Black action

NEWSLETTER FOR UNISON BLACK MEMBERS

SPRING 2016

UNISON

UNISON BLACK MEMBERS EQUALITY

UNISON
the public service union

Looking forward to the year ahead

Your committee's 2016 work plan for tackling problems at work

Some of the most comprehensive surveys looking at race and the workplace and attitudes to race were conducted at the end of 2015. The results both reiterated existing knowledge and revealed new information.

One new area of research revealed that Black people are more likely to enjoy their work and have far greater ambition than their white colleagues. In an open survey run by Business in the Community, 84% of Black employees and 63% of white employees said it is important to progress at work.

The results also revealed that racial harassment and bullying within the workplace continue to be prevalent. And further, that while many UK employees do not feel valued or inspired at work that this is felt most keenly amongst Black workers who are less satisfied with their experiences of management and progression. This is an experience that is reflected in the under representation of Black workers at every management level in workplaces in the UK.

It is clear that employers need to put more resources into addressing race inequality at work. Without continued discussion and a proactive approach the danger is that racism in workplaces becomes subtle and more deeply ingrained and harder to challenge.

Part of the solution must see targeted work that increases access to work experience for young Black people as well as target setting for better Black representation at management level especially in the public sector where a diverse workforce also improves service delivery.

Often what happens in the workplace is a reflection of attitudes in wider society and that is why the priorities we identify at Black members conference are so important. The motions that cover organising and recruiting Black members, Black health, engaging Black communities in politics and challenging racism in the workplace will form the National Black members' committee work programme for 2016 as well as an important part of the wider union's work. Going forward Black members must continue to be the strong driving force behind this work in UNISON.

The solution must see targeted work that increases access to work experience for young Black people

Black members are tweeting!

UNISON national Black members have joined Twitter. Follow us @BlackUNISON to keep updated on UNISON race equality campaigns and activities. For this year's conference use #UBMC16

Is Britain fairer?

A digest of the latest report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) produced a report in October 2015 on the state of equality and human rights entitled Is Britain Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2015. This report is a follow up report on the Commission's previous reports on equality. The full report can be downloaded from the EHRC website.

The report is for policy makers and influencers across all sectors. It outlines the commission's findings and sets out the challenges for the future, inviting those who have statutory responsibilities or an interest in these areas to address the issues by identifying and implementing the necessary solutions.

The key findings relate to education and learning; work, income and the economy; health and care; justice, security and the right to life and the individual and society. For Black people points to note were as follows:

Education and learning

- general improvements in educational attainment in schools; in England, a narrowing of the attainment gap between white pupils and Pakistani/ Bangladeshi and African/ Caribbean/Black pupils
- more effective use of pupil premium funds
- good educational outcomes in secure training centres
- rising levels of participation of 16–18 year olds in education and training, and
- falling percentages of men and women with no qualifications of any kind.

Work, income and the economy

- increasing recognition (in, for example, the Modern Slavery Act 2015) of the human rights violations arising as a result of trafficking, forced labour, servitude and exploitation
- a narrowing of the gender gap in employment rates
- a voluntary target for the FTSE 100 of 25% female board representation was met
- in England, fewer adults and children lived in substandard accommodation; homelessness in Wales and Scotland fell.

Analysis in the review identifies eight key equality and human rights challenges for Great Britain over the coming years:

- improve the evidence and the ability to assess how fair society is
- raise standards and close attainment gaps in education
- encourage fair recruitment, development and reward in employment
- support improved living conditions in cohesive communities
- encourage democratic participation and ensure access to justice
- improve access to mental health services and support for those experiencing (or at risk of experiencing) poor mental health
- prevent abuse, neglect and ill-treatment in care and detention
- tackle targeted harassment and abuse of people who share particular protected characteristics.

There is no honour in killing

At UNISON's 2015 Black members conference a motion on honour killing was carried and conference resolved to raise awareness of the continued use of honour killings.

Tania McGee, National Black members' committee, writes for Black Action.

Honour killings should be known as patriarchal killings as there is no honour in killing.

One of the main goals of this article is to dissociate honour killings from a particular religious belief system and locate it on a continuum of patriarchal patterns of violence against women. However, it should be noted that this has also been associated with men being killed.

Honour killing is, simply put, the murder of a person accused of bringing shame upon their family. Honour violence is based on the belief that women are objects responsible for upholding the family honour. Families believe that they have to preserve their honour by punishing the woman who acted 'dishonourably.'

Honour violence occurs in patriarchal communities where male status and family status are prioritised above all else. Victims have been killed for refusing to enter a marriage, committing adultery or being in a relationship that displeased their relatives. In many instances, the crimes are committed by family members against a female relative.

More cases have reached the UK courts in recent years but a number of crimes still remain unresolved or undetected. In some parts of the world, women who have been raped have also been murdered for the 'dishonour' of being a victim and the 'disgrace' it brings to their family. In the UK, murders have sometimes taken place after a family reacted violently to their son or daughter adopting the trappings of western culture. It's thought that up to 12 honour killings happen every year in the UK.

One of the most well known cases is that of Banaz Mahmod, from Surrey, whose murder in 2006 was organised by her father and uncle. The police were criticised for mishandling Ms Mahmod's situation when she contacted them on a number of occasions before her death.

Laws to prevent forced marriages and to provide a way out for those already in unconsented unions were introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in November 2008. Anybody convicted of trying to force someone into a marriage could be jailed for up to two years. Within the first year, 86 Forced Marriage Protection Orders were implemented.

Honour violence occurs worldwide, from South America to Asia but the exact figures of how many men and women have been killed in the name of 'honour' are unknown. The tougher punishments may have also inadvertently contributed to more female suicides occurring at the instigation of men who want to avoid longer imprisonments. None of the world's major religions condone honour violence or killings although perpetrators have sometimes tried to justify their actions on religious grounds.

UNISON has made contact with Karma Nirvana, an organisation whose stated aim is to stop the scandal of forced marriage and honour-based violence. You can visit their website for more information and further advice and support.

Black members

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Getting active in regions

2015 was a busy year for UNISON Black members. We take a look back at events across the regions organised to recruit and organise Black workers.

Greater London Region

2015 has been another busy year as the regional Black members committee (RBMC) continues to play an active role within the Greater London Region.

To mobilise Black members in the run up to the general election the RBMC held a successful political engagement event. Attendees heard from inspirational speakers about UNISON's campaign and why it was important they used their vote and were encouraged to speak to their friends and families to get them to do the same. Sadiq Khan, Labour's London mayoral candidate addressed the 2014 AGM and the RBMC will be organising a similar event as part of the 2016 election campaign.

Our AGM took place on 18 September and the 100+ delegates heard from Chuka Umunna, MP and former shadow secretary of state for business, innovation & skills. Chuka spoke about a range of issues then took part in a Q&A session and photos with attendees. Margaret Greer was re-elected as chair with Clive Anthony, Elizabeth Baptiste, Mitsy Harmon-Russell and Annette Heslop as co-vice chairs.

This year's Black History Month event to mark the legacy of Black people and their continuing contribution to the UK was a huge success with members and their children from across London enjoying music, speakers, dance and great food under the theme 'Our Legacy'. Speakers included general secretary Dave Prentis, who said Black history month is "A time for action as well as reflection, a time to learn from the past – and to work together to shape a new future".

The working parties focused on motions, supporting self-organisation and recruitment and organising. Each will be continuing their work following a policy day, which agreed the 2016 work plan. Other ongoing campaigning issues will include working with the region to encourage the mainstreaming of equality issues, the Race Discrimination Protocol and defeating the Trade Union Bill.

Eastern Region

2015 was another busy and productive year for Eastern Region Black members. Over the last year our regional meetings have been well attended with new members coming each time. Over 15 members attend each meeting and it's pleasing that they are coming from an increasing number of branches.

We don't believe there has ever been so much branch-based self-organised group (SOG) activity in our region. County-wide "cluster branch" SOGs – open to all Black members within a county – have successfully been established in Norfolk and Suffolk. Two of our largest branches, Essex County and Hertfordshire County have also established their own branch groups for the first time in several years. All of these groups have reported accessing members who have previously not participated in UNISON.

Several members have been energised and supported by the regional group and have successfully been elected into positions within their branches.

Nine members staffed a recruitment stall at Luton Carnival in May. We gave out a large number of application forms and spoke to non-members about the role of trade unions and the benefit of membership. We also spoke to a number of existing members about the different ways they could get involved in their union and got many new contacts for our regional mailing list.

In May, we held an event in Luton to encourage Black members to vote in the general election and vote for the party best placed to defend public services. We discussed the reasons why Black people are less likely to vote and those present agreed what they could do to encourage friends and family members to vote. The meeting was attended by two Labour MPs and a Black Labour councillor.

In November we hosted our third annual education weekend, which was attended by over 20 members. There were numerous activities including workshops on organising opposition to the Trade Union Bill, challenging racism in the workplace, effective recruitment conversations and workplace harassment and bullying policies.

Cymru/Wales Region

2015 was a busy year. We have started to look at the regional results from the freedom of information request. We are making steady progress with the FOI, and UNISON Cymru/Wales Black Members Committee has developed a work programme to progress these activities.

Around 30 people gathered for the Abolition of Slavery event held outside the Senedd in August in Cardiff. Kebba Manneh, chair of our Black members group, spoke at the event. Chief superintendent Mark Warrender from Gwent police also spoke at the event in relation to recent cases taken forward by his force. All attendees held a two-minute silence to remember sisters and brothers who through their struggle gave freedom to so many.

In November a Black members development weekend was held.

Bullying in Britain on the rise

Practical advice from Rakesh Patel at Thompson's Solicitors

A new Acas study published in November 2015 found that not only is workplace bullying on the rise in Britain, but that many people are too afraid to speak up about it.

The Acas report *Seeking Better Solutions: Tackling bullying and ill-treatment in Britain's workplaces* looked at the latest research on workplace bullying as well as calls to the Acas helpline from employers and employees.

The Acas helpline has received around 20,000 calls related to bullying and harassment over the past year with some callers reporting that workplace bullying caused them to self-harm or consider suicide.

The analysis by Acas showed that:

- representative surveys of workplaces, health and safety representatives and employees all show that workplace bullying and ill-treatment is growing in Britain
- there are more incidences of bullying within certain groups such as public sector minority ethnic workers; women in traditionally male-dominated occupations; workers with disabilities or long-term health problems; lesbian, gay and bisexual and transgender people; and workers in health care.

The study recommends that workplaces agree standards of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and that senior leaders act as role models for these standards.

The TUC has also recently published guidance on how to deal with bullying at work. In *Bullied at Work? Don't suffer in Silence*, apart from joining a union, the TUC advises workers to:

- speak to the bully if they feel able to do so
- tell a colleague or manager
- go to the union rep (assuming they are already a member) and tell them what is happening
- keep a diary to record the nature of the bullying and when it occurred
- make a formal complaint.

We often see the effects of workplace cutbacks, reduced staffing levels and pressure to hit unrealistic targets. It is no surprise to see that such unwanted personal conduct is on the rise. It is important to note though that, unfortunately, the law is not a good ally in these circumstances. An employment tribunal cannot hear any case of bullying unless it was either so bad that it amounted to a constructive dismissal, or the conduct amounted to discrimination due to the victim's sex, race, sexual orientation, age or disability. This is where trade unions have such an important role to play as they can stand up for the victim in circumstances where they may be too badly affected to stand up for themselves.

You can download the full Acas report from their website and read the TUC advice on the TUC website.

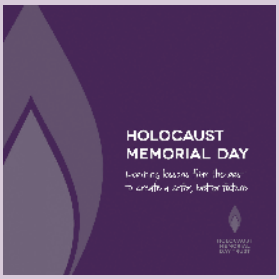
Don't Stand By – Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Day 2016 will be marked on 27 January and the theme is Don't Stand By.

The theme Don't Stand By reminds us that bystanders enabled the Holocaust, Nazi persecution and subsequent genocides. They tolerated cultures where increasingly punitive and oppressive discrimination and hostile policies could separate populations and ultimately lead to ethnic cleansing, destruction and attempted annihilation of communities.

Those who did not stand by while persecution took place were not only bravely acting as resisters and rescuers of individuals, they were also taking action against prevailing views and beliefs that saw some people's lives as worth less than others'.

People who did not 'stand by' in the Holocaust and in subsequent genocides were able to assist in many ways. Some brave people saved lives, giving a home or shelter to individuals and families who tried to escape. Others organised rescue efforts, arranged safe passages or accompanied children to safety.



For information on planning your Holocaust Memorial Day activity visit the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust website at hmd.org.uk.

UNISON joins Show Racism the Red Card in the classroom

Schools competition challenges pupils to come up with anti-racism messages

Young people across the country are being urged to create their own anti-racism messages as part of the annual 2016 national school competition organised by leading equalities organisation, Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC).

The competition was launched at the end of last year at an event hosted by UNISON at its London head office.

The annual SRtRC school competition encourages young people from schools throughout England to create their own anti-racism messages to combat racism in the classroom.

SRtRC uses the high-profile status of football and its players to help engage young people in the competition and with the broader goal of combating racism.

The launch event was attended by UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis, and NUT general secretary Christine Blower, both key sponsors of the competition. Also in attendance were TUC president Liz Snape, Labour's candidate for Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and UNISON's national Black members committee chair, Margaret Greer, together with Clint Hill, the captain of Queen's Park Rangers FC.

Speaking about UNISON's long-standing support for the competition, Dave Prentis said: "When you see the power of the work that young people produce and the level of commitment from the footballers and ex-footballers who get involved, it's not hard to see why the annual school competition is so popular.

Margaret Greer spoke on behalf of the National Black members committee, saying: 'I believe that we have to ask questions about how we develop prejudices and biased opinion, how we become hateful of others and why we discriminate. That is why we value the important work with Show Racism the Red Card using football to educate young people about racism.'

The launch event also included a special screening of SRtRC's new educational film *Immigration; What's the Story?* Aimed at challenging some of the myths surrounding immigration.

Open to young people of all ages, the competition encourages participants to produce anti-racism themed artwork in any medium; creative writing including poetry, short stories and newspaper style articles; film and music pieces.

All competition winners will be invited to a special awards ceremony at a Premier League stadium, with travel costs covered by the campaign and prizes presented by special guests, including current and former professional footballers.

UNISON's response to the immigration debate

Narmada Thiranagama, UNISON policy officer writes for Black Action

The immigration debate is one of the most complex issues in the UK and defies easy generalisation – it is toxic, divisive and frequently divorced from people's real experiences. It is likely to be decisive in the upcoming European referendum and is already driving internal tensions within the government.

While it is an abstract debate for many, it is fundamentally a debate that affects real people, frequently in the most dehumanising way. It is ironic that a debate which has raged with so much heat features so rarely the voices and stories of the people being discussed.

It is striking that a poll by Sky News on 2 October 2015 found that 47% of people in the UK wanted to take in fewer refugees. This hostility rose to 57% when the term "asylum seeker" was used. It is clear that the polarisation within the UK about refugees, asylum seekers and immigration is deep.

While millions of people were moved after seeing the washed up body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, the forces of reaction still remain – as angry and hostile as ever. Violent elements are feeling emboldened. European countries are putting up their borders while the EU is establishing a new border force to expedite deportations and force/bribe middle-eastern and North African countries to establish huge refugees camps in their own countries.

The Immigration Bill currently making its way through parliament is a draconian piece of legislation designed to criminalise and stigmatise immigrants and undocumented people. The explicit aim of government policy is to create a hostile environment for migrants.

Under the provision of the 2015 Immigration Bill:

Workplace crackdowns A new criminal offence of illegal working which will allow immigration officials wide-ranging powers to seize property and earnings, to close down businesses and to enter and search properties.

Access to Housing Landlords will be liable for a fine or for imprisonment for up to five years if they let out a property to a migrant without the 'right to rent'.

Bank accounts and driving licenses Driving in the UK whilst a migrant without status will become a new criminal offence and there will be measures requiring banks and building societies to take action in respect of existing accounts held by undocumented migrants.

Language requirements English language requirement for all customer-facing public sector workers. This is another measure to appear tough with little practical importance. It will however, place Black workers in the public sector under even greater scrutiny, legitimising racist discrimination.

Withdrawal of financial support to 'failed' asylum seeker families These proposals will leave families and children homeless and with no means of support.

NHS charges Proposals to restrict access to care for migrant workers are in the process of being implemented.

In response UNISON will continue to work with the TUC, other unions and non-governmental organisations to challenge racist immigration policies by:

- highlighting the dangers to vulnerable people, public health and huge potential discrimination against the UK's Black community
- supporting positive contributions to the immigration debate
- arguing for a rights-based approach to migrant workers
- advocating for our migrant worker members
- and enabling migrant worker to make their voices heard within UNISON through our migrant worker networks.

Advice will shortly be circulated to branches on the 'Prevent' duty – the counter terrorism Act 2015 that includes a provision that places a general requirement on specified authorities (including local authorities, NHS trusts and educational establishments) "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.".

To strengthen our work UNISON will continue to work closely with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrations (JCWI) and the Migrant Rights Network (MRN). And continue to support a wide range of anti-racist organisations at local and national level, including Unite Against Fascism and HOPE not hate.

Five ways UNISON branches and members can support refugees

The UNISON NEC and UNISON president Wendy Nichols have endorsed the following five organisations working with refugees that branches or individuals might consider supporting.

These organisations provide help for the immediate emergency and long-term practical support.

Refugee Action is running an emergency appeal, and union bodies or individuals can donate.

Doctors of the World is an organisation that provides vital medical services in refugee camps across the world, including in Europe.

The Refugee Council is currently running an appeal to free child refugees from detention centres in the UK as part of the continuing support for refugees it provides year after year.

City of Sanctuary encourages practical ways for ordinary people to show solidarity with refugees in their own communities, through a grassroots "culture of hospitality".

Women for Refugee Women focuses on discrimination experienced by refugee women, their current *Set her Free* campaign is on the treatment of women in detention centres.

Background briefing: Rohingya Muslims in Burma

UNISON's work plan to support the Rohingya people

Burma, now officially known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is a sovereign state in South East Asia. The population includes many ethnic and religious groups. The Muslim minority are the Rohingyas.

Since the 1982 Citizenship Act the Rohingya have not been officially recognised as an ethnic group. This means they continue to suffer from several forms of restrictions and human rights violations.

It is believed that in the 7th century merchants from Arab, Moorish and Mughal areas began to settle in the Northern Rakhine territory. The Myanmar military government however alleges that the wave of Bengali migration to Rakhine started after the 1855 British occupation, which means the Rohingyas cannot be classified as Burmese. In a statement Myanmar stated that 'although there are 135 races in Myanmar today, the so-called Rohingya people is not one of them because they illegally entered Myanmar.'

Treated as strangers in their own land, Rohingya Muslims face issues with access to healthcare and education. Further, the right to marry and start a family are hard to come by unless authorised by government officials, which is costly and difficult to secure. According to human rights groups the Rohingya also face persecution, rape, forced labour, extortion, land confiscation and limited access to public services.

International law prohibits states from returning individuals to countries where they have faced or are at risk or torture. Yet, neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Bangladesh have declined to take in more Rohingyas.

The present government of Myanmar is responsible for creating untold sufferings for Rohingyas whose only fault appears to be belonging to a different religion and ethnicity to that of the majority.

Following a resolution from the 2015 National Black members conference a referral to the international committee was made and a UNISON plan of work has been agreed. It includes:

- engaging the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) to raise the plight of the Rohingya with its affiliate in Myanmar
- calling on the UK representative to the International Labour Organization to raise the issue of the right of Rohingya to work
- writing to the Burma Campaign UK to continue to put pressure on the UK government and others to stop persecuting the Rohingya
- working with Anti-slavery International and other non-government organisations campaigning against forced labour and trafficking of the Rohingya.

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Abiola Kusoro, April Ashley, Elizabeth Cameron, Hugo Pierre

Black action wants to hear from you

Black action is UNISON's publication for Black members and activists.

It provides information and guidance on the most relevant UNISON campaigns and issues affecting Black members and communities.

We want to hear from you. Black members are invited to share:

- Thoughts on Black Action articles and campaigns
- Black member branch and regional activity and campaigns
- Information on recruitment events
- Personal stories and experiences from the workplace and in UNISON
- Good practice in setting up Black members self-organised groups.

To contribute and discuss your ideas further please email blackmembers@unison.co.uk with a brief outline of what you would like to include. Articles may be edited.

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