

# Organising Against Racism



*Usdaw*

*Union of Shop, Distributive  
and Allied Workers*

Executive Council Statement  
to the 2011 ADM

# Foreword



It is 15 years since the Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) last discussed an Executive Council Statement on racism.

In that time unions including Usdaw have made huge strides in tackling racism at work and in wider society. The Trade Union Movement has played a positive role in challenging racism and we can be proud of what we have achieved.

Time and time again we have shown that when we work together we can defeat prejudice and racism. Usdaw members have been active in their local communities campaigning against the racist British National Party (BNP). In places such as Oldham, Barking and Dagenham, Stoke Central, Dewsbury, Keighley and Epping Forest we have worked with others to keep racism out.

There are other signs that prejudice can and is being defeated.

A recent survey by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that over half the general public firmly believe that Britain will be a more tolerant society in 10 years' time.

Over 7 out of 10 people say they are comfortable for their children to choose a partner of a different race or faith.

Young people in particular are mixing socially with people from different ethnic groups on a regular basis.

But huge problems remain.

There are still parts of the country where the BNP increased its vote at the last General Election – Manchester and Leeds to name just two.

And Black people are twice as likely to be unemployed as white people.

Racist attacks are at their highest level for many years.

Black people are far more likely to be imprisoned, to live in sub-standard housing and to be victims of homicide than white people.

Given the scale of these challenges, the time is right to look again at our work on racism. This statement gives us the opportunity to do that.

Many of our Black members work in organised workplaces where overt racism is not tolerated. But we cannot assume racism has gone away – in many workplaces it has gone underground.

Racism from customers remains a huge issue for many of our Black members.

And when they leave work, our Black members have to deal with the reality of living in a society that does not treat them fairly and equally.

Rooting out racism is the responsibility of everyone in the Trade Union Movement. Racism and inequality damage us all.

Whether you are a member, a rep, an activist, Black or white I hope you will find this statement of help in your work to make our workplaces fairer and more equal.

It provides clear facts about the problems Black members in Usdaw face, what the Union is doing to support them and why.

Together we can continue the progress we have been making towards rooting out racism.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Hannett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**John Hannett**  
**General Secretary**

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# Section 1: Black Members in Usdaw – What Are the Issues?

Black members in Usdaw face the same problems as everyone else in the Union – trying to get hours of work that fit around the family, low pay, sickness absence policies and lack of respect from management.

But our Black members face additional problems because of racism and discrimination.

## Racist abuse and harassment from customers and colleagues

Our Black members are not alone in facing abuse at work. However, the abuse our Black members face is very often racist in nature. Our Black members tell us they feel vulnerable at work because the colour of their skin makes them an easy target.

Su Patel, an Usdaw member working in retail, has seen this at first hand:

*“Some customers still treat Black and Asian workers without any respect ... When they ask for payment the money is put on the counter and not in the cashier’s hand. When the cashier speaks and has an accent they are told to speak in English, or worse still if English is not their first language they are told they should go back home! For this to happen in the 21st century is a disgrace.*

*“Recently a Black cashier asked for ID for an age restricted item and was told ‘if you think I am not old enough then you should go back to school and learn some manners. Show me some respect as I don’t think people from your country know the meaning of respect.*

*“Some customers will wait in a long queue just to avoid being served by a Black cashier.”*

A recent Usdaw survey shows that the majority of our Black members have experienced racist abuse whilst at work.

Three-quarters of members who responded to our survey had been subjected to racist abuse at work and a third had faced racial harassment.

Abuse and harassment came from customers, colleagues and managers.

Ushaw Black members told us about colleagues leaving racist literature lying around, having their accents mimicked and being given nicknames such as Bin Laden or Taliban.

Our Black members tell us it can be hard to get colleagues to understand the impact this kind of behaviour can have on them.

## Time off work

Many of our members find it difficult to get time off work when they need it. Whether it is time off to look after a sick child, to take a relative to hospital, to spend with their families, or time at the weekend or in the evening, time off work is one of the big issues in most Usdaw workplaces.

It is no different for our Black members. But on top of all the everyday hassles about getting time off, there are real difficulties for many members when it comes to time off for religious holidays and to visit family overseas. These problems are not unique to our Black members but the majority of members who have problems getting time off in these situations are Black. And it is Black members who first asked the Union to take action on both these issues.

## Religious observance

We live in a country which is home to a wide range of different races, religions, beliefs and cultures. Some towns and cities have a high proportion of people from particular faiths. London, for example, has almost two-fifths of the UK's Muslim population. The West Midlands is home to nearly a third of the UK's Sikhs.

Employers are required by law to manage the needs of different faith groups in a way that is fair and reasonable.

Some religions and beliefs have special festivals or spiritual observance days and many of our members, particularly those who are Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, may need time off as a result. Members may also need time away from work to pray at specific times of the day. Some religions also have special dietary requirements which may include periods of fasting.

Getting time off for religious observance can be a difficult issue for many of our Black members.

In larger workplaces there may be large numbers of members wanting time off for festivals such as Eid and Ramadan. It can be genuinely difficult to manage this in a way that gives everyone what they want. However, our experience shows that where Usdaw gets involved, it is possible to agree an outcome that works for members and their employer.

This happened at Primark in Leeds. Several Muslim members asked for time off to celebrate Eid. Their request was refused as they had not given the required three weeks' notice of their intention to take leave. Because Eid is celebrated to coincide with the sighting of the moon at Mecca, staff could not give three weeks' notice as it is not possible to know this far in advance on which date the moon will appear. The company advised members who took the time off they would be in breach of their contracts and would be disciplined. Then Usdaw got involved. We spoke to management and advised them we did not see any legitimate business grounds for refusing the request. The members were advised they had the Union's full support. Management finally agreed they could take the time off. A new policy on time off for religious observance was put to the company for their consideration.



Bharti Dhamecha, an Usdaw rep at the store, saw what an impact the Union's handling of this case had:

***"It helped raise our profile because people could see that we were willing to stand up for members over an issue that to them was really really important."***

There are numerous examples of Usdaw reps getting involved in this issue to make a difference and win for members.

Loretta Traynor is a rep at the Littlewoods site in Shaw, Oldham where there are large numbers of Muslim members:

***"This was a really big issue for Muslim members at our site and many were having real problems getting time off at what is an incredibly important time for them. The Union got involved and now we have an agreement where between 15 and 20% of staff can have time off for Eid. This does not mean everyone but at least members can see there is a fair system and that really helps."***

However, in some workplaces requests are not handled fairly and members can feel they are being forced to choose between their job and their belief. There is also the problem of Black members being harassed because of assumptions about their religion. This is a growing problem for members who are or who are thought to be Muslim.



It is important to stress that the law requires employers to manage requests for religious observance in a reasonable and fair way. The law does not give any one group the absolute right to time off nor does it require employers to agree to all requests. There is an Appendix at the back of this statement which briefly sets out the rights faith groups have under the law when it comes to time off work for religious observance.

### *Extended leave*

Many Usdaw members have family overseas and may wish to visit relatives from time to time. This can be a significant issue for many Black members. A study by the Policy Studies Institute found that large numbers of Asian employees who had given up their jobs did so because this was the only way they could go and visit family overseas. Clearly no-one should have to make a choice between their job and their family.

Many Black members have problems when it comes to getting time off.

Udaw member Su Patel recently helped a member who asked for time off to visit family abroad. The member was asked to sign a letter stating that if they did not return within the said date then they would be deemed to have resigned:

***“This only ever applies to staff going to Africa, India and Asia and not to those going to Australia, USA or Europe. And members wanting four weeks’ holiday to go back home are kept waiting for confirmation of their holidays much longer than staff wishing to go to the USA.”***

Extended leave agreements exist in many of our sectors and give workers the right to take additional time off which can be used to visit relatives overseas. Workplaces where Black members are active in the Union are more likely to have extended leave agreements than those with no Black reps. Extended leave agreements benefit everyone, Black and white.

You can find out more about extended leave agreements in the Usdaw leaflet for Union reps, Leaflet no. 293 *Extended Leave*.

## **Finding and keeping a job**

Our Black members find it harder to get work in the first place and when they are there they have less chance for promotion or training.

Unemployment rates for Black workers are consistently higher than for white workers. Racism plays a key role in keeping Black people out of work. A recent survey by the Department for Work and Pensions clearly shows this. It sent out almost identical job applications to a range of employers, some with very white-sounding names and others suggesting the person was Black. Applicants with a Black-sounding name were twice as likely to get a ‘no’ response than those who sounded white.

Black members have to overcome racism even before they get a foothold in the labour market.

Nearly half of all young Black people are unemployed.

Unemployment is a major cause of poverty. Research by the TUC shows that Black families are at far greater risk of poverty than white families.

27% of white children live in poverty compared to 48.5% of Black British children and 63% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children.

Research by the TUC shows that Black workers are much more likely to have higher educational qualifications than white employees but far less likely to be employed in managerial posts.

The proportion of Black employees who work as managers is falling whereas the figure for white employees is on the rise.

Average earnings for Black workers are lower than for white workers and if you are Black your chances of working in a low-paying industry are much greater than if you are white.

## Racist attacks

Thankfully, very few of our Black members are at risk of being physically attacked at work because of the colour of their skin. Most of our members work in organised workplaces where they are safe from racial violence.

But when they leave work our Black members rejoin a world where racist attacks and violence can and do happen. This is not to say that our Black members are at risk every time they leave work – far from it. But there are two issues here.

First, fear of violent crime is much higher amongst Black people than amongst white. Many of our Black members may not feel safe away from work.

Second, Black people are at far greater risk of being attacked because of the colour of their skin.

A recent report by the Institute of Race Relations looked at deaths from racial attacks since the murder of the Black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993. A racial attack is defined as one where someone of a different skin colour or ethnic group would not have been attacked in the same way.

Their study found the following:

- Since 1993, 89 people have lost their lives to racial violence.
- Of these deaths, 82 came from Black communities, four were white British and three were Eastern European.
- The vast majority of people carrying out the attacks, in 83 cases out of the 89, were white British people.
- Almost half the victims were young people and their attackers were often young white men under the influence of drink.
- Asian people are at the greatest risk of being attacked.
- Cases which involved petty harassment such as vandalism, racist graffiti, spitting and spoken insults are not included in the report but represent a significant problem for many Black people.
- There is evidence to suggest that racist violence is high in areas where the BNP and other far right groups are active. In Barking and Dagenham, where the BNP had 12 councillors, racist attacks went up by 30% in the area.



# Section 2: What Do We Call People?

This Executive Council Statement uses the term Black to describe anyone who is subjected to racism and discrimination on the basis of the colour of their skin. This term therefore includes Asian people, Afro-Caribbean and African people, Chinese people and a wide range of others who themselves or their ancestors originated in countries outside Europe.

There has over the years been a lot of discussion in British society and in trade unions about the best way to refer to Black people. Some people have said that using the term Black means we are ignoring the differences that exist between people of diverse cultures, origins and beliefs.

Usdaw uses the term Black because we need to find an acceptable way of describing people who have a common experience of racism. Racism does not distinguish between different shades of blackness. It is racism that we need to tackle and if we start looking for complex ways to describe people at the sharp end of racism, we might lose sight of what it is we are trying to do.

A recent study by the London Metropolitan University and the TUC puts it like this:

*“We recognise that the term Black is not an accurate description ... [just] like the term white ... The term Black though is used in much the same way as the term worker – not everyone who works for a wage likes to think of themselves as a worker – they might prefer to be called by their job title or by terms like supervisory staff or technical worker. But to get a sense of collective solidarity [which is] the basis for trade unionism, we need to recognise what brings us together.”*

What brings Black people together is their shared experience of racism. For the same reason this statement does not address issues of religion or religious differences. If we are going to tackle racism effectively, we need to focus on what brings people together and not what pushes them apart. After all, the people who carry out racist attacks do not stop to check whether someone really is a Muslim or whether they are in fact Hindu, Sikh or Christian. Racists do not make fine distinctions between different groups. For them, all such groups are equally undesirable on the grounds of their skin colour.

History teaches us that we need to be united if we are going to defeat racism. Again to quote the same report:

*“We believe that which unites is greater than that which divides.”*







# Section 3: Usdaw Action

Usdaw takes positive action to reach out to members who are under-involved in the Union.

Here's what we mean by positive action followed by some practical real life examples of positive action – in action.

All trade unions need to take positive steps to encourage workers to join up and become members. On the whole, workers do not come to the Union to sign up – the Union has to go to them. Ask any Usdaw rep – recruiting members and organising the workplace does not happen by itself.

Usdaw is growing because our reps are making it happen – attending inductions, using workplace notice boards to raise the profile of the Union and organising campaigns to promote Usdaw. There is no doubt that without the 'go get' attitude of our activists, Usdaw would not be in the position it currently is.

Getting Black workers involved in the Union is no different. Usdaw needs to take positive steps to recruit Black workers in the first place, and once in membership there is a further job of work to be done to keep them in the Union and encourage their involvement.

To make sure the Union is taking up the right issues we need ways of bringing members together to hear about what matters to them.

Whilst all Usdaw members share similar concerns such as pay, working hours and safe working environments, different groups of members inevitably have distinct concerns. So, for example:

- Driving hours is a concern for members in road transport.
- Under-age sales is a concern for members in retail.
- Youth pay rates are a concern for young members.
- Pick rates are a concern for members in warehouses, distribution and dot com stores.

Just as the Union takes action to address these particular issues and organises conferences for each of these groups of members, it does the same for its Black members.

Taking positive action to sharpen our appeal and generate activity amongst Black members is sometimes misunderstood as 'special' treatment. It isn't. It is about taking steps to remove the barriers we know get in the way of Black workers joining and getting active in the Union.



## Positive action in practice

Usdaw's work to encourage the involvement of Black members has always focused on practical and achievable goals. It has been successful because it delivers real results not just for Black members but for all Usdaw members.

Racism in the workplace not only damages the livelihoods, health, well-being, self esteem and confidence of our Black members and their families, it makes the workplace a difficult place to be for all Usdaw members. Racism creates hostile and intimidating workplaces where people do not feel able to speak out about unfair treatment or be themselves at work.

As Sandra Nelson, a Black Usdaw activist, puts it:

*"Life is hard enough without bringing extra things into it."*

It also undermines the strength of the Union by dividing the workforce, pitting one group of members against another.

All of the following positive steps have resulted in more Black members getting involved and active in the Union and have come about because Black activists made them happen.

## Usdaw's equalities structures

At Usdaw's ADM (sometimes called the Union's Parliament) in 2005 delegates overwhelmingly carried an Executive Council Statement to set up new equalities structures in the Union. Every division now has a divisional forum with reserved seats for Black members. This means that the Union now brings Black activists together at a divisional level as well as nationally, helping to generate activity and strengthen networks amongst Black members. Some of the things the forums have done are:

- Organised weekend schools on tackling racism.
- Raised Usdaw's profile at anti-racist festivals and community events.
- Visited workplaces with large numbers of Black workers.

## Racism is no joke

This is as relevant today as it has ever been. Racism and so-called racist 'jokes' remain the number one concern in the workplace for Black and Asian activists. In response to this the Union has produced a DVD featuring Usdaw's Black and Asian activists talking about their experiences of racism.

The DVD gives a voice to our Black and Asian members and challenges the views of those who believe that racism is a now a thing of the past. It is widely used by reps and officers and regularly shown at federation and other weekend schools as well as on training courses.

There is also a poster to accompany the DVD designed by local college students. Usdaw members voted for their favourite and thousands of the posters are now on display in workplaces, Union offices and public buildings. Reps repeatedly tell the Union that the poster sends out a strong message to everyone in the workplace that abuse and racist banter are not acceptable and will not be tolerated in Usdaw organised workplaces.



## Tackling the BNP

Literature exposing the racism of the BNP has been developed and hundreds of Usdaw members have helped to deliver it to thousands of households in local, national and European elections. Workshops have also been organised to equip reps with the information they need to successfully challenge racism and BNP propaganda. Usdaw has a strong track record of working with local communities at election time to counter the BNP.

## Leaflets

Udaw has published a series of leaflets for reps and members on a wide range of race equality issues from tackling racial harassment and negotiating time off for religious festivals to extended leave. The leaflets give reps the information they need to better support Black members at work.

## Campaign stands at anti-racist community festivals

For many years, Usdaw activists have teamed up with local Black communities to give the Union a real presence at anti-racist events such as the Notting Hill Carnival, the Rise Festival in London and regional Mela festivals. Usdaw is also affiliated to several leading anti-racist campaigns such as Searchlight and the National Assembly Against Racism.

## Supporting Usdaw members facing deportation

Thanks to the support of their Union, a number of Usdaw activists facing deportation have won the right to remain in the UK.

## Supporting the struggles of Black people overseas

Udaw was very active in the anti-apartheid movement including seconding a member of staff to work in South Africa's first ever free elections. We maintain strong links with campaigns working to win a better deal for farmers in the developed world and have helped ordinary Usdaw members to travel as far afield as Costa Rica, the Windward Isles and Ecuador to support fair-trade farmers.

## Local get-togethers for Black members

The Union regularly holds local get-togethers for Black members to encourage them to get more involved in the Union. Get-togethers have also been organised in divisions for all reps on issues like tackling racism and combating the BNP.





## Usdaw's Organising Academy

The Union has written out to Black members and run a workshop to boost interest in the Union's Organising Academy.

## Delegations to conference

Every year, the Union sends a full delegation of Black activists to the annual TUC Black Workers' Conference, making sure the issues that matter to Black members in Usdaw are debated there.





# Section 4: Organising Black Workers

Black workers are under-involved in the Union. This is not just an Usdaw problem. Right across the Trade Union Movement, Black workers are less active and less visible than they should be.

We know this because around 8.5% of our members are Black. It would therefore be reasonable to expect that around 8.5% of activists and lay member roles would be filled by Black members. Yet this is far from the case as the following statistics show:

- The proportion of Black delegates to ADM is lower than it should be. For the last three years, on average 2.9% of delegates have been Black. This figure should be three times as high if Black members were represented at the ADM in line with their overall numbers in the Union.
- Last year less than 3% of members attending branch officers courses were Black.
- For the last 10 years, on average 4% of members attending Second Series Summer School have been Black.

Figures like this are the best guide we currently have to the degree of involvement our Black members have in the Union.



This is not to say the Union is not making progress, as Section 5 'Getting Involved' makes clear. However, it is important to recognise that developing activists is not something that happens overnight.

So does it matter that Black members are under-involved in the Union? After all, surely all that matters is that we have members willing to be reps, stand down reps, branch officers and committee members. Why does it matter what colour their skin is?

Usdaw believes it is absolutely vital that Black workers are involved and active in the Union. We cannot afford to have any section of our membership under-involved as this only weakens the Union. If we have clear evidence that one group of members is under-involved, surely this is something that is in all of our interests to address. The more members we have active and involved, the stronger, more visible and more effective we are in the workplace.

One of the most important measures we can take is to ensure we have Black members active and visible. This sends a clear signal to other Black workers that Usdaw is somewhere they belong.

Black activist Tom Offeh has recently completed Academy 2 and saw for himself how well Black workers responded to a Black activist taking time to reach out to them:

*“Some of the stores I went into they had never seen a Black person from the Union – they had only ever seen the white man in a suit. They could relate to me and were very open, talking about the problems they have at work. They were not scared of saying things as they knew I would be able to understand. I could relate to what they said because of personal experience. I think my being there sent out a clear message – you are not alone.”*

If we fail to get Black members involved in the Union, we are letting them down and every other member who wants to see a strong, active and dynamic Usdaw.

Black members will see little reason to join or get active in the Union if they feel it is a ‘white man’s club’. It is the same for any section of our membership – every member wants to see people like themselves involved in the Union. All our members want to know the Union understands the issues that matter to them. One of the ways we do this is by making sure members from right across the Union are visible and involved and that they have a voice.

We cannot afford to not reach out to Black workers – there are growing numbers of Black workers in the labour market and if we have nothing to offer them they will go elsewhere.

We know from talking to our Black members that there are two main reasons for this under-involvement: feeling invisible and racism.



## Feeling invisible

Black members tell us that they may never have met a Black rep or activist. Going to a Union event for the first time can be daunting. If there are no other Black members there, this can lead to feeling isolated and invisible.

Black member Sandrene Harrison has personal experience of feeling invisible at work, in the Union and in her community:

*“I live in an area where there are hardly any Black people and at work I think there are maybe three Black people out of a total staff of maybe 350 so you can feel isolated. You have to get used to being the odd one out, to being different, to being stared at. I think some Black members can feel they are losing their identity.”*



Black activist Debbie Newman explains that it can sometimes be difficult to get the issues that matter to Black members taken seriously. Even within the Union Black members can sometimes feel invisible or feel that the issues that matter to them are not being addressed:

*“It isn’t that I’ve met with open hostility. It’s just that it can be difficult to get the issue of tackling racism on the agenda. Whenever I visit a workplace with large numbers of Black members I always take the Racism is No Joke posters with me. Often where the reps have no direct experience of racism themselves they’ll hand the poster back to me saying that there is no problem with racism in their workplace. I then ask them how they know that, have you ever asked? It helps them to see they need to start asking questions, scratch below the surface to check that their instinct that racism isn’t an issue is in fact true.”*

Janet Ryan is a Black Usdaw member who has been on Academy 1 and 2. During her time on the academy Janet visited a workplace with large numbers of Black staff:

*“At the time of our visit there were very few people in the Union. I think a lot of staff did not realise that the Union took up issues like racism and equality. We managed to recruit a few people on the day but we also put lots of leaflets on the notice board about racism and bullying and we used the Usdaw Racism is No Joke posters. We hoped that the notice board would make an impact after we left. I believe that it helped raise the Union’s profile in the store. Membership has gone up and we now have a Black member who wants to become a rep.”*

## Racism

Black members who have faced racism either at work or in their community may be reluctant to put themselves forwards. The fear of being a target or of standing out can stop some Black members getting involved. Many Black members in workplaces where they are in the minority say it can be difficult to get accepted as a rep. They feel they have to work twice as hard to convince members they are up to the role.

Albert Williams, an Usdaw member working as a Security Guard, says racism can make Black members reluctant to get involved:

*“Black members might sometimes not want to get involved with the Union because they may lack motivation and self esteem. Racism over decades has put across the view that if you are Black you are inferior, less educated and somehow of less worth. Persons like Barack Hussein Obama, the President of the United States of America, is an excellent role model and a beacon of hope for Black people everywhere.”*

Black members may be reluctant to stick their heads above the parapet as they believe this will single them out for abuse and harassment. Okey Anokwu, a black Usdaw member who recently completed Academy 1 found this to be the case:

*“I have noticed in many workplaces, my place of work and during my time in the academy that it is often the Black members who feel most cheated, marginalised and treated badly at work. They don’t feel protected enough at their place of work and also they feel they are being targeted by their employers for speaking their minds. At times they are scared to speak up and this can mean they don’t want to get involved.”*

Usdaw wants to encourage more Black members to get active and involved in the Union. If we get this right, we make the Union stronger and more representative of its members.

As Okey Anokwu says:

*“The more Black members we have the more we grow in strength and confidence to battle the discrimination we face.”*





# Section 5: Getting Involved

The Union is not interested in paying lip service to the issues that matter to our members. We measure success by whether the action we take helps to:

- Make a difference to members' lives.
- Strengthen and grow the Union.
- Give members a reason to become active.
- Develop Union activists.

This Executive Council Statement has already outlined the positive action the Union takes to make sure that we appeal to Black workers. Usdaw is right to be proud of its achievements and we have made some brilliant progress in many areas.

For example:

- Whilst the number of Black delegates to the ADM is still too low, progress has been made. More than twice as many Black delegates attended ADM in 2010 than in 2000.
- For the last two years the number of Black members attending the Union's residential summer school has reflected the number of Black members in the Union. In 2008, the numbers of Black members attending summer school trebled rising to an all time high of 11.8%.
- The numbers of Black applicants to the Union's Organising Academy is as high as it has ever been. In 2010, 15% of applicants to Academy 1 and 14% of applicants to Academy 2 were Black.

## Making the Union stronger

Another area where we have seen real success is the Union's joint work with Tesco around the rep elections. We have been working to try and encourage more Black members to get active in

the joint consultative structures under the partnership agreement. We have not stopped trying to get white members involved – we just realise that if we want to get Black members active as well, we need to make a particular effort to reach out to them in a way that engages with their issues.

We have gaps in our rep networks in Tesco just like in all our agreements, and we know that there are stores with large numbers of Black staff but no or very few Black reps. This tells us we have a problem – why are Black staff joining but not getting active?

So as part of the project we brought together Black and Asian members in Tesco to find out more about the barriers to getting involved. And we asked the question 'what's stopping more Black members getting more active and what can we do about that?'

This work is ongoing and we hope that it will lead to more diverse rep teams and fewer gaps in our rep structures. If there are members out there who want to become active but need a little bit more support to take their first steps, it is in everyone's interests that they get the support they need.

## Black Members' Weekend Workshop

Each year the Union holds a national conference for Black members called Black Members' Weekend Workshop. This event is open to anyone who might experience unfair treatment or discrimination because of their colour of skin.

This conference has a strong track record of encouraging activity amongst Black members.

The majority of members that attend Black Members' Weekend Workshop have often never been to a Union event before. The weekend builds the confidence of Black members. Many go back into their workplaces determined to become more



active in the Union whether that is attending divisional conferences, taking up the role of Shop Steward or applying for the Organising Academy.

Maureen Williams, Usdaw's rep on the TUC Race Relations Committee, explains that it was at Black Members' Weekend Workshop she first started her journey from member to activist:

*"My first Black Members' Weekend Workshop was nine years ago. I was very apprehensive and unsure. I didn't know what to expect as I wasn't really involved in the Union back then. I hadn't realised the Union held a conference for Black members and it was the first time I'd been anywhere where I wasn't in the minority. I left feeling positive and confident. I'd made a lot of friends who I am still in touch with now. I never dreamt then that I would be back nine years later chairing the weekend! I've never looked back. I am now proud to represent Usdaw on the TUC Race Relations Committee, to sit on the National Equalities Advisory Group and to be elected as an Usdaw divisional councillor."*

Debbie Newman explains why she believes Black Members' Weekend Workshop is an important date in the Union's calendar:

*"It's been an incredible journey since my first Black Members' Weekend Workshop which was only last year. Last year I came away feeling really enthusiastic and wanting to get more involved and that's exactly what I did. I applied for the Union's Organising Academy and was delighted to get a place. It's been the most fantastic experience. It's up to us as reps to go back into our workplaces and spread the word that the Union is there for everyone and let our colleagues know about the many opportunities available to them."*

The Union is often asked why white members cannot attend the event to learn more about the issues affecting Black members.

This is because experience shows that if we give Black members space within the Union to get together to share their concerns this helps to build members' confidence, which means they are far more likely to get active and involved in the Union when they go back to their divisions.



The Union regularly brings together different sections of our membership. For example, we have a youth weekend, the Retail Trades Conference and the Warehouse and Distribution Conference to name but a few. Black Members' Weekend Workshop is not any different. It is about recognising that not all of our members are the same. Different groups of members have different issues and it is only right that we should give them the space to come together to discuss them.

Black Members' Weekend Workshop is unique in that it is perhaps the only event in the Union's calendar where Black members are in a majority.

What goes on at the weekend is no secret. The debates and discussions are widely reported. An account of the weekend goes to the Executive Council in December of every year and a double page spread is given over to the conference in the November/December edition of *Network*.

There are also plenty of other opportunities throughout the year to find out more about the problems Black members are facing.

Black and white members regularly get together at Union events such as divisional conferences, the ADM and branch meetings. Members can find out more by getting hold of a copy of the *Racism is No Joke* DVD or going along to an equalities event in your division. For example, divisional equalities forums run workshops on tackling racism and divisional conferences will often have a speaker from the forum reporting back on the work they have done.

# Section 6: Looking Ahead

Usdaw's work to reach out to and involve Black members does not stop here but is always developing and this Executive Council Statement is part of that development.

As always Usdaw reps are absolutely crucial when it comes to making any strategy to reach out to Black members a success. It is activity in workplaces and not in Union offices that will ultimately make the biggest difference.

Below are some examples of the activities Usdaw reps are organising to make sure the Union is seen as relevant and welcoming by Black members:

- Directly approaching Black workers in workplaces and inviting them to join the Union.
- Giving a high profile in workplaces to Union literature that emphasises the positive role that Black reps are playing in the Union.
- Publicising Usdaw initiatives like local get-togethers, Black Members' Weekend Workshop and TUC Black Workers' Conference and encouraging Black members to put their names forward.
- Displaying Usdaw's *Racism is No Joke* poster in workplaces.
- Working with divisions to raise awareness of practical measures reps can take to help ensure workplaces remain free from racism and discrimination.
- Putting the issue of tackling racism and supporting Black members onto the Union's agenda, eg by suggesting it as an appropriate topic for federation schools or submitting propositions to the ADM.
- Visiting workplaces with large numbers of Black workers to encourage workers to join and members to become more active.

Another key action for Usdaw reps is to be alert to any signs that there might be an issue of racism or discrimination in their workplace. We know that racism and discrimination can sometimes be

expressed in ways that are not always obvious. The following checklist might help reps decide whether or not there might be a problem in their workplace.

Some of the following things to look out for are more immediately obvious than others:

- Black workers are clustered in lower grades.
- Black workers are disproportionately likely to be involved in disciplinary or grievance procedures.
- Black workers are clustered in certain jobs with less chance of promotion or training.
- There is a higher turnover of Black workers.
- Certain jobs are not advertised as assumptions are made about what skills and aspirations Black workers have.
- A culture of racist banter exists or racist graffiti appears in private workspaces like staff rest areas or toilets.
- Black workers are performing badly in staff appraisals compared to their white colleagues.
- Black workers are isolated at break times or less likely to participate in team or social events.

Looking forward, the Union will continue to learn from experience about what works best in terms of generating activity amongst Black members and will build on past success.

In the future Usdaw will continue to:

- Explore ways to raise awareness of racism and the experiences of Usdaw's Black members by regularly reviewing and updating the Union's publications and resources including the *Racism is No Joke* DVD.
- Work with national and local officers as appropriate to tackle the under-representation of Black members in the Union's Shop Steward structures.
- Use positive action measures such as get-togethers and targeted campaigns to help us reach out to Black members.
- Work with the Education Department to ensure reps have the necessary resources to confidently tackle racism and support Black members at work.
- Hold an annual Black Members' Weekend Workshop.
- Ensure Black role models are visible in the Union's publications, campaigns, organising and recruitment work.

# Appendix: Religion or Belief in the Workplace

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate against someone because of their religion or belief. These rights used to be contained in the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 but the Equality Act has now replaced the regulations. All the rights that existed under the regulations stay exactly the same.

The regulations cover not just believers of organised religions, but anyone who holds any religious or 'philosophical belief' such as paganism or humanism. The regulations also protect non-believers and someone who is perceived to hold certain beliefs when in fact they do not.

Religious hate crimes are a criminal matter and are dealt with by the police.

The regulations outlaw:

- Direct discrimination – which means treating people less favourably than others on the grounds of religion or belief (or instructing someone else to behave in this way). An example of this would be where an employer decides not to offer someone a job because they are a Hindu.
- Indirect discrimination – which means applying a provision, criterion or practice (whether intentionally or not) which disadvantages people of a particular religion or belief, unless it can be justified. An example of this would be a manager who does not like delivery drivers wearing baseball caps so introduces a no headwear policy. Although this policy applies to all employees it disadvantages Sikh staff who wear turbans for religious reasons. This would be indirect discrimination.

- Harassment – which is defined as subjecting someone to unwanted conduct that violates their dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. The harassment does not have to be intentional. An example of this would be an employee whose colleagues continually tease and abuse him, calling him a terrorist because they think he is a Muslim.
- Victimisation – which means treating someone less favourably because they made or intend to make an allegation about discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, or because they have given or intend to give evidence under the regulations. It does not matter if the allegations turn out not to be true, providing the person made them in good faith.

The three most common religious observance issues that arise in Usdaw workplaces are prayer rooms, dress codes and time off for religious observance.

## Prayer rooms

The law does not require employers to provide a prayer room. However, if an employee requests access to a quiet place to meet their religious obligations and such a place is available without this having a negative impact on the business or other staff, employers may be acting in a discriminatory way if they refuse.

It is good practice for employers to consider providing a suitable place for prayer.

## Dress codes

Imposing the same rule on everyone may indirectly discriminate against workers with a particular religion. Some religions require their followers to dress in a particular way or to wear particular items of jewellery or clothing. If an employer cannot accommodate this they would need to show that their refusal to do so could be objectively justified (in other words that the refusal is for a genuine health and safety or business reason).

## Time off for religious observance

Managers should try to be flexible about when rest breaks and annual leave are taken. Acas suggests that time taken for prayer is rarely longer than that of a tea break. Staff need to understand that they have a responsibility to be reasonable to both their employer and their colleagues when asking for time off. Employers may be able to refuse a request for time off where it conflicts with legitimate business needs but if they are unable to justify the refusal this may be discrimination.

There are a number of ways in which requests can be handled as the following extract from an Usdaw model policy on time off for religious observance shows:

**Rescheduling of rest breaks to coincide with the need to pray at certain times of the day.**

**Use holiday leave.**

**Rearrange the working week so that the individual can be off work at the time they need.**

**Swap shifts with a colleague.**

**Unpaid leave if none of the above options are available.**

All requests will be considered on a first come first served basis. Where an employee's leave is denied they will receive priority on the next occasion subject to operational requirements. Where too many staff request the same time off the company will work with the Union to find a fair and consistent solution. This may include asking colleagues to change shifts, split shifts or divide the time so that more people can be accommodated.

Copies of the full policy can be obtained from the Equalities Section at Central Office.





# Improving workers' lives – Winning for members

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