

# UNISON SOUTH EAST REGIONAL BLACK MEMBERS COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER 2024



## A Tribute to Skip Bawa

It is with a heavy heart, that I write this piece to pay homage to our dear brother and cherished member of our UNISON South East Black Members family, who sadly passed away on 21st February 2024, and whose determined spirit and unwavering commitment towards anti-racism will leave an unforgettable mark on us all.

Skip Bawa, worked for Hampshire County Council as a social worker for over 46 years where he first became involved with the trade union movement, regrettably after experiencing racial discrimination in the workplace. When I first met Skip in 2016, I recall him explaining how that incident influenced his decision to become an anti-racist campaigner and how he would tirelessly advocate for the rights and dignity of every Black worker in the public sector.

He was a valued member of the Southeast Regional Black Members Committee (SERBMC) and in 2022 he was elected to share the co-chairing responsibilities of SERBMC alongside his close friend and confidant, Rosita Ellis. This gave Skip a great sense of pride to be able to serve the committee and share his knowledge and expertise. His dedication to our cause was not merely a profession, but a calling, a beacon of inspiration for us all to follow.

From the first moment I met Skip it was obvious straight away that he was a person with tremendous integrity and always thirsty to learn and share knowledge. He was a great friend, and a mentor, and his kindness knew no bounds, his wisdom was truly a source of solace in times of uncertainty, which I know was felt by all who had the pleasure to work alongside him or whom he supported.

As we mourn Skip's passing, let us also celebrate the life he lived, the impact he made, and the legacy he will leave behind. Though he may no longer walk among us, I truly believe his spirit will forever guide us as we continue the fight for a fairer, and more just world.

Rest in power, dear friend. Your memory will forever be enshrined in the heart of our union and all the brothers and sisters that you saved.

BY BILL ACHARJEE

**Welcome New Committee**  
The Committee was ratified at the SERBMC AGM on 16 January 2024:

**CO-CHAIRS:**  
Sandra Charles  
Jed Murray

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**  
Abdul Rahman  
Bernard Marengereke  
Bill Acharjee  
Fatima Kamara  
Hasina Hamid  
Kathy-Ann Mark-Evans  
Shirley Owens  
Susan Cooper-Olawale  
Tunde Majekodunmi

**Interested in joining the committee?**  
Contact Mumta Erkadoo at [m.erkadoo@unison.co.uk](mailto:m.erkadoo@unison.co.uk)



# MEET THE CO-CHAIRS



**SANDRA CHARLES**

Portsmouth City Branch

Greetings SE Region Black Members, my name is Sandra Charles from Portsmouth City Branch and I would like to extend my thanks to all who voted both myself and Jed Murray for co-chairs. Jed and I have known each other for many years, so I am looking forward to working alongside him so we can share, and develop our expertise and skills.

At a branch level, I hold the positions of Steward and Black Members Officer. I was previously Vice Branch Chair but I have recently stepped down so I am able to adjust to my change in employment. I also served on both the National Black Members and National Women's Committees, which have helped to expand my network circle and make solid friendships.

I would like to thank all members who voted for Sandra Charles and I for Co-Chairs to the South East Regional Black Members Committee. I also owe a debt of gratitude to all of the branches and members for nominating and voting for me to become the South East Regional Convenor at the Regional Council AGM in February 2024.

In 2023, the Year of Black Workers, I became the first Black Branch Secretary in East Sussex Area Branch and I have been focused on developing our newly initiated branch Black Members self-organised group. Following the successful inaugural meeting in November 2023, we had our second meeting in February this year, where I presented the Anti-Racism Charter. The Charter outlines the difference between being an employer who adopts a non-racist, passive approach i.e. not taking action when racism occurs and being proactively Anti-racist to make sure that you have zero tolerance for racism. As an employer you must actively encourage and engage staff in the process of negotiating and developing anti-racist training, policies, procedures and fair pay. This helps to embed an anti-racist philosophy and culture within the fabric of any organisation.

I am very pleased to announce that two of the group's new members Sybil Msezane and Lourdes Madigasekera, are standing for election to the Regional Black Members Committee. If successful, we will have four members from East Sussex Area Branch who are active on the RBMC. Building on the work developed by Rosita Ellis and the late Skip Bawa, and supported by the regional staff members Mumta Erkadoo and Lily Obadiah, Sandra and I would like to continue to develop SERBMC into a vibrant hub of Black activism and we look forward to working with you all in 2024.



**JED MURRAY**

East Sussex Area Branch

## **AS SERBMC CO-CHAIRS WE RE-AFFIRM OUR VOW TO:**

- Promote and implement UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter (ARC).
- Encourage more Black workers to become UNISON members and activists.
- Further develop our strong and vibrant membership.
- Ensure equality and fair representation are at the heart of all regional activity.

# SHOW RACISM THE RED CARD UNISON AMBASSADORS PROGRAMME

Racism is a very complex social construct and often challenging to define and even to talk about, and I usually find that people are at different levels of their racial awareness and how it manifests in society and the workplace, or how to even deal with it. As such, I would highly recommend UNISON activists to attend the 7-week Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC) UNISON Ambassadors Programme, which I had the privilege to attend and cannot praise it enough. From start to finish, the experience was nothing short of transformative.

First and foremost, the content was impeccably curated covering all aspects of anti-racism, from how to spot and deal with racism within the workplace, to sensitive topics such as Antisemitism and Islamophobia. The SRtRC trainers demonstrated a profound understanding of the subject matters, delivering insights with clarity and precision. Their expertise was evident, and they seamlessly conveyed complex concepts in a manner that was accessible to all participants. Moreover, the material was incredibly relevant, providing practical tools and strategies that can be immediately applied in both personal and professional contexts.

The training session was not just informative, but also highly engaging. The trainers fostered an interactive environment that encouraged active participation and dialogue from the cohort of UNISON members, who all worked across the many different sectors in our public services, through thought-provoking discussions, group activities, and real-life case studies and ensured that every attendee was fully engaged. This interactive approach not only enhanced comprehension but also facilitated meaningful connections with fellow participants, fostering a sense of camaraderie and collaboration. Also, listening to the diverse range of participants sharing their lived experiences offered invaluable insight and knowledge all helping towards the learning process.

The SRtRC ambassador course is professionally facilitated by experts and is a fantastic opportunity and a great starting point for anyone to support and refresh their learning practices in becoming anti-racist with tried and tested strategies on how to support their Black, Asian and racially minoritised colleagues.

In conclusion, I cannot recommend this training session highly enough. It exceeded all of my expectations and left me feeling inspired, empowered, and equipped with valuable knowledge and skills. Whether you're a seasoned professional seeking to enhance your expertise or a newcomer eager to expand your horizons, this training session offers something truly invaluable. Invest in yourself and take advantage of this opportunity for personal and professional growth – you won't regret it!

BY BILL ACHARJEE



Show Racism the  Card

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## National Black Members Conference 2024

The National Black members conference took place on 19-21 January 2024 in Brighton. This was my first-time attending conference, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Some of the guest speakers were Bella Sankey (Leader of Brighton Council), Christina McAnea (Unison General Secretary), Libby Nolan (Unison President), Chris Smalls (Amazon Labour Union-Online), and Hugo Pierre (Camden Branch Secretary). There was a Black Leadership Presentation by Davinder Rihal (Head of Staff Learning and Development) a programme of which I have benefitted from, and I helped her at the leadership stall during break-time and a lot of members signed up for the programme.



BY SUSAN COOPER-OLAWALE

## Important action for Black members



Your Regional Black Members Self Organised Committee is asking you to...

## STAND UP PROUD & BE COUNTED!

It's vital for organising around issues affecting Black Members that we are properly recorded on the union's database.

This allows your regional committee and your branch's Black Members Officer\* to contact you, invite you to events, organise relevant actions and fight effectively for our interests - such as UNISON's anti-racism charter.

\*No Black Members officer in your branch? Consider standing!

### To check & update

- Log-on to MyUnison  
my.unison.org.uk
- Call UNISON Direct  
0800 0 857 857
- Speak to Senior Officers in your branch

## **IMPORTANT LINKS:**

1. Hasina Hamid, one of our SERBMC Members, has written an article about 'Inspiring inclusion as a Black woman trade unionist'. You can find this on the UNISON South East website:

<https://southeast.unison.org.uk/news/article/2024/03/international-womens-day-guest-blog-inspiring-inclusion-as-a-black-woman-trade-unionist/>

2. Find out about Black Members Training Passport and other Courses [here](#).

<https://southeast.unison.org.uk/>

**UNISON**  
South East