

IDEAS TO CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black history is often overlooked as a valid subject for trade unions to consider and support.

A core theme of UNISON's Positively Public campaign has been equality of access to public services. UNISON believes there should be no discrimination in public service provision, and that there is equality of access for all members of the community based on need. UNISON is determined to learning the lessons of the Inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, and applying them across the public services.

Examples of issues of importance to Black workers are low pay, career progression, facility time; pensions; General Social Care Council registrations and health privatisation.

The ideas in this briefing give some examples of how your branch and region can get involved in Black History Month activities, and develop a greater understanding of these issues through the prism of our shared, multicultural society. Black members should be encouraged to come up with further ideas.

Some suggestions are ambitious and may not be deliverable this time round, but it is

best to mark Black History Month in whatever way you can and build on this for next year. Of course, you can use these ideas to celebrate trade union activity and Black members' contributions all year-round.

Black History Month activities can be organised to reflect the relevant parts of UNISON's objectives and priorities for 2006, particularly around 1) recruiting, organising and representation; 2) negotiations, bargaining and equality in pay and conditions, and 3) campaigning, including international work.

Organising and recruiting (Objective 1)

- Organise an open-house event at your branch. Invite Black members to come along and learn about the work of UNISON and how it benefits them. Provide refreshments and ensure the venue is accessible.
- Promote UNISON's Challenge X initiative throughout the month, focussing on Black members.
- Work with local employers and branch officers to facilitate a training programme over the month. Use promotional materials designed especially to meet the needs of Black members. Contact UNISON's Learning and Organising Services for practical ideas and guidance.
- Invite a local branch of Thompson's Solicitors (www.thompsons.law.co.uk) to run a surgery for Black members – include a public Q&A where court rulings and their consequences are discussed.
- Working with your local Black members' group hold a workplace stall

with information on how to get involved in UNISON, and the Black Members' Self Organised Groups. Remember to give details of who to approach in the branch.

- Encourage branch SOGs to organise events looking at the diverse experiences of Black people in the branch or workplace. Theme music, debate or group excursion initiatives around Black LGBT, Black women or Black disabled people and visit the Lesbian and Gay Coalition Against Racism (www.naar.org.uk/lagcar) or Regard (www.regard.dircon.co.uk) the disabled LGBT organisation, or the women's organisation, the Fawcett Society (www.fawcettsociety.org.uk).

Communication (Objective 2)

- Produce a calendar of Black History Month initiatives happening in your branch and local area. Make these available to members by displaying it on UNISON notice boards in the workplace and on the branch website and newsletter.
- Mount wall displays about aspects of Black History Month – reflect the African, Asian or Caribbean community that live locally, e.g. by engaging the children and families of fellow trade unionists or local community groups for contributions. You could use this display to showcase previous initiatives run with the Black community, e.g. attendance at carnivals, community events or forums the branch has run.
- Write a feature for the branch magazine about Black peoples' contributions to local trade union activity. Interview a Black hero in public life e.g. a local

nurse, teaching assistant or council worker, to give additional relevance to the piece.

- Run a poetry writing competition for members around the UNISON Black History Month theme of 'Changing Worlds, Changing Minds'.

Campaigning (Objective 3)

- Work with groups like the Student Assembly Against Racism (www.naar.org.uk/saar) to engage young people and run initiatives with local colleges and universities and youth groups.
- Contact local Unite Against Fascism (UAF) groups to organise anti-BNP community stalls and activities (www.uaf.org.uk).
- Join the campaign to shut down the hateful 'Redwatch' website which targets anti-fascists.
- Link with UNISON branches in your area to invite Love Music Hate Racism to run a music gig (www.lovemusicateracism.com). Or, put on a bhangra, hip-hop, jazz or world music night in a local community venue.
- Contact local schools to see if you can run a history/citizenship class or an assembly about the role of the trade unions in supporting migrant workers to the UK. Ask the National Assembly Against Racism (www.naar.org.uk) for facts and figures.
- Engage local football teams to organise a Kick Racism out of Football tournament. Be sure to invite the community and local workplaces to form teams as part of the initiative. Order materials from Kick It Out

(www.kickitout.org) or Show Racism the Red Card (www.srtrc.org)

- Set up panel debates about racism in the workplace, or the under-representation of Black people in society. Other big topics to debate include the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights or the 2007 Bicentenary of the Abolition of Slavery. Contact UNISON's Membership Participation Unit (email: blackmembers@unison.co.uk) or the 1990 Trust (www.blink.org.uk) for ideas about speakers.

International work (Objective 3)

- Promote MakePovertyHistory initiatives and organise a fundraising evening e.g. a raffle or auction where proceeds go to a particular initiative in a developing country. Contact UNISON's International team (email: i.relations@unison.co.uk) or the development charity, ActionAid (www.actionaid.org.uk) for advice.
- Run themed night to promote international justice. Invite speakers or show films from Cuba Solidarity Campaign (www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk) or Palestine Solidarity Campaign (www.palestinecampaign.org). Or show: *'The Revolution Will Not be Televised'* a film from the Venezuela Information Centre (www.vicuk.org) to illustrate progressive work being done by Black people in the Caribbean.
- Set up a working group to discuss ideas for how your branch will mark the 2007 Bicentenary of the Abolition of Slavery. For ideas visit Anti-Slavery UK (www.antislavery.org) or contact the Membership Participation Unit (email:

blackmembers@unison.co.uk) for its briefing.

- Run accessible film showings (www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/445627) from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Include documentaries like: *The Secret Policeman* (www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3210614.stm) and *Injustice* (www.injusticefilm.co.uk). Follow the film with a guest speaker or general discussion. Contact INQUEST (www.inquest.org.uk) for suggested speakers.
- Run an international food fair in a central venue. Engage workers of Black heritage to promote their national identities through food and textiles. Try asking workplace caterers to join in by preparing menus themed on the cuisines of Black countries from around the world

Other points you might consider are:

- 1 Have we consulted branch members? Can we use this opportunity to engage those Black members not already active?
- 2 Can we establish links with local community based projects that will be running events and join them?
- 3 Have we approached local public authorities and negotiated with them under the Race Relations Amendment Act to organise a joint initiative in the workplace?
- 4 Can we promote our initiatives to staff in the workplace and the community – have we sent a press release to the local media?

After October, be sure to review the initiatives you run and devise a strategy

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On-line briefing

about how you can integrate Black History Month into the branch work plan in 2007. Similarly, think about how you will develop this annual celebration into your plan to deliver on UNISON's four objectives and priorities.

To discuss ideas you would like to implement in your branch or to share the details of events in your region, or nationally, please contact your regional black members' contact (details can be found through your branch) or email Pav Akhtar, national race equality officer, at: blackmembers@unison.co.uk