

Focus on why racism is a trade union issue

We focus on why racism is an issue in workplaces, and why trade unions have the responsibility to ensure employers tackle racial discrimination effectively.

Unions must continue to fight for the rights of our members and ensure employers provide safe and inclusive working environments, free from racial attacks and targeting.

A YouGov poll in 2020 found that 84% of black Britons (we use 'black' in the political context to describe anyone from an Asian, African, Caribbean, and Chinese heritage) think the UK is still very or somewhat racist.

[The London School of Economics](#) has also highlighted that race hate crimes have surged in the UK since the 2016 Brexit referendum.

We also have a responsibility to call out and fight racism in our communities.

We are committed to giving our reps and members the skills to tackle racism where they live and work, across the civil service and private sector.

Blatant racism

Racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia – these are all words we find tripping daily from the tongue as racists, fascists and bigots have once again become active in our communities, emboldened by the rhetoric of right-wing politicians and some mainstream media. We have seen a return to blatant in-your-face racism with language so divisive Enoch Powell himself would have been proud.

As microcosms of society, the same racist attitudes and rhetoric pervade our workplaces; the team member with their overt racist 'opinions' or, as has been the case in the Department for Work and Pensions, line managers that defiantly call out "all lives matter" when black colleagues request a BAME risk assessment. The same risk assessment negotiated by PCS in DWP following evidence that the black and South Asian community are at heightened risk of dying from Covid.

It is a legal requirement for all employers to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare of all their employees. This should be done by conducting risk assessments of premises and work processes that are

suitable and sufficient in consultation with trade union safety representatives.

In the Cabinet Office, too, PCS is in talks over multiple complaints of racism, bullying, harassment and discrimination and we have called on the EHRC to help us challenge racism there. The hostile environment approach of this government caused open season to be declared on anyone non-white or non-British. This pushed the black community further into the forefront of the penal system, having already been:

- 5 times more likely to be stopped and searched by police and suffer the use of force,
- Almost twice as likely to die following contact with police than white counterparts
- And twice as likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act.

Covid disparity

In many departments, the Covid-19 working-from-home arrangements have further highlighted the disparity in the treatment of black and white staff. The majority of white civil servants were allowed to work from home during the pandemic, while facilities staff – the majority of whom are black and South Asian and most at risk – were left to attend the workplace.

Discrimination is weaved into the structure of British society. Imperialist attitudes remain, with black workers blocked from recruitment opportunities, pushed into low-paid work in frontline jobs, with the lowest terms and conditions, struggling to exist on poverty pay.

The ‘Sewell’ report on race and ethnic disparities, which was [totally rejected by PCS](#), ignored the wealth of clear and undeniable evidence of structural racism in the UK. Rather than build on the tenets of the Equality Act 2010, created following the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence and the disgraceful failings of the Met Police, the report moves to deflect the responsibility for the inequalities faced by people of colour, from government, onto the community itself.

As trade unionists we recognise that the attacks on our black workers, the discrimination suffered by communities of colour – this institutionalised racism – is of course a trade union issue.

Actively anti-racist allies

In PCS, we pride ourselves on our anti-racist, anti-fascist (ARAF) stance and in 2014 we created our [ARAF strategy](#) to support reps and members. We have been in full support of the Black Lives Matter movement since its inception following the racist murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, through its reinvigorated activity after the racist murder in 2020 of Breonna Taylor by the police as she lay in her bed, and last year the haunting sight of the lynching of George Floyd.

Build, educate, organise

With the curtailing of workers' rights via anti-trade union legislation, and the new policing bill removing our right to demonstrate and protest inequalities, it has never been more important for our movement to build, educate, and organise.

We are calling on every member of staff in the civil service and related employer groups to join PCS, to unite with all workers in struggle and grow our industrial muscle. We want every white ally to be not just 'not racist', but to be actively anti-racist, and for every black worker to come to PCS so we can build a strong black members' movement, too.

We are committed to campaigning against racism within all our workplaces across the **civil service** and related areas and in the wider community. We are affiliated to many anti-racist organisations and have an active [black members' committee](#) which advises our national executive committee (NEC) on campaigns and issues relating to black members in PCS and wider society.

The committee is a safe space for members to raise and discuss black issues, then to communicate them to other members.

The current chair of the NBMC is Mohammed Shafiq and the secretary is a PCS equality officer. Contact equality@pcs.org.uk for more information.

Get involved

Each region and nation has its own black members' network, which sends regional representatives to the national committee. If you wish to join your regional/national black members' network, please contact equality@pcs.org.uk.

PCS members can report racial incidents in confidence on the 24-hour helpline:
020 7801 2678

[Join PCS](#) to help see off racism and fascism.

[Get trained](#)

The PCS Academy runs a one-day course on 'Racism and intolerance: changing attitudes in the workplace'. The next date is 9am-5pm on Tuesday (7 September). [Sign up through PCS Digital.](#)

[Use the TUC's interactive guide on tackling the far-right.](#)

BBC bitesize has some great materials on educating children about racism

[Black History Month - Year 1/2 - P2/3 - History Collection - Home Learning with BBC Bitesize - BBC Bitesize](#)

[Read a member's experience](#)

As part of our focus on why racism is a trade union issue, [a PCS member shares her experience](#) of racism and fighting discrimination in HMRC.

Tell us about your experience at work and outside, email editor@pcs.org.uk

[Read our resources for reps on PCS Knowledge](#)

- [What is racism?](#)
- [What is race discrimination?](#)
- [PCS ARAF strategy.](#)

[Further reading](#)

Download and read the [Trade Union Coordinating Group's booklet](#) on fighting racism and the far-right

[Read the TUC's 5 ways to combatting racism guide.](#)