



# Black action

NEWSLETTER FOR UNISON BLACK MEMBERS

Summer 2010



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## After the election

The general election produced many surprises and the more welcome ones included the demise of the BNP. The BNP had targeted the elections in Barking and Dagenham and Stoke, hoping to see the first BNP MPs elected and to take control of the local councils.

In Barking and Dagenham Nick Griffin, BNP leader, trailed in third place and of 28 existing councillors only two were re-elected overall. A humiliating defeat for the racists and fascists and a triumph for hope over hate. Many UNISON members spoke out and campaigned against the BNP and thanks go out to them.

There was a 100% increase in Black MPs to 26 – although the numbers still do not reflect the population. Eight of our new MPs are Muslim. The Con Dem coalition cabinet has only one Black member and she is in an unpaid role!

Parliament still does not represent all our communities and initial messages suggest hard times for our public services – £6billion of cuts will affect us all, whether as providers or users, of public services. And it is likely public sector pensions will be under close scrutiny. Limits will be placed on immigration but specific proposals are as yet unclear.

Dave Prentis, UNISON general secretary said: “We will fight tooth and nail to protect our members and the vital jobs they do. We will seek to build strong alliances, particularly with local communities and service users, to campaign against cuts and privatisation. I call on every member and activist – however you voted at the general election – to join us in the fight of our lives to defend our vital public services.



### UNISON national race equality officer appointed

Narmada Thiranagama has been appointed as UNISON race equality officer. She has been involved in community and political activism as well as working within the British trade union movement.

Prior to joining UNISON, Narmada was the women’s equality policy officer for the TUC and a senior official at the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT). She brings a wealth of skills, experience and knowledge to support Black members in UNISON. She is delighted to be joining UNISON and looks forward to meeting members.

## Moroccan worker wins unfair dismissal case

**A hospital chef has won his case for unfair dismissal and race discrimination, thanks to UNISON.**

Hamid Elkiyari, a Moroccan and a devout Muslim, was employed by ISS Mediclean, which is contracted to provide a catering service at Kingston hospital. Mr Elkiyari had battled his way to work through the heavy snowfall one day in February 2009 at 5.30am after he had been called in early to cover for colleagues who had been unable to get to the hospital.

That day he worked through from 6am to 2pm without a break and, when the kitchen was closed, he ate a piece of garlic bread that would otherwise have been binned. A manager saw him and suspended him on the spot. He was later dismissed.

Mr Elkiyari, who had been with his employers ISS Mediclean for 23 years, had even been commended for his ‘outstanding efforts’ on the day of the incident. Following his dismissal Mr Elkiyari contacted his union UNISON, which instructed Thompson solicitors to bring a claim against ISS Mediclean.

The employment tribunal found that Mr Elkiyari had been unfairly dismissed. The tribunal held that the company had failed to follow a fair procedure or to give Mr Elkiyari’s length of service and the adverse weather conditions due consideration. The tribunal also found that Mr Elkiyari had been treated less favourably than white members of staff who had engaged in similar conduct.

Following the tribunal’s decision ISS Mediclean agreed to pay Mr Elkiyari £25,000 in compensation.

The company has since lodged an appeal with the employment appeal tribunal against the discrimination finding, but has accepted the unfair dismissal decision.



# Saving our public services

## How UNISON's Million Voices campaign will hold the government to account.



UNISON warned that the Tories would start cutting public services as soon as they were elected and will fight to protect services and our members' jobs.

**“We have built awareness, organisation and alliances that will significantly enhance our strength and influence over the coming period”**

The campaign to defend our public services has just begun. We always knew that whatever the outcome of the general election, UNISON would need to step up its campaign against any attempts to pay off the country's debts with cuts in public services.

The Million Voices campaign has positioned us well for this. By mobilising our members and the wider public to show their support for public services, we have built awareness, organisation and alliances that will significantly enhance our

strength and influence over the coming period.

In the weeks running up to the general election we took our pro-public service message out to audiences of millions with national newspaper, television and internet advertising. Thousands visited the specially created website at million-voices.org, watched our powerful film about the consequences of cutting public service jobs and registered their support for the campaign.

By alerting the public to the threat to public services, and demonstrating to politicians the extent of public concern, we helped to ensure that, during the election campaign, all parties sought to reassure voters that 'frontline services' would be safe in their hands. While many of their policies on public spending and public service reform could have devastating consequences on service delivery, their reluctance to

spell these out means they have no mandate for the deep cuts that some would like to make.

Now UNISON has a key role to play in holding the government to account and challenging any attempts to solve its financial problems by cutting pay, jobs or services, which would harm the wellbeing of vulnerable groups and ordinary working families.

At national level the new budget and spending review will be carefully scrutinised with this in mind, and UNISON's views will be heard loud and clear. But UNISON activists have a critical role to play in workplaces and local communities, where the impact of any cuts will be felt and where we can be most effective in marshalling opposition.

Unfortunately, Black members and their communities could be hit especially hard. Already Black workers experience lower pay and higher rates of unemployment due to the disadvantage and discrimination they suffer. The danger is that they will also suffer disproportionately from pay cuts and redundancies in the public sector and that services they rely on will be considered a low priority and first in line for cuts as a result.

Defending public services from cuts is therefore an intrinsic aspect of standing up for Black workers, their families and their communities. That's why it's important that Black members in UNISON feed in their views on how we should take the campaign forward.

There is now a website offering UNISON branch activists ideas and resources for taking forward the campaign in their local area: [unison.org.uk/million/branches.php](http://unison.org.uk/million/branches.php). In addition, a new Million Voices factsheet, "Speaking up for Black equality", is now available for download at: [unison.org.uk/acrobat/18912.pdf](http://unison.org.uk/acrobat/18912.pdf)



# Equality impact assessments

## Public authorities' duty to prevent discrimination.

The public sector race equality duty was introduced into legislation in the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. It means that public bodies must have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

All listed public bodies must publish a race equality scheme that identifies all function/policies that are relevant to race equality. The scheme requires public bodies to:

- assess and consult on the likely impact proposed policies will have on the promotion of race equality
- publish the results of the impact assessments, consultation and monitoring.

### What is an 'equality impact assessment?'

Equality impact assessment (EIA) is the process by which organisations look at their policies and activities to ensure that the possibility for discrimination against any particular group is minimised. The purpose of conducting an EIA is to ensure that policies and activities help to promote equality.

This means that any new or existing policy that is likely to have an equality aspect must be examined in detail. The EIA process involves the employer gathering information to see if a policy has any direct or indirect discriminatory elements to it, consulting with relevant stakeholders and then adapting policies if necessary.

For instance if an employer is proposing a workforce restructuring, the trade union can ask the employer to do an EIA on that proposal. This

may demonstrate a disproportionate impact on Black staff.

### What you can do

Public sector trade union representatives should be consulted by their employers concerning their race equality schemes and EIAs. Talk to your branch to ensure this issue is raised with your public sector employer.

### E-Quality bulletin

E-Quality is a regular e-bulletin for branch officers with an equality role. The bulletin gives an overview of equality developments in UNISON, in parliament and in the wider world. If you would like this e-bulletin email: [equality@unison.co.uk](mailto:equality@unison.co.uk) or write to UNISON Means Equality, 1 Mabledon Place, London, WC1H 9AJ.

## How to conduct an EIA

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has produced new guidance on carrying out EIAs. This guidance includes a new screening process to determine whether an EIA is required, and a five step approach to carrying out an EIA.

### The screening stage

The screening process involves considering:

**1.** What the main aims, purpose and outcomes of the function strategy, project, decision or policy are and how these fit in with the wider aims of the organisation.

**2.** How these aims will affect the duty to:

- promote equality of opportunity

- eliminate discrimination
- eliminate harassment
- promote good community relations
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- consider more favourable treatment of disabled people
- protect and promote human rights.

**3.** What aspect of the policy could contribute to inequality.

**4.** If the policy will have an impact

(either positive or negative) on the lives of people, including members of particular groups and the evidence for this.

**5.** The different needs, experiences or attitudes that particular communities or groups are likely to have in relation to the policy.

If the answer to any of the questions 3, 4, or 5 is yes and potential impacts have been identified in question 2, then a full EIA should be carried out.

# Equality Act set to benefit members

The government's flagship Equality Bill has become law following years of discussion and almost 12 months of parliamentary debate.

The bill received royal assent on 8 April and formally became the Equality Act 2010. It brings together all existing equality legislation, in most cases strengthening and simplifying the law.

The act should see UNISON members benefit from: a new socioeconomic duty on public authorities, which means they have to consider how to reduce all disadvantage; the use of public procurement to improve equality; protection against discrimination for carers and a ban on age discrimination outside the workplace. The current race duty on public bodies, which was introduced as a result of the Stephen Lawrence enquiry, will be integrated into a

new single equality duty covering all areas of equality. UNISON is currently lobbying to ensure that this new single equality duty retains all the strengths of the current race, gender and disability duties.

Liane Venner, head of UNISON's membership participation unit said: "We are delighted that at the very end of the last parliament, the Equality Bill has finally completed its passage into law. UNISON campaigned for some elements to be stronger, particularly on equal pay, but this does represent a significant step forward for equality. It extends rights and protections on age and gender reassignment and introduces an extended duty on public bodies to promote equality for all groups. We continue to lobby for

the new equality duty to be robust and enforced. Some commentators are suggesting that there is little to choose between Labour and the Tories. We in UNISON are clear that this bill would never have been achieved under a Tory administration."

The main provisions of the Equality Act come into force in October 2010. The integrated public sector equality duty, the socioeconomic duty and dual discrimination protection come into force in April 2011. Discrimination in goods and services on grounds of age is banned from 2012 and private and voluntary sector gender pay transparency regulations start in 2013.

Full details of the act are at: [equalities.gov.uk/equality\\_act\\_2010.aspx](http://equalities.gov.uk/equality_act_2010.aspx)

## The five-step approach to conducting an EIA

### Step 1 – Scoping the EIA

This involves building on the material included at the screening stage. An EIA should begin by considering the impact or likely impact on the policy in relation to all areas of equality.

### Step 2 – Involvement and consultation

Consider how to involve and consult other people (including internal and external audiences) and different equality target groups (such as age, disability, gender, race etc.) in developing the policy.

### Step 3 – Data collection and evidence

Include any evidence, data or information you have about the policy and how its potential implementation might affect equality.

### Step 4 – Assessment and analysis

Include any evidence on how the policy will affect different groups and communities in relation to equality and human rights.

### Step 5 – Procurement and partnerships

Consider: if the project will be carried out by external contractors and if you have included equality into the contract; how to build the requirement to consider the general equality duties and equality into all stages of the procurement process; and how to ensure that any partner you work with complies with equality and human rights legislation and how to monitor this.

For further information and to obtain an EIA template, visit the EHRC website at: [equalityhumanrights.com/our-job/our-equality-impact-assessments/](http://equalityhumanrights.com/our-job/our-equality-impact-assessments/)

The EHRC has produced guidance on Race equality impact assessment, to download a copy, visit: [equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/PSD/race\\_equality\\_impact\\_assessment\\_guidance.pdf](http://equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/PSD/race_equality_impact_assessment_guidance.pdf)

## Defending the ‘hidden’ workforce

Why UNISON should be speaking up for vulnerable workers in the private sector.

### “Many outsourced workers are vulnerable to exploitation and poverty pay because their employment is more precarious”

If we want UNISON to be strong, we have to make sure it is speaking for all public service workers. Everybody in the union is clear about the need to organise all public sector workers, but perhaps we aren’t as representative of public service workers employed by private companies as we should be.

The truth is we have been better at organising directly employed public sector workers than those who have been privatised. As more and more public service jobs are being outsourced to private companies this becomes a bigger and bigger challenge.

Many outsourced workers are vulnerable to exploitation and poverty pay because their employment is more precarious. Poor pay and exploitation make outsourcing a cheaper option; the exploitation of vulnerable workers becomes part of a downward spiral in which even more public service workers face having their jobs outsourced.

Part of the problem is that these workers, whom the Trades Union Congress (TUC) describes as

‘vulnerable workers’, lack access to representation and advice. The report of the TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment last year concluded that unions must ensure they represent the interests of these workers.

However, representing vulnerable outsourced workers poses a challenge. Many activists already feel that they have too much work just representing existing members. Obtaining facility time to represent outsourced workers can also prove a problem. And outsourced workers can be reluctant to get involved or speak up because they feel their job is at risk.

We need to overcome these barriers; if we believe in justice in the workplace, these are the workers who most need us. There are disproportionately higher numbers of Black workers, migrants and women in this hidden workforce. They need our support. And UNISON is never better than when it is fighting exploitation, injustice, poverty pay and discrimination.

Reaching out to these workers isn’t going to be easy. In a large and complex organisation like UNISON it is often difficult to change the way we do things. Fortunately there are a number of exciting new UNISON initiatives aiming to secure fair treatment for outsourced public service workers, including the 3 Companies project, which works on procurement and personalised contracts.

But all these initiatives depend on UNISON activists engaging with the outsourced workforce.

The Hidden Workforce project aims to encourage regions, branches and activists to engage with outsourced workers, using promotional materials, meetings and education. We believe the key to progress is to get regions, branches and activists to take a strategic approach, steadily building our organisation amongst outsourced workers. Through talent spotting, training, mentoring and networking the project will help regions and branches to empower outsourced workers.

We recognise that the union cannot simply rely on existing activists; we have to help them to develop new activists. It is important that Black members actively support the campaign; if we are going to tackle discrimination in the workplace we cannot ignore the problems faced by outsourced workers or the fact that they are often reluctant to speak up for fear of the consequences for their job security.

Sign up for up-to-date information on the project through the Hidden Workforce newsletter by e-mailing [hiddenworkforce@unison.co.uk](mailto:hiddenworkforce@unison.co.uk).



**thehiddenworkforce**

## All together now

The UNISON 3 Companies national project is testing out new union organising methods in the privatised sector. One of the national organisers, Robert Johnson, spoke to Black Action about how the project is helping members to help themselves.

The 3 Companies national project aims to organise workers, build up union density, set up organising committees and maintain a sustainable body of workers to demand fair pay and a decent working life.

Nigel Flanagan, UNISON's national organiser for 3 Companies, said the project is working on 17 separate contracts across the country and "we are determined to do these things: unionise, organise and win".

Currently three multinational companies – Compass, Aramark and Sodexo – are winning the majority of servicing contracts in hospitals and schools across the country. These global giants are making profits on the back of low-paid, mostly women workers such as kitchen staff, catering staff, cleaners and porters. Since Chartwells, part of Compass, took over the schools catering contract in Sheffield in 2006, the number of kitchen staff has dropped from 1,000 to 448, putting the service – and staff – under immense pressure.

UNISON is working in partnership with American trade union Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to build international strength and demand a fair deal for employees in the three companies. The 3 Companies project pilot trains organisers using the SEIU model of organising.

Robert Johnson, a UNISON member and shop steward at the Greater

London Authority, was known for being the "highest recruiter of UNISON members at City Hall." Working on 3 Companies, he has learnt how important it is to listen and give people a "chance to express themselves" so they can "organise and deal with the issues that are important to them".

Robert says: "Getting people to collectively organise themselves and talk about their issues and concerns gives them a voice, makes them take control. It gives them a choice to really make a difference in their workplace."

Workers have told him about the issues that affect them from no sick pay (so having to work in school kitchens and hospitals when they are sick), working overtime without reward and having different contracts and rates of pay for the same work. Initially it takes time, he says, to get workers to open up and "speak about the issues they have in a kitchen or hospital".

Sustainability is a crucial part of the project and it identifies potential leaders from the workforce to set up and run local organising committees and local campaigns and activities to build an active union. Robert's first organising event was very positive with 26 women turning up.

Many of the Sheffield kitchen workers work in small groups in schools and were surprised to learn that there were around 500 people like them, working in the same area. Getting organised



Robert Johnson, 3 Companies organiser

**"These global giants are making profits on the back of low-paid, mostly women workers"**

together will make a real positive change to their working lives.

Audrey Parkinson, a school worker, employed by Chartwells/Compass, from Sheffield summed it up when she said: "We didn't actually know anything about a union for us workers. But now I feel as though someone is listening".

And in Devon, after local organising and campaigning by hospital staff, Sodexo accepted all UNISON's demands. This was done in partnership with the region and the branch. Nigel Flanagan said: "It was a great example of combining national initiatives with knowledge on the ground. But our work is not finished there and the issue of sustaining density and union organisation is just as vital to organising work."

Find out more: Search Facebook for: UNISON 3 Companies Project  
Visit: [youtube.com/user/Companies3](http://youtube.com/user/Companies3)

## Trafficking: a trade union issue

Prostitution and the trafficking of women and girls undermines the fight for equality for all women, says Sharon Greene, UNISON's national women's officer.

Interpol 2010: "The trafficking of women for sexual exploitation is an international, organised, criminal phenomenon that has grave consequences for the safety, welfare and human rights of its victims. Trafficking in women is a criminal phenomenon that violates basic human rights, and totally destroys victims' lives."

While there are no realistic estimates of the number of people trafficked to work as domestic servants or in other forced labour, it is believed that around 4,000 trafficked women in the UK are forced to work as prostitutes. As many as 85% of those working in brothels were born outside the UK. Often these are women from developing countries and from vulnerable parts of society in developed countries. Lured away from their homes by promises of legitimate work, they are provided with false travel documents, while an organised network is used to transport them to their destination country, where they find themselves forced into sexual slavery.

For both groups of people, once they arrive in the UK their personal freedom is curtailed by the removal of their documents, debt-bonds which they cannot repay and threats

of violence against them and their families.

In 2008, the minister for women, Harriet Harman commissioned the Women not for sale report, which highlighted the scandal of local newspapers carrying classified advertisements for women 'escorts' specifying the nationality or ethnic origin of those women, often describing them as 'oriental'.

As a result of this and other campaigning work, the UK government has taken action. From 1 April 2010 it is "an offence to pay for sex with someone who has been forced, threatened, exploited or otherwise coerced or deceived into providing the sexual services by someone else who has engaged in such conduct for gain." It is no longer an excuse to say that you did not know that the woman was trafficked and you can end up with a £1,000 fine and a criminal record.

But there is still much more that needs to be done. UNISON's national women's conference 2010 identified both trafficking and the broader issue of prostitution as a priority for their campaigning work in 2010 and beyond. This includes submitting a motion to this year's national delegate conference calling on

UNISON to support Demand Change! – the campaign to criminalise the purchase of sex whilst at the same time decriminalising those who sell sex and offering support services to people in prostitution.

**"Whilst women remain for sale there will never be true gender equality in the UK"**

In Sweden, where this legislation has been in force since 1999, there has been a significant reduction in trafficking and prostitution with a halt in the recruitment of new women. Sweden is no longer an attractive destination for traffickers, and the number of men purchasing sexual services has fallen significantly. The law clearly works as a deterrent.

Whilst there are those who argue that the complete decriminalisation of prostitution – including the legalisation of brothels – would protect prostitutes, in fact it just creates a climate in which organised crime, money laundering, drugs and trafficking flourish, and countries that have tried this approach are now moving away from their apparently liberal policies.

UNISON members see the results of trafficking in their working lives – those who work in health care, social services and the police. And while women remain for sale there will never be true gender equality in the UK.

### Are you a Black LGBT member?

Why not come along to the Black LGBT network meeting on Saturday 11 September, in Birmingham. Get involved, network, find out what the Black LGBT caucus has been doing. Then join us at the national LGBT conference in Bristol, 19-21 November 2010. For further information email: [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk)



## Youth representation

### Reaching out to young Black members.

Black members who want to improve the representation of young people in their ranks are facing a major challenge, as statistics on young Black workers' participation highlight.

UNISON figures reveal that only three of around 200 branch Black members' officers are under the age of 27; there were only four young members out of more than 500 delegates to this year's Black members' conference and there are no young members on the national Black members' committee.

This cannot be attributed to young Black people being significantly under-represented amongst young members. On the best information available it seems that around 10% of members under the age of 27 identify themselves as members of an ethnic minority – not significantly different to the membership as a whole.

What's more, three out of the 21 members of the national young members' forum (NYMF) are Black, and the annual national young members' weekend consistently attracts a significant number of young Black people – this year nine young Black members attended.

So why are young members better at attracting Black activists? And what can be done to encourage more young members to get involved in Black self-organisation?

**“The young members' weekend is a key event, designed to 'springboard' members into UNISON activism”**

Young members positively encourage and publicise the involvement of young Black members, ensure that their voices are heard and that issues they are concerned about are part of the work that they do. For example, the most recent issue of the young members' magazine Next Generation includes an interview with a young Black activist describing how she became involved in UNISON and what it meant to her. The magazine always includes an interview with an active young member and ensures members from under-represented groups are featured.

But promoting positive images is only part of the work. For the past five years, the young members' weekend has been publicised, with regions specifically encouraged to send young members from under-represented groups. It has also been promoted at self-organised group conferences and through self-organised group publications and networks. Over the past five years there has been strong representation from Black members at the event, along with disabled and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members. The young members' weekend is a key event, designed to 'springboard' members into UNISON activism, and many young people are developing through this route.

In addition, through the campaign for decent apprenticeships, the NYMF has been clear that apprenticeships can be used to challenge job-role stereotyping; in UNISON's work campaigning against the far right,

young members' contribution has always ensured that the threat to people from under-represented groups has been underlined.

And finally there is word of mouth. Like other members, young people become activists because they are persuaded to do so by other activists who have led by example. We need to talk to our young people about trade unionism, about the dignity and significance of collective endeavour and why they should be involved.

The national Black members' committee is discussing these issues with the NYMF, but it is what we do as members in the workplace that will really make the difference.

## National Slavery Memorial Day

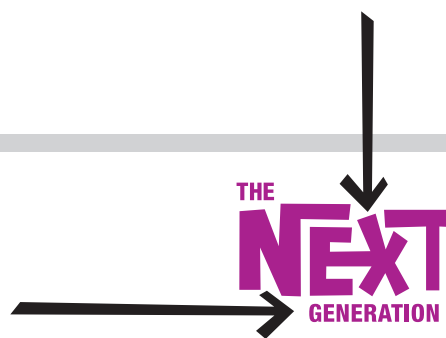
The UK will mark National Slavery Memorial Day on 23 August. This day has been set aside as a national day of remembrance for the abolition of the slave trade.

It gives us an opportunity to understand the reality and the truth of the slave trade and abolition movement, and reflect on its legacy of racism and inequality.

It also enables us to celebrate the courage of those who struggled for emancipation, reminding us that slavery became unsustainable through the actions of slaves themselves.

UNISON was one of the organisations that called for a national slavery memorial day. UNISON Black members' groups in our regions will be discussing how to commemorate this day.

For more information, visit: [antislavery.org/english](http://antislavery.org/english)



## Race discrimination at work

Wilf Sullivan, TUC race equality officer sets out why a collective approach to tackling race discrimination at work is needed.



Wilf Sullivan,  
TUC race equality officer

Over the past few months race equality has appeared back on the political agenda with politicians arguing that it is social economic status – class rather than race – that most affects people’s life chances. For trade unionists the fact that race and class are related is nothing new and counterposing them as if they were separate is misleading. If you cannot get access to a job, get promotion or are confined to low-paid jobs in the labour market because of the colour of your skin, your social economic status is bound to be low. This is why tackling institutional racism is so important and dealing with racism in the workplace so vital.

The Trades Union Congress recently published a new negotiators’ guide on tackling racism in the workplace, which provides reps and activists with practical advice on how to deal with racism on a collective basis. Negotiators’ guides in themselves, however, are not enough; trade unionists need to rediscover why a collective approach to dealing with racism in the workplace is necessary.

All too often racism is seen as an individual legal problem that should only be dealt with when a member makes a complaint. As a result, the issue of racism is taken out of the workplace and the debate about how to deal with race discrimination centred on whether unions should apply a 50%-plus success criterion when deciding whether or not to take cases to an employment tribunal. That is not to say there

is not a debate to be had and action to be taken to address the level and competence of individual representation when it comes to unions handling racism cases, however this cannot represent the ‘be all and end all’ of a trade union strategy for dealing with racism at work.

The employment tribunals’ annual report for 2008/09 showed that of 3,970 race discrimination cases submitted to the tribunal only 1,074 reach employment tribunal stage. Of these 694 were struck out, 236 were lost at hearing and only 129 were won. This amounts to a 3% success rate for race discrimination claims, which is the success rate for all discrimination claims on an annual basis. If our strategy for tackling race discrimination in the workplace rests solely on employment law, we are not only bound to fail as the figures indicate, but we are also showing a real lack of ambition – such a strategy only attempts to sort out problems after they have occurred, to obtain justice after injustice has taken place and obtain compensation for the hurt that has already been inflicted.

It is vital to rediscover the ambition that led Black workers to organise in trade unions – to stop race discrimination happening in the first place and to redress the historic imbalance and disadvantage that Black workers suffer in the labour market. This can only be done by developing an understanding that race discrimination in the workplace

**“All too often racism is seen as an individual legal problem that should only be dealt with when a member makes a complaint”**

is a collective issue for everybody, not just the individual that may have suffered. It is about involving all members in the fight for fairness at work and a just working environment. This can only happen if there is open and collective discussion in the workplace and in the union about the measures and actions that members need to take collectively to fight racism, so that pressure can be put on management to address the issues and make systemic and institutional changes. Only then can we say we are tackling racism in the workplace rather than dealing with its casualties. Solidarity is our strength, now more than ever is the time to use it.



## “A bit of an all-rounder”

Irene Mbwanda, a 25-year-old support worker at Northumberland Tyne and Wear health branch, talks to Black Action about promoting the union and attracting young activists.



Irene Mbwanda

### Tell us a little about your job.

I am a support worker for people with learning disabilities. My day-to-day work means caring for the people I work with and, for example, assisting with well-being and daily hygiene. It's a big responsibility. It can be quite demanding, but I also find it very rewarding.

### Why did you join UNISON?

Well at first I said no! The local UNISON steward came round regularly with a newsletter and other material, and even brought them to my home. I was studying at the time and I didn't really know anything about the union. But the steward was persistent and in the end I read the leaflets she brought round – that was about a year later, and I joined.

### Was there anything in particular that caught your interest?

Yes, it was the young members' group. That really made me sit up and helped me make my decision to join.

### What's your role in the branch?

I am the Black, migrant and young members' development worker. This means trying to build organisation amongst these groups of workers: recruiting them, holding meetings, producing newsletters, putting news on our website, developing new activists. It means being a bit of an all-rounder as an organiser.

### What do you enjoy about your organising work?

Well, it's a great way of meeting new people – I do get the chance to get away from my job to promote the union and attend induction sessions and other events. It's really important to me that the union isn't just a newsletter that comes round once a month. It has to be something that is about talking face-to-face and building relationships and friendships.

### How else are you involved?

I've been to Black members' conference, which was really interesting, and I'm looking forward to the national young members' weekend and to the union's national delegate conference. I know I will learn a lot about the union at these events and also get to meet some new faces.

### What would you like to see change in UNISON?

I want to see many more young people involved. It's a challenge to recruit them, but even more so to get them to be active. One way is to campaign around issues that are relevant to them. That's why I'm active in the work to combat the BNP and the extreme right. I think it'd be great to have more young members involved in that work.

# Black members' regional contacts

If you want to get in touch with your regional Black members' contacts, see below:

## Eastern region

### Tracey Lambert

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## National disabled members' committee

Ingrid Browne – Wallace, Peter Daley

## National lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender committee

Bev Miller, Julie Biggs

## National women's committee

Davena Rankin, Gloria Hanson

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## The campaigning and organising newsletter for Black members in UNISON

Black Action supports Black self-organisation in a number of ways:

- keeping Black members in touch
- providing news and information
- exchanging views and ideas.

For Black Action to be a successful tool in Black self-organisation, we need to make sure we are reaching our intended readers. This means keeping an up-to-date distribution list.

We need your help to do this. If you are a UNISON member and want to add your name to the national mailing list to receive email copies of Black Action and other information, please complete the online form on our website: [www.unison.org.uk/blackmembers/maillinglist.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/blackmembers/maillinglist.asp) or email: [blackmembers@unison.co.uk](mailto:blackmembers@unison.co.uk)

If you need hard copies or multiple copies, please contact your Regional Black Members' contact above.