

From the Black Trade Unionist Solidarity Movement to Black Lives Matters

Speech by Nigel Carter,

Oxford Coalition of Black People and People of Colour, at the

Oxford and District Trades Union Council

International Workers Day Online Rally 2021

Greetings and solidarity from the Oxford Coalition of Black People and People of Colour

April 2021 was the 40th anniversary of the 1981 Brixton uprising of Black youth opposing the London Met police force and Special Patrol Group's racist stop and search policing and harassment of Black people via the notorious SUS law and Operation "Swamp 81".

The London Met police force's modus operandi of 'policing the crisis' under the name of Operation "Swamp 81", was perhaps a coded reference to the dog whistle anti-immigration politics of Margaret Thatcher, whom stealing the clothes of the Neo-Fascist National Front had claimed in a 1978 TV interview that British people feared being swamped by Black and Brown immigrants from the New Commonwealth.

Today, it is almost a year since the 2020 murder of George Floyd in the US alongside the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Black and minoritised communities on both sides of the 'Black Atlantic', galvanised the Global Black Lives Matter movement.

In the UK the past 12 months has witnessed a new generation of activists seeking to dismantle structural racism, decolonise institutions, toppling and dumping slaver Edward Colston's statue into Bristol's harbour, and demanding that Rhodes Must Fall.

So as a new generation of activists renew previous struggles such as campaigning for an anti-racist curriculum as depicted recently by Steve McQueen in his Small Axe series of films, today on International Workers Day we must ask what is the role of trade unionists and the wider labour movement in this new wave and upsurge of radical activism?.

In April of this year the annual TUC Black Workers Conference highlighted the launch of the TUC's new Anti-Racist Taskforce. And, in many respects both the TUC Black Workers Conference and the TUC's new Anti-Racist Taskforce are direct descendants of the pioneering Black Trade Unionists Solidarity Movement established in 1981 by Bernie Grant.

Whilst Bernie Grant came to prominence as a Labour politician alongside Diane Abbot, Paul Boateng and Keith Vaz in the period of the 1981 uprisings, this afternoon I'm especially keen to celebrate Bernie Grant the Guyanese and Black British trade unionist. The key aims of the Black Trade Unionist Solidarity Movement founded by Bernie Grant in 1981 were to promote the interests of Black workers at the workplace within trade unions and within the community through investigating racism and discrimination in the workplace, to raise

awareness of the implications of economic trends such as recession on Black workers and to increase levels of Black representation within positions of responsibility within trade unions.

The key organising principle of the Black Trade Unionist Solidarity Movement was to organize as a self-organised group within the trade union movement to fight against racism and for positive action for Black workers, rather than acting as a separatist grouping outside the labour movement. This is the model upon which first NALGO and now UNISON's self-organised group structures including UNISON's Black Self-Organised Groups are based.

So, in respect to recognising continuities and building on the legacy of Bernie Grants Black Trade Unionist Solidarity Movement what is the current role of Oxford and District trade unionists vis a vis the TUC's Anti-Racist Taskforce?

Well, we know that Black and ethnic minority migrant workers are super-exploited and over-represented in poorly paid, zero hour's contracts and insecure-precarious forms of employment. And we have shockingly witnessed how Black and minority ethnic migrant frontline essential workers have been over-exposed and as a result disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, the Office of National Statistics have just released data which highlights that young Black workers are experiencing an unemployment rate of more than 40% - a rate which is three times worse than for white workers of the same age, this is a level of labour market exclusion on a par with the rate of Black youth unemployment at the time of the 1981 uprisings forty years ago.

Given this backdrop it seems clear to me that Oxford and District Trade Unionists need to be championing much more our local Black trade union and labour movement activists such as Jabu Nala Hartley, chair of the Oxford City Living Wage Campaign and founder of Mothers for Justice Ubuntu, as well as GMB organiser and branch secretary Mo Fadlallah.

We need more ODTUC promoted public meetings such as the inspiring 'Gig Is Up' public meeting of 2019 which was chaired by Jabu with TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady speaking alongside Anneliese Dodds MP and Mo Fadlallah.

Both Jabu Nala Hartley and Mo Fadlallah are Labour candidates for next week's local elections in Oxford. So at this point I'll conclude by noting that the Labour candidate for Barton and Sandhills – Jabu Nala Hartley is a graduate of the Bernie Grant Leadership Programme.

Thank You.