

# fresh tracks



the journal of  
ASLEF's black and  
ethnic minority  
consultative  
committee

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Forty thousand people packed Trafalgar Square for a spectacular May Day/Unite Against Fascism rally and concert.

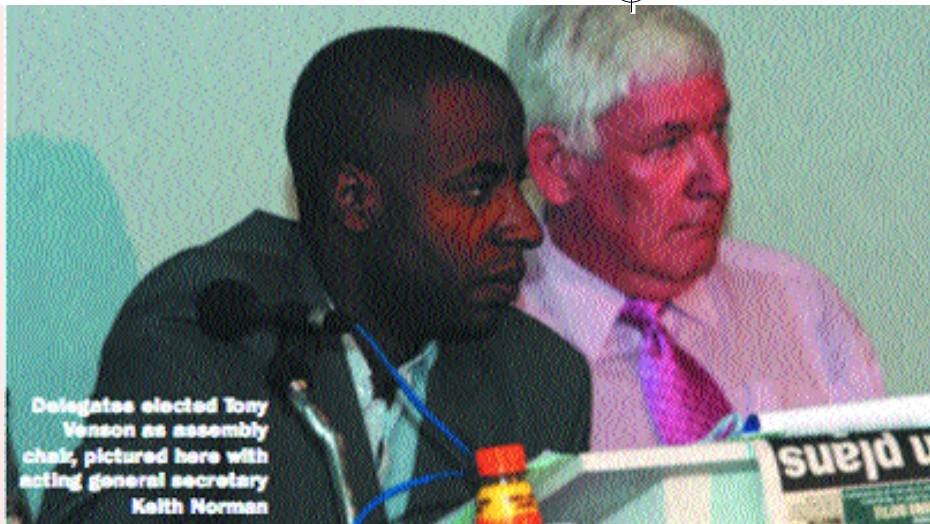
The concert followed the traditional International Workers Day march joined by contingents representing every section of the trade union movement, campaigning organisations and migrant workers from every corner of the world.

The audience – black and white, young and old, showed the true face of today's multicultural Britain and hammered home the message that this is a generation united and determined to say Never Again to the threat of fascism, as represented by the fascist British National Party.

There were show-stopping performances by headliners Pete Doherty and Estelle, ably supported by the brilliant Terri Walker, Metro Riots, Roll Deep, Skeme & Big P, Crazy Titch & J2K, Ras Kwame, Bigga Fish and Lady Sovereign. Lively and entertaining hosts throughout the day were longtime LMHR supporters Rodney P & DJ Skitz, alongside UK hip-hop veteran MC D and Tibbs.

Between the acts, speakers highlighting the need to fight racism and fascism drew loud cheers from the audience. Those present included living legend Tony Benn, Holocaust survivor Leon Greenman OBE, Lee Jasper from the National Assembly Against Racism and Weyman Bennett, Sabby Dhalu and Martin Smith from Unite Against Fascism, Paul Mackney general secretary NATFHE, Abdul Bari from Muslim Council of Britain, Pav Akhtar NUS Exec, Peter Turner, TUC National Officer LGBT and disability rights, Mick Connolly from SE Region TUC, Glyn Ford MEP, and many others representing the organisations of event partners – the London MayDay Organising Committee.

Among the most poignant moments of the day was when 94-year-old Holocaust survivor Leon Greenman – a talented singer himself – congratulated Estelle and Pete Doherty on their performances and told them about his experiences at the hands of Hitler's Nazis' death camps, and his continuing determination to help alert a new generation to the anti-fascist struggle.



Delegates elected Tony Venson as assembly chair, pictured here with acting general secretary Keith Norman

### Tony Venson reports from the ASLEF Annual Assembly of Delegates

For over fifteen years I have been a member of Rugby Branch and during this time have held various positions including National Secretary of the BEMCC and attended the ASLEF Annual Assembly of Delegates (conference) five times as my Branch District delegate plus attended as a guest.

AAD experiences allow union members to take part in the full democratic process of this great trade union plus gain the skills necessary to chair the ASLEF Conference.

AAD 2005, the 125th Anniversary was a ground breaking change from the traditional past, with me as the first black Chair and also the election of Pauline Cawood as the first women Vice Chair.

Interestingly enough Pauline Cawood and I both chaired a mock AAD which was held at the ASLEF joint equalities school at Wortley Hall in 2003.

Delegates at the AAD elect a chair from amongst themselves. This is one of the highest positions a lay representative of ASLEF can hold.

Positions that I have held in the union have given me

a great insight into the many 'behind the scenes' workings of ASLEF.

Like many members, over time, I have been a Branch Secretary, Chair, District Council (DC) Delegate, DC Auditor, Local Level Representative, Business council representative. (Secretary) and BEMCC rep.

Most of the delegates at the AAD hold some of these positions within their respective Branches.

Some delegates don't hold positions and unless they seek advice, some of the workings of the conference can seem very technical at times. The information that is given to delegates in their conference organising pack is very helpful.

The first day seemed to take an eternity.

The initial walk up to the top table was very daunting and took forever, but as each debate carried on the task got easier.

Electronic voting was very hard to cope with as it was a new procedure, but towards the end of the week the words of the EC President in his opening address were very true, with there definitely being more openness and transparency with this system.

As every day progressed there was always the possibility of someone challenging my decisions so it was up to me to make sure that if points of order

were raised that we carried on in the correct order.

I had to make sure the correct names were called out to speak on the debates (sorry 'Acting' General Secretary).

Sometimes the Chair has to decide the outcome of a closely argued debate with a casting vote. This task was unnecessary this conference owing to the great contributions from the delegates which allowed people to make their minds up when voting.

As the Chair you can take part in debates, so when the debate on the equalities issue came up I vacated the chair briefly to make my contribution. This item was carried forward as policy unanimously by the delegates in the vote.

It was also a great honour to chair the Society Dinner. This is the traditional function of the conference which makes the presentations to the honoured guests, plus the opportunity to present the Chair with a token of conference's appreciation from the Acting General Secretary.

I would like to thank my fellow delegates at the 125th ASLEF AAD for giving me the great honour of chairing the conference. I will cherish my memories of the help and support of my good friends at the conference for many years to come.

## report TU

ASLEF's delegation to the conference was Floyd Doyle, Tony Phillips and Hanif Takolia. The Conference was opened by the Chair Harish Patel, he outlined that the theme of the Conference this year was organising black workers. This came about after a motion was passed at TUC Congress 2004.

The motion called on the TUC and the Race Relations Committee to develop a strategy to deal with race equality. A project has been established and the Committee has decided to establish a number of 'roundtable' sessions with activists from black communities to look at:

- What changes we need to consider in making trade unions more relevant to the black communities
- What we can do to support community campaigns and initiatives on issues we have in common
- How we can establish a link that ensures the struggle against discrimination is seen as the same struggle in and outside the workplace

He concluded by giving a plug to the 'Make Poverty History' campaign and asking every one to buy an armband off the stall.

The debate on motions commenced. ASLEF's motion was calling for changes in the law to allow unions to expel from membership anyone who is a member of the BNP or other fascistic organisations was very well moved by Hanif and seconded by the FBU. The motion was well supported by speakers and carried unanimously at the vote.

Other items carried at the Conference were: composite on promoting equal opportunities in the workplace; composite on making unions work for black workers; motions on the Government Task Force, Pensions, Race and the Tomlinson Report, the Gershon/Lyons Proposals (civil

# JC Black Workers conference 2005



service job cuts), career progress of BE in the Magistrates' Courts Service, access to justice for workers, job applicants and vocational trainees, racism and xenophobia, asylum seekers and migrant workers, recruitment of overseas teachers, the Identity Cards Bill, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme – racially aggravated offences, promotion of BME networks in the NHS, racism in football in Europe, combating world poverty, developing world debt cancellation and equalities seats on the General Council.

The final motion which called for the equalities seats on the TUC General Council to be elected at the equalities conferences, rather than at Congress where they are currently elected, was the motion chosen to go forward to Congress from the Black Workers Conference.

Other speakers included Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC, he told delegates that he was asking trade unionists not to 'play the race card' in the forthcoming general election and try to prevent an election debate on asylum, immigration and race dominated by fear and prejudice. He went on to say that on 5 May 5 there was a clear choice between a Tory party that scapegoats and stigmatises immigrants, asylum seekers and migrant workers and a Labour

Government that – while not perfect – has delivered genuine improvements for working people.

Other speakers included Jeannie Drake, President of the TUC, who spoke about the need to combat the far right in the general election. The TUC have been working hard to build campaigns in seats where the BNP are standing with the help of Searchlight and Unite Against Fascism

Bill Morris, former General Secretary of the TGWU, spoke very movingly about the AIDS pandemic in Africa. Altogether 32 million people are dying of AIDS,

and already there is a missing generation – the 25-40 year old – these have already died. If the western world does not do something the African continent will be devastated. This is against a background in the wealthier western countries where people who were diagnosed as being HIV+ in the 1980s are still alive and well today.

Clearly the west must intervene if Africa is to be saved. Cheaper, generic forms of the drugs to treat the illness need to be made available and much greater financial aid needs to be devoted to Africa to try to combat the disease.

## Workplace racism denies training to many qualified black workers

Racism in Britain's workplaces is damaging the careers of many black workers because at every level of working life they get less training opportunities, despite often being better qualified than their white counterparts.

A new TUC report shows how training is denied to many qualified black workers.

'Workplace training – a race for opportunity', reveals that even though job related training is more likely to be offered to qualified workers; qualified black and minority ethnic workers (BME) receive less opportunities.

The report shows that 28% of graduates are BME, compared to just 20% of white workers. And while having a degree significantly increases access to job related training, only 17% of white graduates have never been offered training, compared to 20% of black workers.

In workplaces with union recognition and in the public sector the openings to training

are better. Positive action taken by unions, and imposed by the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) on employers has limited the effects of workplace racism.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: 'Racism at work is still preventing too many black workers from fulfilling their potential. We need new legislation that will force all employers to give equal access to training for all workers. The TUC is campaigning to extend Britain's race relations law to make all workplaces respond positively to the training needs of black workers.'

Certain ethnic groups, in particular Pakistani and Bangladeshi employees, face real barriers to training opportunities. Nearly two fifths (39%) of Pakistani employees and nearly half (47%) of Bangladeshi employees have never been offered training. And in the case of Bangladeshi men, this rises to more than half (51%).

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District 7  
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District 8  
election in progress

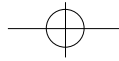
## open meeting

The Black and Ethnic Minorities Consultative Committee's Open Meeting will be held on 27 October 2005 from 2.00pm at ASLEF Head Office in London.

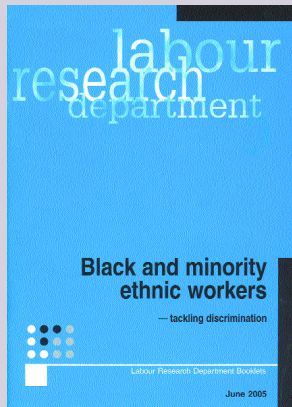
This meeting is open to all BEM members, and we are trying to get a speaker from the Stephen Lawrence Foundation to address the meeting.

Come along and have your say about what it is like to be a black worker working in the rail industry and what you think the Society could be doing to help with the recruitment and retention of black members.

If you want to find out more about this meeting, contact Sharon Allen, Equalities Officer on 0207 317 8600



The Labour Research Department have produced a new guide Black and minority ethnic workers – tackling discrimination packed with useful advice to help not only reps and activists but members who experience racism.



ASLEF experience is quoted under the section dealing with religious discrimination at work. '...the ASLEF rail drivers' union at Leeds railway station – (was still) pursuing its case for a multi-faith prayer room at the station. Branch secretary Pauline Cawood said that, with the RMT, the branch had approached Network Rail, which had verbally agreed to provide the prayer room but had not so far done so.

She said: 'Leeds is a major station, and while there is a railway chaplain's office as there is at most stations, we've waited and waited for the multi-faith room but nothing has happened. Meanwhile though, the chaplain's office has been refurbished! There are members of the workforce who would definitely use a multi-faith room. We'll be pursuing this because as things stand it's discriminatory.'

Leeds branch, and Pauline who chairs the ASLEF Women's Consultative Committee are to be congratulated.

■ £5.95 from LRD 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF, 0207 928 3649 (tel), 0207 928 0621 (fax) or info@lrd.org.uk. Why not ask your employers to purchase a copy? A circular was sent out in July recommending that each branch buys at least one copy, so contact your Branch Secretary.



The TUC and affiliated unions have expressed their sympathy and solidarity with all those whose lives were lost in the explosions in London in central London.

And union leaders have warned against an anti-Muslim backlash. PCS general secretary, Mark Serwotka, said, 'We must be prepared to oppose any rise in prejudice and Islamophobia from whatever quarter, but particularly that of fascist organisations which are trying to exploit the situation.'

The far right British National Party (BNP), had used images of the bombed London bus on a leaflet in a recent council by-election in the east London borough of Barking and Dagenham. But voters snubbed the BNP and returned Labour.

Unite Against Fascism said that the BNP's exploitation of the atrocities 'was countered with a united anti-racist campaign calling on voters to reject the BNP'

The Observer newspaper reported a 500% rise in faith-hate crimes in the days after the bombings. It said that more than 1,000 race and faith-hate incidents have been reported to police across the country. Community leaders are estimating that the

figure is much higher as many such crimes do not get reported to the police. Islamophobia is based on an unfounded and irrational hatred and hostility directed towards Islam and Muslims and those who are perceived to be from that religious background or from similar ethnicity.

Islamophobia results in unfair discrimination and harassment, and the exclusion of individuals or groups from the mainstream areas of social, political or economic life, including employment. In expressing concerns over an upsurge in Islamophobia, unions are tackling the prejudice and discrimination that has been directed against Muslims since 9/11.

Islamophobia results in:

- Discrimination against Muslims in recruitment and employment practices, and in workplace cultures and customs;
- Verbal and physical attacks on Muslims in public places;
- Attacks on mosques and desecration of Muslim cemeteries;
- Negative stereotypes in the media and in remarks made by political leaders, implying that British Muslims are less committed than others to democracy and British laws;
- Muslim employees are harassed for praying during approved work breaks and suffer psychological and verbal abuse;
- Laws curtailing civil liberties that disproportionately affect Muslims.

Unions in the UK have been attempting to rise to the challenges this has presented in the workplace. In particular, teaching unions, whose members deal daily with children and young people from a variety of different backgrounds and faiths. The National Union of Teachers have been issuing information and advice to their members on how to tackle Islamophobia in schools and colleges across the country. They say that schools have a crucial role to play in helping dispel myths about Muslim communities and promoting social justice. NATFHE, ATL, GMB, TGWU and UNISON have signed a national agreement on guidance for religion and belief.

ASLEF is committed to opposing all forms of racism, and our Black and Ethnic Minorities Consultative Committee will be looking at guidelines on how to combat Islamophobia.

## Police in dock over Tube shooting

Whilst Ken Livingston, mayor of London, praised transport workers and how they responded to the suicide bombings and the attempted bombings on 21 July, the police in London were accused of being 'gung ho' and 'trigger happy' over their shooting at Stockwell station on Wednesday 22

July of the Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes. ASLEF's Steve Grant, district organiser of District 8, expressed our concerns after it was revealed that in the confusion Mr Menezes had been shot seven times in the head and once in the shoulder. The ASLEF member driving the train that Mr

Menezes had been travelling on was racing away from the gunshots when he was wrestled to the ground and had a gun put to his head by over zealous police officers. The member who is of West African origin, is still off work following the trauma of this unwarranted and terrifying attack.