah. I only ever had one DB and that was for over-sleeping on nights. I was sleeping on the cushions in Neasden Yard and Kevin Rose, another ASLEF representative, represented me and I got off with nothing. 'Suitably addressed' I think was the phrase.

DW: For the tape, DB is --

ANON: Disciplinary Board, yeah.

DW: At which you would have had a union representative, in this case an ASLEF …

ANON: Yeah.

DW: Section council representative?

ANON: Yeah. And **name removed** was interesting because **name removed** was openly gay. In '78 when I was in the training school, there were two running jokes that went through your training. One was kind of getting us used to the idea that sooner or later you're going to have a person fall underneath your train, so there was cracks about the contents of the meat pies in the canteen and so forth. And the other was about if you work at Parsons Green you got to be a bender. Because there was the one openly gay employee, I never met him, he was called Julian and he worked at … I think he lived in that gay squat in Brixton. Anyway, he was at Parsons Green. By the time I left, at Neasden there were about half a dozen openly gay men. It was extraordinary fast cultural change.

DW: That's a big change.

ANON: Yeah. I can remember doing a late turn on the Jubilee and two young men who had just been to the opera got on and rode up to wherever it was they were going in my driving cab because one of them was rostered at Neasden. And a similar sort of change had clearly happened in an earlier generation about black people working on the trains. I heard stories from the older generation of black Underground workers who had gone up through the … there was two … what you have to understand is there was two different kind of parallel promotion systems. If you just stuck around long enough, you would get promoted from driver to inspector and up. If you wanted to take the fast track thing, you went to the railway training centre and became an instructor and then after that you became an area manager or whatever. But by the time I went there it meant that there were a lot of black men who were, I suppose, in their forties, fifties, whatever and they'd reached inspector stage, manager level and whatnot. Those I was friendly with, sometimes they'd tell you stories about the old days and it must have been really, really hard and just absolute non-stop racist abuse, basically. But as usual, there were kind of covert forms of retaliation. Pissing in the station foreman's teapot was one I remember. And similarly when I joined up women were finally allowed to be guards and drivers, in the teeth of opposition from … not from management, the unions. And I briefly … I think she was called **name removed** or something but she was the first woman to qualify as a driver. And she was very … I didn't know her well but I just saw her in the mess room at Baker Street, but she was like a parody of a train driver. Coming in, saying, "Right! Get the cards out! Who's made the tea?" I mean, so you know. Oh, that was another thing I remember is in my days as a station guard at Neasden. I was working for a week with one of the old school drivers. Some of them had handlebar moustaches and waistcoats and watch chains and whatnot, and this man said to me, "You got a tea can, lad?" And I didn't know what a tea can was and he didn't speak to

me the rest of the week. But again, by the end of my years, there weren't a lot of women but there were quite few, and they were more sort of like women than a parody of … I don't mean to insult the woman because she must have really had to put up with an awful lot of crap. As I say, if I remember correctly, it was basically ASLEF, I'm not sure about the NUR, but it was ASLEF that were the last … they were still opposing women drivers after management had sort of completely … presumably after equality legislation. I don't know the details of that.

DW: And what were your relations with the NUR as it was, because it was in the Sid Weighill days …

ANON: Well, after Sid Weighill days it never changed. ASLEF and NUR absolutely hated one another like poison. For reasons … actually, I have read the official history of ASLEF, *The Lighted Flame*. Reading that is like chewing your way through a doormat. A deeply boring book. But the disputes, the differences were always due to the mass industry union and a craft union but something, I forget what, happened around the time of World War One. And it was sort of tribal. Train crew, being trained drivers, and guards, because they were in line for promotion to be train drivers were allowed to be ASLEF members. And everyone else was represented by the NUR. Because the effect was management just had a divide and rule edge for every single occasion. And going back a bit to sectional council representatives, there was this very, very strange archaic structure by which if we ever went into dispute with management you had to go to your branch, put a resolution to your branch who would pass the resolution that would then be sent to district council, who would examine the resolution. That would take a few weeks and then it might come back. And this would all take a month. Meanwhile, management would just make a phone call to the Evening Standard. It was like fighting tanks with bows and arrows.

DW: And there were … obviously one of the disputes that you got involved in was the one following the … I mean, there were small disputes, like stabling of trains and other things, I seem to remember that you … And there was also the strike over the Fares Fair. That was '83?

ANON: Yeah. I don't remember much about that. Sorry. We sort of flexed our muscles and had a bit of fun at Baker Street. As a new branch, we really annoyed ASLEF because we went on strike, just Baker Street depot went on strike at least twice, possibly three times.

DW: And that was over …?

ANON: Can't remember. I really can't remember. Sorry. I do remember playing hide and seek … Because it was an underground depot, so technically if we tried to do any picketing we were on the premises and we shouldn't be. So we'd play hide and seek at Baker Street, up and down the escalators at British Transport police and so forth. And somebody super-glued a lock to the mess room at one point.

DW: What about when you went … Talk about when you went up for motors. What the process there was, when they would call you up, wouldn't they, for an interview and say were you interested in going up, and then you would say yes or no and the trains …

ANON: My memory was that you just had to sign a form. I may well be wrong. But then you went up to the training school. It was a much, much more intensive course than guards

training. And you then had an oral exam, which I … my first one I didn't pass because I didn't go to the exam because we were actually out on a official strike that time and I was assistant branch secretary of Baker Street ASLEF and **name removed**, oddly enough, managed to be on annual leave that week. So I eventually, having been on strike … I think it was about two weeks later I was asked up to White City and went through my motors exam and failed dismally. Made an absolute dog's breakfast of it. And I then had to wait I don't know how long. Went up the second time, I just got a really bad set of nerves. Don't know what … After my examination the chief instructor at White City called me in and read me back one of the answers I'd given to one of the questions and said, "Does that make any sense to you?" and I went, "No!" And he said, "You were the best in the class, what happened?" And I went, "I don't know". And then the third time … in the end it cost me a hell of a lot of money because I … A friend of mine who joined on the same day actually qualified for motors the first time around, so I lost a lot. But the third time, it was just … the exam was absolutely nerve wracking. Because it's oral, it's open-ended, and the one thing … I remember the sweat, but the one thing I remember about it, after I'd been told that I'd passed and the instructor went back to this question he'd asked me and I just absolutely dug my heels in and refused to change my answer. And the question was: You come into a platform, stop at the platform, and you've slightly over-shot and your front pair of wheels is just on a set of points and they're set wrongly. What do you do? And I … this is my oral answer. I just sat there and refused to do anything! Actually, the right answer was reverse the train two feet because you're still covered by the signal behind. But he couldn't fail me on that because I hadn't done anything unsafe. And this poor instructor spent a really long time trying to get me to … giving me every opportunity to give the right answer. And I just wouldn't do it. And he gave me this pained look. But otherwise I just sort of sailed through. But the disturbing thing was how many drivers having qualified and then completely forgot everything they'd been taught. I remember in the period between my second and third exam for motors and I really did know my stuff and two different occasions I had youngish drivers in different situations saying to me, "What the hell do I do?" and I told them. But normally it was a very, very monotonous job until something went wrong. And when something went wrong then you sweated and had to know your stuff. I didn't have any … I did a couple of unbelievably stupid things. As a guard. But never had … I had one under. Well, it's not under because I stopped short of her, but it shook me up really badly and then I had … you're supposed to get three days off for writing reports and in case the transport police want to interview you and whatnot and I just said to … It was Roy Blackett the SM, I said to him, "You've got my home phone number." And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "Right. See ya." And I went and bought a bottle of whiskey and went round to the flat of an ex-girlfriend and got … just drank myself insensible for the next three days. This is before the era in which … subsequently they were … ASLEF's … it's possible it might have been NUR's … they had a series of court cases in which people got much longer, much more time off to deal with the stress.

DW: I think they do now.

ANON: But what happened to me was … I had the one under on a Thursday and the following week I was on annual leave for two weeks and following that I was on this transferring over to the Picc. So I had two weeks annual leave and I had however many weeks it was training on the rolling stock at the Picc and the road training on the Picc. So when I started driving on the Picc, every time, as my train entered the station and a

passenger took a step forward, my stomach just looped the loop. And then one day as I was combing my hair and it started falling out. And I got this huge bald patch on the back of my head which was, I assume it was alopecia, but I assume it was stress induced. And once as a guard I had to walk … there was an Elephant driver who was … I don't know where he'd been. He worked on the … he wasn't someone I knew, but he had worked on the Bakerloo, gone somewhere else and then come back, and he was notorious for being a fast driver. And he went into Piccadilly Circus northbound at full speed, and derailed the train on the points. And we were, me and my driver, we were just stuck south of Charing Cross and we had to walk the passengers out. Fortunately it wasn't a full train, it was about a third full. We had to walk the passengers out through the tunnel and they were good as gold and everything was fine until the station inspector from Charing Cross came down the tunnel to help and generally got in the way.

DW: So that was the crew. That's the way you'd evacuate a train, was it? I mean, today …

ANON: Yeah.

DW: Without guards, the evacuation of the train is just dependent on the driver.

ANON: Well, what sticks in my mind is somewhere in the early 60s, there was a guard who got the George medal for bravery because he walked … because there was a fire in the middle of the train … a standard train is made up of two units, with a driving cab at each end. A fire right in the middle of the train. And this guy had walked backwards through the tunnel, which the one thing you should never do is go backwards. Because everything in that system is designed … all the protection works on the assumption everything is moving in the same direction. And he went back, got help and got the passengers off the train in the wrong direction in a smoke-filled tunnel. These days, if a fire should occur in the middle of the train, the passengers in the rear of the train are just going to be on their own.

DW: So you were on there just when one person operation was …

ANON: Being mooted. Yeah. And after I left, one person operation was introduced and things changed hugely. And first of all, as usual, the split between the unions and ASLEF cut a deal and drivers got a huge pay rise. Two thousand guards' jobs were lost. And I hope someone kept statistics on that, but as I said earlier, the guards' duties involved observing the train safely out of the platform, which meant you sort of looked out of your guards' door until the train was sort of well away. But once there was no guard to do that, there were a whole series of accidents and fatalities. I think I remember a statistic of something like eleven people a year being killed falling down between the train as it left the platform and … yeah, accidents to passengers who's somehow got caught up with the train or slipped or whatever and killed. And of course the driver at that time wouldn't know anything about it. And there was one particularly horrible case at Holborn where a father watched his little boy caught … he got the toggle on his duffle coat caught in between the doors and this poor child was lifted up and smashed against the head wall of the station. But that is … yeah. Two thousand jobs went and … I don't know if this figure's true, but eleven deaths a year. That was the price that was paid for one person operation. [Break]

DW: OK, sort of further comments on the system then as against now?

ANON: I don't know anything about the system now. I've still got friends working on the job but it's changed so much in, well, it's twenty-one years now. I don't kind of recognise it. But when I was working on the tube, you had the eight-hour day, which had taken a generation at least for the rail union to win. But what that meant in effect was that if you were spare and the station master tried to give you a job that meant you would finish after eight hours and one minute, you could say no. And he would threaten you with a disciplinary report and you could say "go on then" and nothing would happen. But you wouldn't pick up that train. After the introduction of one person operation, people are now doing shifts much longer than eight hours,exactly what, I don't know. And you had to know your agreements. This was a series of deals that had been worked out over the years between management and the unions, but principally it meant that no shifts should be longer than eight hours and secondly that you should always have a minimum of twelve hours rest between one shift and the next. The thing that was really killing was the week after nights because you used to do seven successive nights, starting on a one Sunday night and finishing the following Sunday morning. By which time your body would have adjusted to working all night. The following week you then had four days rest day covers, which was Monday to Thursday and typically you'd get a really early start on the Monday. On Baker Street Jubilee, we used to stable our trains overnight in Neasden yard and sit around the mess room in Neasden Yard, or some people would go and sleep on trains, some people would play cards. I've seen a guy lose more than his entire week's wages playing Kalookie. I was mostly a chess player. There weren't that many people who played chess. But you'd have these conversations in which the man who was due to be early spare and the man who was due to be number one duty on the following Monday would have this conversation where, "I don't mind, but if you're not coming in you have to tell me!" Because the one thing you did not want to happen was to work seven nights on the trot and then come in at six o'clock in the morning and have to do a really crappy eight hour shift on the Bakerloo Line. And there was always a lot of arguments about that. And there was a driver called **name removed** who was just known forever more at Baker Street as Dodgy **name removed**. Because what he'd done was he'd changed his running turn with another driver who was called Robbo or something … but he'd given away his spare turn in exchange for a running turn and then he hadn't come in for the running turn and got the guy who'd given him the spare turn and the next time he saw the guy he called, "**name removed**!" And he was known as **name removed** forever after. The whys and wherefores I don't know!

DW: And what about … what was the politics of the mess room? Was there …

ANON: When I first went on the job I thought I was a Trotskyist and I read the Guardian and I was a fairly easy target for wind-ups. And the whole culture of the mess room was wind-ups. People would just try and annoy other people and get them red in the face, steam coming out of their ears. And you just.. people would just do it to pass the time. Sometimes very, very funny and very witty, I often wish I'd taken notes of some of the things people said because they were extremely funny. I remember one change, it was the Thatcher era and the whole idea of a property owning democracy was pushed. And people started buying houses. At Baker Street we had quite a few people who bought houses in Luton. Because houses in Luton were far more affordable than houses in London and also there was a mainline paper train and you could come down into St Pancras and you could get in time for number one duty at Baker Street. Because Baker Street was the latest number one duty on the Underground. But because they had all that extra time in the morning, they had a

morning commute, a couple of them at least started reading the Daily Telegraph, having hitherto read the Sun or whatever. I lived at King's Cross and I once actually got from my being in bed thinking, "Oh god I'm late," to picking up my train on time in less than 15 minutes. I didn't book on or anything, I just got to the platform and got the driver off. Because we had good SMs at Baker Street, you didn't get booked late as long as you picked up your train, that was that. But I was never very good at getting up early in the morning in those days, so I would normally arrive in the mess room bleary-eyed, hoping to god someone had made tea and it wasn't going to be too noisy. Because it was a small, underground tiled room and the sound bounced around and if someone was having a wind-up or an argument …

DW: Yeah, you don't want that at that time of the day.

ANON: But, yeah, as I say, people started reading the Telegraph and I'd get in, barely awake, and they'd read the Telegraph editorial and they were just fully armed and ready to tear me to shreds politically. I really felt a bit like a sitting duck. On the other hand, we had union-sponsored education courses and some of the transformations … you saw people who'd had a pretty rotten time at school and had just gone straight to work and getting into education and it really changed them. It really changed them. And I left … when I left, the reason I left was I'd got into college to do a degree in photography and I thought everyone was going to take the piss, as usual. But in fact, there was an awful lot of people who said how pleased they were for me and were it not for the mortgage, were it not for the kids, they'd absolutely love to do that and they were really glad for me. And we had a good drink. There was a guy called John Killick who's now sadly dead, who was a former greyhound trainer, military policeman and whatever, and I can remember getting in first thing in the morning at Baker Street, getting in there, and he had this huge, one of those blue ring binders and he plopped it down on the table in front of me and said, "ANONYMOUS, I've sussed it! I've worked out M3!" Which was the monetarist policy of Nigel Lawson in those days. I said, "Oh give me a break!" Johnny Killick, you know. He was a nice man.

DW: Yeah. He was at Upminster. What about … when those final years … you had a relationship with the GLC …

ANON: You're cruel!

DW: You can be perfectly honest about this, ANONYMOUS, what was that … what was the nature of that? What did you think of the GLC's role in …

ANON: Well, there was --

DW: Good, bad or indifferent.

ANON: There was some bloke there --

DW: No names!

ANON: There was the popular planning unit which sort of opened its doors to those of us who wanted to come, and also would … and tried to kind of bring together people from … I think there were twenty-nine different trade unions on the London Transport. And try to build some kind of … I don't like to using the word rank and file because it's so redolent of the Socialist Workers' Party but some bring workers from different areas of LT together. And

there was a journal called *Bus Worker* which had been going for quite some time, and that evolved into a group of us forming a journal called *Transport Worker*, which indirectly eventually … I started trying to take photographs for it --

DW: Doing interviews?

ANON: Yeah, but it was taking photographs for it that got me off the job and into a photography degree which later evolved into a film degree. It was a good time. You sort of had the sense of what was happening. But earlier than that, I'd been a health and safety representative and we went on a day release course every week to become health and safety reps together with bus workers. So you got some sort of insight into what bus workers' lives were like. Apart from having the same employer, we really didn't have an enormous amount in common in terms of our working conditions. Bus workers didn't have an eight hour day, for instance. If our train was running late, if we were going to go over eight hours, someone would be sent to take us off. Didn't happen to the bus workers! And all the drivers had really bad backs, for fairly obvious reasons.

DW: Was that Transport Worker initiative one that you think was worth it? I mean, obviously it came to an end when the GLC …

ANON: I think, yes.

DW: Which suggests a kind of weakness.

ANON: Well, I think it was certainly worth it, but in retrospect what it means, I think time will tell. That was the era in which the organised working class as I understood it and knew it, was just completely flattened and defeated. It was the Thatcher era. I can remember in '79 looking at the Conservative Manifesto and thinking, "Nah, they'll never do that!" Because I'd grown up in the era of what was known as Butskellism, there were certain things that were agreed, there was a consensus between the Labour and the Conservative parties. And the … Thatcher's was an ideological government. They were driven by free market economics. The '79 election was in the autumn, wasn't it? I remember something, I don't remember exactly what, but it had to do with schools and teaching in January? And probably, it would seem like a completely normal policy now, but to me I was just flabbergasted that this could happen.

DW: Yeah.

ANON: But for awhile, under the GLC, it really felt there was some kind of dialogue going on between transport workers and what was the London government in those days. Which was certainly kind of refreshing because as I said earlier, I didn't feel that trade unions represented us at all. Certainly ASLEF I regarded as … the leadership of ASLEF as a self-perpetuating clique and most of the deals you felt were actually done not in the meetings of the executive but in the Flask, at Hampstead. And you could huff and you could puff but you weren't really going to change the way ASLEF was.

DW: And still today, I think.

ANON: Probably still the same today. It was the great tragedy of the Underground that the workers on the Underground were split into three different unions: NUR, ASLEF, the TSSA. And there was no direct representation. When I trained as a health and safety rep, ASLEF

really didn't want health and safety representatives. Because they feared a health and safety rep would sort of circumnavigate the authority of the sectional council representatives. And I never really worked out what happened, but I got really seriously intimidated and threatened because I was a newly qualified and appointed health and safety representative and sort of keen and whatnot and I got a phone call from a guy in Stonebridge Park depot, saying, !I've got a very, very dodgy train here." And it was a 1938 train. It was over the pits in the sheds in Stonebridge Park. And if you stood beside the train and put both hands against the side of the train and pushed, it tilted over but it didn't come back again. It remained at that tilt. And I told the driver to refuse to take the train out. Which he did. And management came down on me like a ton of bricks and I think his name was Ron or whatever I remember meeting him, I don't remember much about it but I remember not understanding what had been said. And then fortunately for me, two and a half weeks later that same train smashed into the roof of the tunnel at the sidings going up into London Road depot and the matter was quietly dropped. But for awhile I had the very clear impression I was going to get the sack and the union wasn't going to back me. But looking … I wasn't doing it the right way but it took a long time to sort of work out what the right way for health and safety reps to operate was. And I don't think I was ever really clear about it, to tell you the truth! Because the health and safety legislation as such really did not map on to the negotiating structure. We ought to resume this interview some time and I'll do some reading and try to remember stuff.