

FRESH TRACKS

Black and Ethnic Minority Representative Committee Newsletter **Autumn 2009**

LOOKING FOR LEADERS

THE Labour Research Department recently undertook a survey of 32 nationwide trade unions accounting for 90% of the TUC's membership. The aim of the survey was to identify the numbers of senior union officials who were from BME backgrounds. They found that little had changed since the last survey undertaken in 2001 with only one trade union, The Prison Officers Association, having a BME leader in the shape of Colin Moses their National Chair.

The Professional Footballers Association (PFA) remains a leader in this area, with their Deputy Chief Executive and 5 of their 42 full time officials from BME communities. Their BME membership had also increased from 12% to 25% since 2001. The same can not be said for all unions though, as many have little or no BME representation in senior posts.

To get to the top things need to change at the bottom and the way to become part of the solution is for more BME members to get involved at grass roots levels by becoming branch representatives or branch equality officers.

Here BEM Representative Committee members tell us why they decided to become active within ASLEF:

Curty Gunputrar, District 3 Representative: 'I was approached by ASLEF to apply for the post of BEM Representative Committee member for my district as the post had been vacant for some time. As I was the appropriate candidate, I volunteered to help my union.

Surjeet Puee, District 4 Representative: 'I have been an ASLEF member since 1978 and was elected as BEM Representative Committee member for my District six years ago. Since this time I have been helping members from ethnic minorities from all ages and backgrounds. I am very enthusiastic and continue to serve above and beyond my role.

Pat Blake, District 8 Representative: 'I started attending branch meetings and found out that the previous member for my district was standing down. I decided to put my name forward; it has been an eye opening and interesting experience.



A NEW THREAT: THE ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE



AROUND England throughout the summer the English Defence League (EDL) has been leading 'anti-Muslim extremism' demonstrations. If you have not yet encountered this group rest assured they will be coming to a town near you soon as they prepare to expand their campaign across the country.

Its founding members come from football 'firms' and many have known histories of hooliganism and violence. 'Firms' from different football clubs put aside their rivalries to come together to, as they say, 'claim back our town centres'.

With 'divisions' in Luton, North London, Bristol, Portsmouth, Southampton, Derby, Cardiff and the West Midlands this is an expanding organisation that is fast gaining momentum. They organise predominately on the internet and now have an 'official' website along with utilising social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube.

They have made three very public claims: they are distinct from the BNP, they do not advocate violence and they are opposed to racism, however these have been rubbished by their actions.

The BNP leadership has tried to distance itself from EDL and have gone on record to say any party member involved with them would be disciplined. This has not happened as the EDL is currently being run by someone whose name appeared on the leaked BNP membership list. Whilst the official EDL website was set up and is run by a known BNP activist.

Although they may claim to not advocate violence the rallies held have ended in violence and arrests. There have been clashes between EDL members, anti-fascist groups and local Muslims. The Home Office recently banned any political demonstrations or rallies in Luton for the next 3 months due to the threat of the EDL returning to the town.

The rallies have seen black and white male supporters standing side by side which is why they claim they are not racist. However their signs, chants and actions are all Islamophobic.

One thing is certain, the English Defence League are building a violent racist street army who aren't afraid to travel around the country flaunting their anti-Muslim views.

BRITISH BUS BOYCOTT

MANY will know the names Martin Luther King and Malcolm X but few will have heard of Paul Stephenson or Roy Hackett. Whilst the civil rights movement gained momentum in the United States during the sixties a campaign against inequality and discrimination was also taking place here in the UK, in Bristol.

The Bristol Omnibus Company was owned by the Government and run through the Transport Holding Company. During this time the company were enforcing a colour bar against employing black or Asian bus crews, a policy that was completely legal as laws on racial segregation and discrimination had yet to be passed. There is some dispute over how the colour bar came to be in place with company management placing the blame on a resolution passed by The Passenger Group of the Transport and General Workers Union in 1955, although the union themselves dispute that this was ever passed.

In 1962 the local press in Bristol were reporting labour shortages at the bus company and a black woman named Ena Hackett applied for a position as a bus conductress. Despite the reported staff shortages she was turned down for the role. Her husband Roy Hackett was despondent with the situation, that the bus company was happy to allow black people aboard buses as paying passengers but not as employees. He began to talk to other people in the community and from this the West Indian Development Council was born, with founding members Roy Hackett, Owen Henry, Audley Evans and Prince Brown. The group needed a spokesperson and Paul Stephenson, a youth worker in the city was chosen.

The group needed proof that the bus company were enforcing the colour bar and Paul Stephenson arranged an interview for one of his students, Guy Bailey as a test case. When the interview had been scheduled he called back to tell the bus company that Guy was West

Indian and the company instantly cancelled the interview. After this occurrence Paul Stephenson visited the bus company's general manager, Ian Patey who confirmed that the company did operate a ban on the employment of 'coloured labour'.

The group now needed a strategy to progress their campaign and took inspiration from Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott and so began the bus boycott of the Bristol Omnibus Company. The media frenzy started and there was a war of words in the press between both sides, some of which resulted in libel action by Paul Stephenson at the end of the boycott. However, despite this, the campaign gained support from thousands of Bristolians of all races. Students marched in protest and Labour MPs Tony Benn and Stan Awberry spoke in support. Harold Wilson who was then Leader of the Opposition at the time also spoke out against the ban at an Anti-Apartheid rally in London.

After 60 long days the boycott finally ended on 28th August 1963 with the Bristol Omnibus Company removing the colour ban. On the same day, Martin Luther King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC and told 200,000 civil rights protestors 'I have a dream...'



CONFERENCE ROUND UP

STUC BLACK WORKERS CONFERENCE 2009

By Paul Patmore, BME Representative Committee Secretary, District 2

I had the pleasure of attending this year's STUC 13th annual Black Workers conference, held at the Menzies Hotel, Glasgow on the 3-4 October. This year's theme for conference was 'A future free from racism'.

Sofi Taylor was this year's Chair and she welcomed all delegates to conference and said that our challenge today as black workers of tomorrow is to fight against the BNP.

The first guest speaker was Martin Keenan, STUC President who said our 'society is now multicultural, we defeated the National Front in the seventies and we will defeat the BNP now. As unionists we are building a movement that will be strong and united.'

I put a question to guest speaker Tommy Breslin of Show Racism the Red Card. 'Why are football clubs saying that they will ban for life any football supporter showing any form of

racism or sectarian inside the ground but not outside?' In short he said they can but they don't.

Guest speaker Grahame Smith, STUC General Secretary, paid tribute to former Secretary Bill Spires who sadly passed away. A minute's silence was held for him at the start of conference. He spoke on the turbulent economic climate that we are in, the nationalisation of Scotland's biggest banks, that Scottish Parliament has no representation by anybody from the minorities, the denouncement of the BNP as a vile racist organisation and workplace discrimination.

On behalf of the STUC Black Workers Committee I was asked to second the FBU motion 12 on 'racial abuse whilst carrying out duties'.

ASLEF's motion to conference, motion 4 'Stop the BNP advance in Scotland'. I called on conference to recognise that the BNP is a fascist, racist organisation that stands for an all white Britain. We live in a multicultural society which the BNP plays no part. Their refusal to not recognise people from the minorities, people with a different skin colour



Paul Stephenson: Founding member of the West Indian Development Council



speaks loud and clear, they say no to us, we say no to them, keep Scotland BNP free.

Both motions were unanimously carried.

Whilst the number of delegates was down, this year's conference as a whole was a success and I am to be retained on the STUC Black Workers Committee for another year.

TUC BLACK WORKERS CONFERENCE

By Floyd Doyle, BME Representative Committee Chair, District 5

This year's conference was held in Scarborough and the theme was "Time to organise". There were 226 delegates representing 32 unions. The ASLEF delegation was Floyd Doyle – District 5, Paul Patmore District 2, Surjeet Puee District 4 and new delegate Ronald Gordon Hill. We were joined by Simon Weller, National Organiser.

We had a minutes silence at the beginning in respect of Jack Jones the ex-leader of the TGWU who had died recently aged 96.

When we got underway, we had two speeches; one from TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber and another from Sheila Bearcroft, the TUC President.

Simon Woolley the director and co-founder of Operation Black Vote spoke with vigour and passion about President Obama and how not to settle for second best. He then told us about a member from Unison who was recently sworn in as a magistrate, she entered the court and some of the people thought she was the tea lady and their jaws dropped when she took her seat on the bench! And the best bit was when those same people had to then bow to her!

There were 20 motions on a wide range of subjects from the far right, racism in the workplace, black representation in the trade unions, migrant workers and our motion "Encouraging young black workers into employment".

The RMT spoke on "Immigration and asylum information campaign". Surjeet Puee from District 7 seconded the motion on behalf of ASLEF. He spoke

very well on the subject.

Ronald Gordon Hill moved our motion "Encouraging young black workers into employment." It was his first time at conference and he took it in his stride, spoke very eloquently even though he was initially nervous. The motion was seconded by UCATT and we had 8/9 speakers in support and the motion was carried.

There were various workshops and fringe meetings going on which we also contributed to.

Luka Phiri from the Zimbabwe Association spoke on how he was tortured many times for his union activities by the Zimbabwean Government. He is over here now unable to work as he is not allowed to by the British Government as he is an asylum seeker. His family had to stay in Zimbabwe and his wife died as he could not send money home to help her.

It was a full and lively conference in all and next year we hope to take our new allocation of 6 delegates. And gladly I was re-elected to the TUC race relations committee for another year.



BAME MEANS MORE ETHNIC MINORITIES IN LABOUR POLITICS

By Pat Blake, BEM Representative Committee member, District 8

I ATTENDED the Obama scholarship event that was held in Victoria on the 4th April.

The meeting was opened by Ahmad Shahzad who is the Labour BAME Chair. He outlined the idea behind this scholarship which entails getting more MPs and MEPs in the Labour Party and on to the parliamentary selection list. He also talked about setting up the 54 group which the aim is to have 54 BAME prospective candidates in place by the next general election.

We were then introduced to Ellie Reeves (NEC member) and Kiran Mahil (National Women & Equalities Officer). They talked about how to get started and how the selection process works. We were shown a presentation which showed the route that you take to get selected - short listing, your C.V., selling yourself, if you get nominated etc.

Claude Moraes who is an MEP told us about his personal experiences in getting selected to be a BAME MEP. He also enlightened us to the fact that the selection process that is now in place was not around when he got elected in 1992.

Sonia Klein is the prospective parliamentary candidate for Ilford North. She told us that she was selected from an all woman shortlist. She also gave some background to how she got to where she is now. Sonia and her husband helped out on President Obama's campaign in America to get some insight into the American way of nominations. She also outlined that it is very tough - you have to put heart and soul into it, going to the constituency involved, raising funds and lots of other things!

My thoughts on the day were that it is a good idea to have this selection process. There is help for you if you decide to run for parliament but you will have to put a lot of days and weeks of work to get the nomination. You

also have to go through an interview process with the Constituency Labour Party that you want to represent, then another interview with the NEC.

Things are all in place and we will have to see how it goes when the next General Election arrives.



Contacts

The BEM Representative Committee would welcome letters or articles from members for Fresh Tracks.

If you would like to contact the BEMRC delegate in your district, details are:

District 1:

Vacant

District 2:

Paul Patmore
020 7317 8600

District 3:

Curty Gunputrar
07875 592230

District 4:

Surjeet Puee
07949 131226

District 5:

Floyd Doyle
07788 153594

District 6:

Aaron Clapp
07790 490128

District 7:

Amjid Hussain
020 7317 8600

District 8:

Pat Blake
07743 382890

Useful addresses

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) The new commission is working to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society. Telephone 0845 604 6610 info@equalityhumanrights.com <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com>

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) Provides support and legal advice around a wide range of immigration and asylum issues. 0207 251 8708 info@jcwi.org.uk <http://www.jcwi.org.uk>

The Afiya Trust National charity working on ethnic minority health issues. 0207 582 0400 www.afiyatrust.org

BLINK - Black Information Link Independent Community interactive site for black communities. 0207 582 1990 www.blink.org.uk



Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen