

Black Members in UNISON WALES

UNISON CYMRU/WALES BLACK MEMBERS NEWSLETTER

November 2020

“A people without the knowledge of their past, history, origin and culture are like a tree without roots” - Marcus Garvey

As we celebrate Black History Month, amidst the many global issues; some new, others ongoing, we are reminded of the original purpose of Black History Month. An event whose purpose is to celebrate the contributions that Black People have made to the British History. We remember, the struggles of Black People for freedom and equality, whilst simultaneously, deepening our understanding of British History.

This year, UNISON Cymru Wales has had the honour of having our very own National Black Members Committee Chair, Kebba Manneh, to feature in our celebrations of Black History Month. Kebba has also presented us with a new narrative and challenge going forward: “let us make future Black History a positive one.”



Kebba invites us to look back at our struggles, our achievements but reminds us that the future is also ours for the making and taking. Kebba, through his personal account of his childhood, presents us with a brief insight into the life of an African boy, this gives us a narrative different to the common ones expressed on mainstream media.

“I’m a proud Mandinka Welsh man and Mandinka history is Black history, Black history is African history, African history is world history – all of our collective history.

“I had a positive childhood experience, born and brought up in the Mandinka clan dynasty called Nyanchos. Mandinka language, culture and traditions are structured, taught practices, and organised civilisation which dates since time immemorial passes down from generation to generation through the rites of passage.

“The clan and tribe are direct descendants of the Mali Empire. Hence, surnames were very important in Mandinka culture, tradition and history, because not only does your surname determine your role in civil society, but your status in terms of the society’s expectations.”

Kebba explains that, in school, he learnt about Mansa Musa, the tenth Mansa or emperor of the Mali Empire. “Nyanchos are the only clan to be installed as successors to the throne of Mansa Musa, who was a direct descendant of Sundiata Keita, a prince and ruler, but above all, founder of the Mali Empire.” He also learned from a griot – a West African oral historian and storyteller – that Mali Empire was a province of Nubia.

Looking back over this year, the UNISON Cymru Wales Black Members Committee says, that what has been revealed by the pandemic cannot be ignored.

The committee highlighted that Black History Month compels us all never to forget the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and the ongoing struggles that Black People still endure today. Covid-19 has highlighted the devastating and fatal impact of inhumane, racist policies that perpetuate institutional, structural and systemic racism within the United Kingdom.

These reflections, has once again, reminded us of some our achievements, despite the hostile environments in which many Black people live and work. These victories demonstrate our strength, fortitude, integrity and steadfastness as UNISON activists and working alongside with community groups.

Black History Wales

On 1st October 2020 UNISON Cymru Wales Black Members' Committee sponsored Race Council Cymru to launch Black History Wales instead of Black History Month, reflecting the teaching of Black history 365 days a year.

The Committee was heavily involved in promoting its vision of Black history and are proud to confirm that the Welsh Government has accepted our representation that Black history should and will be taught as part of the National Curriculum in Wales.

We will continue to campaign for more Blacks teacher and tutors to be employed within our educational settings.

Tiger Bay Youth F.C.

The photograph on the right shows Tony McLean presenting a donation from the UNISON Cymru Wales Black Members' Committee to the manager of Tiger Bay Youth Football Club. Tiger Bay Youth F.C. was formed in 2012 and is a local football club located in Butetown, Cardiff. The club has operated with little financial support and has been run by volunteers and local community members since it was formed. It has a youth section with around 60 young people training and playing for the club. The numbers have decreased due to a number of reasons and in particular due to the lack of qualified coaches which is partly because of lack of finances to undertake FAW accredited courses.

Butetown was highlighted in 2019 as the area in Cardiff with the highest levels of poverty. 46% of young people there are growing up in poverty.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation for the club has got worse. Like other football clubs, Tiger Bay Youth have not been able to train or play. However, the club has a very high percentage of BAME families linked to it and the combination of low paid employment and unemployment has impacted them financially, and also affected their well-being during the last five months. 60% of the parents are taxi drivers and nearly 100% of young people who are members of the club are on free school meals.



UNISON Cymru Wales Black Members' Committee is proud of the achievements of the National Black Members' Committee in, for instance, promoting within the union the commemoration of the United Nations International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition on 23rd August each and every year, and having a zero tolerance approach to violence and abuse against emergency workers, many of whom are Black.

As you celebrate Black History, wherever you are, in whatever way you chose, remember, our struggles unite us as a people, as a union. We must remain determined to build and improve our future. The struggles, hardship, poverty on various levels that we endure, should make us more determined to seize our future and shape it the way we want it to be. Let us build Black History together.

"Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it takes a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom." - Nelson Mandela.

The Immigration Health Surcharge

Our social care members have been on the frontline caring for us during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many are migrant workers, and some are in a precarious position with their visas up for renewal during the crisis. It's a costly process that's stressful at the best of times, let alone after coming off a tough shift during a pandemic. UNISON is campaigning to ensure that social care staff are included in any government schemes to support front line migrant staff.

UNISON has campaigned for years against the unfairness of the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS). It is a deeply unfair double tax on access to health care, as migrant workers already contribute to the NHS as everyone else does, through general taxation. Migrant workers in health and social care make yet a further, direct, contribution: through their work. As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold we highlighted the huge financial and administrative pressures on health and social care staff and the injustice of the IHS to politicians, civil servants and the public.

Under pressure, the Government announced that health and social care staff would be exempt from paying the IHS. UNISON welcomed this change of heart. However, the implementation of this exemption is deeply unfair and places the lowest paid health and care staff under great financial pressure. While workers on Tier 2 visas working in the healthcare sector will be exempted, wider healthcare staff and nearly all social care staff will have to pay up front and then be reimbursed over time.

UNISON will continue campaigning to exempt all health and social care staff from the surcharge as the first step to scrapping the charge altogether.

The exemption scheme: how it works

Tier 2 visa holders working in social care: A new Health and Social Care Visa (Tier 2) was launched by the Government in July 2020. Those eligible for this visa pay a reduced visa application fee and are exempt from the IHS for themselves and their dependents.

All other social care staff: These workers will need to continue to pay the IHS for themselves and their dependents but may be able to claim the fee back in six month blocks. To be eligible to claim the IHS fee back, the applicant must be working or have previously worked in a health and social care sector job:

- for six months or more
- for an average of 16 hours per week (calculated over the period of 6 months)
- on or after 31 March 2020
- have payslip evidence of their employment for the period covered

Gaps for maternity, paternity and sick leave are allowed for in this calculation. Reimbursements are not paid as a single payment. They're paid in six-month instalments, in arrears, covering the period from 31 March 2020. The reimbursement amount will be six months' worth of what the applicant has paid for their immigration health surcharge.

The applicant will need to reapply after every 6 months to continue getting reimbursed. A reimbursement claim cannot be made for any period before 31 March 2020.

The Government portal for applying for refunds can be found here:

<https://immigration-health-surcharge-reimbursement.service.gov.uk>

Continued overleaf

Immigration Health Surcharge continued: what UNISON branches/ reps can do

There are several things UNISON branches and reps can do to support their migrant worker members:

- Publicise details of the reimbursement scheme to eligible members who might be able to claim their money back.
- Find out how many of your members are affected by the immigration health surcharge and the impact it has on them.
- Meet your employer and ask them to help support staff who still have to pay the IHS upfront.
- Let us know if members experience any difficulty in getting their reimbursements. They can email us, in confidence, at care@unison.co.uk

Immigration Advice Helpline

We work with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) to provide immigration advice to members who have come to work in the UK. If you would like to get some advice please call us on 0800 0 857 857 and we'll arrange an appointment for you.



COVID-19
response fund
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there
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Join UNISON and get involved with the Black Members' SOG

Black members in UNISON work to improve equality in the workplace and challenge racism and discrimination. They have many of the same concerns as other members regarding access to employment, pay, promotion and training. However, racist discrimination can deepen the impact of problems faced in the workplace.

For more information, please get in touch with one of the contacts below, we always provide a warm welcome for new members.

Lianne Owen

Regional Contact

✉ l.owen@unison.co.uk

Kebba Manneh

Group Chair

☎ 01792 483903

✉ kebbamanneh1@gmail.com

Denise Thomas

Group Secretary

✉ denise_thomas2@hotmail.com

Join online at joinunison.org or call free on **0800 171 2193**