

## Anti-Racism Taskforce: Listening Activity Roundtable

### Introduction

The TUC Anti-Racism Taskforce conducted this listening activity roundtable in May 2022. The aim of the roundtable was:

- to provide Taskforce members, general secretaries, and senior union figures to talk to Black workers and Black groups about the issue of racism at work.
- to explore representation in the workplace,
- to consider how unions can collectivise the experiences of individual race cases, to organise and bargain on.

The attendees heard from a range of unions as well as two external speakers from Bectu and UNISON East Midlands, each of whom spoke about the anti-racism work taking place in their respective unions.

### Item 1: Collective Bargaining

The presentation covered Bectu's experience of collective bargaining on race:

- For 20 years the Bectu Black members' committee have been running major initiatives involving hundreds of employers which are also collective bargaining, in that Bectu have acted collectively on behalf of ethnic minority members to persuade the employers to adopt a course of action, on race in the workplace. And although they've taken different forms each time, there is a common underlying approach.
- Underlying methodology: Everything done has been discussed, directed and approved by the union's Black members' committee, which has representatives from across the union.
- The first step is a discussion with ethnic minority members about what the main problems are that are faced by Black workers in a sector. It's crucial to understand in detail what Black workers themselves see as the key issues facing them. Not just the general term "racism" but how the racism is manifesting itself in practice and how specifically it is impacting on Black workers. The big question is what issues do Black workers want the trade union to prioritise in addressing? It could be under-representation, or racist

abuse, or failure to promote for example. The answer will be different in different workplaces or industries.

- Once this is answered, further research was done to gain the best understanding, then the logical response – what the union can do about it – starts to become apparent. Then a plan can be developed, and you get the support and cooperation of the relevant part of the union for it.
- And at the appropriate point, you approach the employers. In the film, broadcasting and theatre industries there are many people who want to do something about racism, they want to do the right thing and have the right processes. But often they aren't sure what to do and/or are afraid that if they do or say the wrong thing, they'll be accused of being racist. So, if a trade union comes along with a positive plan and reaches out in partnership, we've found employers responding very warmly to our offer.
- Main initiatives that have proved to be successful for Bectu: Move on Up (networking programme between Black professionals and employers), Zoom on Up (online networking events), Theatre Diversity Action Plan (simple step-by-step guide for employers to recruiting a more diverse workforce), and Commercials Diversity Action Plan (recruitment and retention, including a new discrimination complaints procedure for freelance workers).
- Bectu's experience has shown that successful and innovative collective bargaining on race:
  - has resulted in Black workers getting jobs and other opportunities.
  - increases Black workers' respect for and awareness of the union.
  - brings Black workers into union membership as the union can prove that it's delivering for them, and that gives the union the means to increase the number of Black activists and reps.
  - Working hand in hand with the Black members committee ensures that action is responding to what Black workers believe is needed.
  - can improve the relationship with employers
  - puts the union in a very positive light across the industry and gets people talking about the union in a different way.

## Feedback from breakout groups

### 1a. What do unions need to do secure industry agreements on race?

- **Acknowledge:** Need to acknowledge and accept that there is an issue.
- **Internal work:** Need to deal with racism within unions

- **Listen:** Listening to members is core; their views and experiences are what should be driving this work forward. Will struggle with credibility if members are not engaged.
- **Train allies:** Need to engage not just with Black workers but White Workers as well; need to train White observers to have the uncomfortable conversations as well; to enable allies in the workplace
- **Collect data:** Need data on the workforce of Black members and where they are in the workplace and USE the data.
- **Train negotiators:** Identifying key priorities and ensuring that negotiators are trained on race issues.
- **Set the agenda:** Black workers need to be consulted about the issues that the Union bargained on and help set the agenda. It was recognised that Employers were setting their own agenda but that unions did not have their own agendas
- **Prioritise:** Race must be at the forefront and embedded into all our collective bargaining work.
- **A place at the table:** Black workers should be involved in negotiations and negotiating committees
- **Accountability:** Strategies need to be developed to hold employers accountable.

### **1b. How do unions secure branches and sector committees in negotiating and implementing agreements?**

- **Collaborate:** Unions need to work better together, through the TUC, to achieve the gains needed. Many are doing great work, but this not always shared / collated. There should be engagement with the sector committees as well.
- **Create safe spaces:** the provision of safe spaces for Black members within local structures.
- **Embed:** Create mechanisms for incorporating anti-racism within and throughout wider democratic structures. Review and develop policies and procedures to ensure race is reflected throughout. Need to engage collectively as well as individually.
- **Lead:** Unions need to make decisions about who to target to encourage proactivity, activists/members, or employers.
- **Make links:** Race cases are not taken forward because we don't connect race disparity statistics in the way that we should do; could be something operating across workplaces, rather than unique to that case.

### 1c. How should unions engage with employers?

- **A win/win strategy:** Develop an agenda that seeks to help employers as well as the Union.
- **Set the agenda:** Employers' solutions are a deficit approach and stuck on identifying small groups of people to promote. Consider making it easier for employers to take this work on rather than a focus on attack. Need to educate the Government as well as the public on anti-racism.
- **Resources:** Unions should produce anti racism frameworks and action plans that incorporate the need for collective agreements.
- **Internal work:** Unions need to start modelling the behaviour they expect from employers to build the confidence of Black members in Unions.
- **Collect data:** Unions need to gather data; if we don't gather data, hard to secure industry agreements on race. Census data is due very soon; need to get employers to use and ask them how their workforce match against this.
- **Consult:** Take advice from advisory committees to inform actions for engaging with employers.

### Item 2: Individual cases

The speaker from UNISON East Midlands spoke about the Regional Black Members Committee initiative 'The Uncomfortable Conversation about Racism in the Workplace':

- The Uncomfortable Conversation Survey produced by the Regional Black Members Committee coincided with a survey of members about the Uncomfortable Conversation. The premise of this survey was to find out about members' experience of racism, and of challenging racism.
- Leaflets were sent out to inform members how to get help when they have experienced race discrimination or harassment or victimisation
- A PowerPoint guidance document was sent out to all 54 Branches about how to use the Race Discrimination Protocol to improve the way they support Black members experiencing race discrimination in their workplaces
- A dedicated email address was created to report incidents to the Region.
- A system was created for making sure these reports are dealt with by Regional Organisers and Branches.
- The RBMC are establishing what members experiences are in the workplace, approaching the Branch and gaining an effective assessment from Thompsons on the merits of their claim through the Race Protocol, at its earliest stages.

- The survey identified the need to encourage employers to better implement the Equality Impact Assessment Tool at all levels of policy making.
- That Branches should in line with the Regional Strategic Plan (agreed at Regional Council January 2020) encourage Branches to discuss the effectiveness of the Race Protocol on a quarterly basis.

### **Feedback from breakout groups**

#### **2a. What do reps need to learn in order to collectivise issues on race in their workplaces?**

- Education is the key here; organising forums for allies to have these discussions could be something to consider but could also have degree of risk.
- Need collective training package, produced by the unions, to bring allies on board e.g., collective understanding of language that should be used.
- Reps need to learn that race issues are vast and complex and seek to understand diverse experiences of racism.
- Reps needs to understand the law. Reps need to be comfortable and trained to deal with race cases.

#### **2b. Who is at the collective bargaining table and what needs to be done to get Black reps there?**

- Need mentors within branches and regions for those collective bargaining conversations.
- Reps need to have the evidence of racist incidents to use with employers.
- All reps should be trained and equipped to collective on race, not just the job of Black reps. But Black reps should be confident that their Union will support them and equip them with the tools to be part of the solution.
- Need greater transparency on how we collectivise on Race.
- Trade unions need to train reps to be proactive on issues of race with their employers and not see it as a legal issue which is sent off to lawyers.

#### **2c. What do you think could be improved or what opportunities are there that the trade unions can learn from to improve the experiences of supporting members on racism at work?**

- Need to encourage safe spaces
- Need prevention as much as after-the-fact
- Need bargaining on race a higher priority for Unions

- Unions need to encourage and support reps to run anti-racism campaigns in the workplace
- Unions need to take responsibility and not be leave action on race to Black worker

The key points from this listening activity will be highlighted in the TUC Taskforce General Council report to Congress. The TUC Anti Racism Manifesto will include a principle for all General Secretaries to sign up to about improving the confidence of Black workers in the union movement's ability to represent them in all matters relating to collective bargaining and tackling racism at work.