

Advisor

**Rep Carole Brown
on boosting
B&EMM in Kent**
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The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union Black and Ethnic Minority Members www.fbu.org.uk

Autumn 2007



**Fire authorities
– just how
representative
are they?**



Foreword

Dear friends

It is with sadness that I write my last correspondence to you as the National Secretary of B&EMM and as one of the original founders of our organisation. The last 14 years have been among the best of my 20 years in the fire service and I do not regret a single moment. In my escapades with B&EMM over the years, I have made a fair few friends, some for life and some for a time.

Throughout all of this though there have been those who have stood side by side with me through thick and thin in pursuit of our God-given right to fairness and justice for people of colour primarily in the British fire service but more generally in the local and global society. You know who you are and to you all I say thank you with all my heart.

B&EMM have adopted a saying in recent years: "that without struggle there can be no progress". As a small organisation enveloped within a much larger machinery it would be fair to say that we have had more than our fair share of struggles but we have (especially in the early years) learnt to punch way above our weight and we needed to, because of the number of enemies who despised our very existence.

Most recently we have had to prepare for a ferocious attack on our continuation within the FBU from other supposed union colleagues who wanted to argue at annual conference that we should be disbanded due to a variety of spurious reasons, not least of which was our alleged disproportionate numbers compared to our voting rights.

While we steeled ourselves for the vociferous attack to our very being (along with our comrades from the LGBT and Women's committees) the two brigades who were forcing the issue – Northern Ireland and Nottinghamshire – backed

**Our very existence is within
your gift and remains your
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down at the very last moment, seemingly in fear of a backlash from the rest of conference.

In one sense this is a good thing as it demonstrates the support we do have nationally from our union. But in another sense it leaves an uneasy calm for another year and allows our

enemies to re-galvanise with an altered strategy. So the struggle continues. However the point is we will fight all the way to protect our liberty which is nothing new to a people who have been doing so for well over 400 years!

Sisters and brothers my final plea to you as the outgoing National Secretary is to get involved in whatever way you can, local or national to help preserve B&EMM as a pressure group within the union supporting and protecting people of colour today and in the future. Our very existence is within your gift and remains your choice, if it is lost we will have no one else to blame.

The National Committee has become smaller in size in recent years due to members leaving. It is my considered opinion that the committee is in desperate need of a breath of fresh air. This can only come with the impetus of new ideas and new enthusiasm from new members.

The incumbents can do with a fresh challenge and focus to place B&EMM as a leading organisation for equality and diversity in the British fire service. It is my firm belief that this remit has been lost in recent years and unless we redirect our attention there exists the distinct possibility that B&EMM is only surviving on borrowed time.

I have done my bit and am proud of that – now it is up to you.

To my family who have suffered in my absences over the years, thank you for your patience and understanding. You are as much a part of B&EMM and the FBU as any member. I love you.

Carl St Paul, B&EMM National Secretary



MICHAEL LENNY PHOTOGRAPHY

B&EMM School



Discover the truth about our past 200 years on

B&EMM School 2007 takes place as usual at Wortley Hall in Sheffield running from Friday 12 October to Sunday 14 October. This year the theme is '200 years on'

We welcome all those who are attending the school this year to come on a journey with us. To discover the truth about our past, to examine the present challenges that exist for us within our communities today and to look to the future to visualise what it is possible for us to achieve in the future.

This year marks 200 years since the British abolished the enslavement of Africans. This year has seen many celebrations and commemorations for what was a crime against



Participants at last year's school

humanity. At the school this year we will have an opportunity to mark this year in our own unique B&EMM way.

We expect there to be about 80 students attending the school this year from 15 different brigades across the country. We have invited guests to join us including:

Professor Gus John who was the first black director of education in a UK local authority (Hackney), and is now chair of Parents and Students Empowerment, a body that works with students who are excluded

We expect there to be about 80 students attending the school this year from 15 different brigades

or at risk from exclusion from school. He also works with young people associated with gangs and relatives of victims of gun violence in Manchester.

Khi Rafe who is co-founder of UK Black Pride and a member of Unison.

Richard Hart who was involved in trade union activities in the British Caribbean colonies for many years and had the responsibility of drafting a model trade union constitution in Jamaica.

Mick Shaw, FBU President.

We have also invited guests to

join us from the TUC Race Relations Committee, Thomsons Solicitors, London Fire Brigade as well as the new Parliamentary Under Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Parmjit Dhanda MP.

There will be three workshops around the themes "past", "present" and "future". The past will look into the trade union movement in the Caribbean and its link with the enslavement of Africans. The present workshop will look at where we are as a community now. The future workshop will be led by Sue Evans from the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) Hub at the Fire Service College and will be looking at the future and how we can develop ourselves.

We will be providing a crèche and young people's facilities and we hope to also entertain our children with Ananci stories – powerful spiritual tales from African and Caribbean history. We hope to assist our children in giving a presentation to the school.

Lastly, we hope commemorate the abolition of the enslavement of Africans with the establishment of an award to be presented this year for the first time. This award will mark the commitment and contributions of an individual to B&EMM within the fire and rescue service.

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CAMPAIGN NEWS

In brief

Late 19th century carved figure of an enslaved African breaking free of his chains on display in the National Museums Liverpool



B&EMM Region 7 rep Warren Simpson has organised and advised West Midlands Fire service to support fully the Bicentennial Walkathon to commemorate the Slave Trade Abolition Act. The event will culminate in Birmingham in March 2008 and the B&EMM National Committee will be requesting that regional FBU committees, head office and the UK fire and rescue services give this event the support it deserves. We hope as many of our members as possible will take part.

Some of our more enlightened brigades now contribute to Black History Season, a recognition of BME achievement. It is important that this year we encourage our brigades to do something to commemorate the bicentennial of the Slave Trade Abolition Act. Please let us know if your brigade is planning an event and if we can be of any assistance. Your B&EMM officials will be happy to assist where possible.



FBU delegation at the TUC Black Workers Conference. Left to right: Dalton Powell, Brian Amos, Samantha Samuels, Leroy Phillpotts, Patsy Griffiths, Carl St Paul, Michael Nicholas, Garrett Brooks, Warren Simpson

FBU takes lead on slavery at TUC

BICENTENNIAL

Michael Nicholas, Executive Council member for B&EMM, addressed the Trade Union Congress in Brighton on 10-13 September on behalf of the Race Relations committee of the TUC, moving a motion on the slave trade and its legacy.

Michael Nicholas highlighted that a Remembrance Day proposal now has widespread support but that there needs to be a campaign to bring that to fruition – next year. A space has been acquired in Hyde Park and a permanent memorial has been commissioned. He called on the trade union movement to contribute towards the costs and to engage in a debate around slavery.

The TUC motion originated from the TUC Black Workers Conference, where it was presented by the FBU. For the first time

the conference, on 20-22 April, took place in Bristol, a city with strong links to the slave trade. Another first was the decision to make an FBU motion the one to be moved as the black workers' resolution at the TUC. The FBU delegation to the TUC Black Workers Conference consisted of eight B&EMM reps and officials.

The commemoration of the bicentennial of the transatlantic slave trade has been a key thread through much of B&EMM activity this year and will continue to be to the end of 2007.

Michael Nicholas was earlier this year called upon to speak on slavery at the South Yorks Festival, an annual trade union and co-operative event held at Wortley Hall on 7 July. The political debate was entitled Slavery, Rebellion and Abolition in commemoration of the bicentennial. Other B&EMM reps, officials and members also attended the event.



A child carries a union anti-fascist placard at an event to mark the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street when the people of the East End of London united in defiance of Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists and refused to let them march



Nicholas Okoth of London Fire Brigade's Twickenham fire station, White Watch, completed the London marathon on 22 April 2007 in full gear. The feat – achieved in 6 hours, 51min and 59 seconds – was in aid of charity.

BNP AND UNIONS

ASLEF case has big implications

The Union attended a briefing in June organised by the Institute of Employment Rights on the February European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decision in favour of the rail union ASLEF in a case that will have profound and positive implications for trade unions.

In *ASLEF v UK*, the ECHR held that Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights does not impose an obligation on a union to admit those who do not share its values (para 39) and that the right of ASLEF to choose its members outweighed the BNP member's right to freedom of expression (para. 50).

The briefing outlined the build-up to the case, the implications of the ECHR judgement and where unions and those involved in policy take this important decision. John Hendy QC and Michael Ford of Old Square Chambers and Vicki Phillips from Thomsons Solicitors briefed legal, research, education and policy officers in trade unions. Professor Keith Ewing, President of the institute, chaired the event.

See *Firefighter* magazine (August/September 2007) for more.



John Hendy QC

i'm a rep



CAROLE BROWN

Kent

Positive role models

Carole Brown is a watch manager in the emergency fire control room at Kent Fire and Rescue Headquarters at Maidstone and now a B&EMM rep. She's relishing the role, though there's much work to be done.

Carole has worked for the fire service for eight years – but only got involved with B&EMM last year after going to a residential B&EMM school.

"Up until then, I'd always ignored it as something that I didn't need because I'd never had any problems. Some people at the school had some real horror stories, but we also discussed the positive things we can do to encourage people to join a service which is still seen as mainly white, male and heterosexual.

"When I got back to Kent, I explained to white colleagues that we weren't just having a whinge, but offering support and encouraging others to apply. There are black and Asian people in the community who could make very good firefighters, but may be put off because they don't think it's for them. We'd all benefit if that changed."

Black and ethnic minority FBU members can provide positive role models, Carole believes, and knows young people thinking about career choices like to hear first-hand from frontline firefighters. "I want black and Asian members to get involved in positive action days locally. I went to a community event in my uniform. Of course people want to hear about rescues, engines and hoses, as well as what happens in control. It would be great to hear from operational firefighters who'd like to get out there and encourage others."

Compared to South-East London, where Carole grew up, Kent is not particularly ethnically diverse, though there are sizeable Asian communities in Gravesend and Medway.

Carole is keen to spread the word and boost B&EMM membership locally.

"I've sent out letters, but so far only had a couple of replies. Obviously people are as reluctant as I was to get involved. It's early days, but I've got to keep pushing it. It's certainly worth getting involved."

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Fire and rescue authority members are unrepresentative of the communities they serve. It's high time they address this issue, the FBU's B&EMM section says

When London Mayor Ken Livingstone insisted that the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) Assembly be made up of a diverse range of members truly representing London's ethnic and gender diversity, the FBU's Black and Ethnic Minority Members (B&EMM) section was clear: this was a principled stance that it fully supported.

London has a black and ethnic minority (BEM) population of around 28%, according to the 2001 National Census. The nomination process in June this year should have been an opportunity to correct a serious misrepresentation of the community the fire and rescue service of the capital serves. Yet the same unrepresentative group of local politicians placed at the highest levels of LFEPA were to be reconfirmed in post – all seven of the Conservative nominees to the fire authority are white (including one woman), and all three Liberal Democrat nominees were white men.

As B&EMM pointed out in a press statement at the time, the LFEPA claims to be an equal opportunity employer. This declaration permeates most of the authority's policy documents and indeed London can boast of the highest proportion of ethnic minority and women firefighters in the country, not to mention Europe.

Michael Nicholas, Executive Council Member for B&EMM, said: "The principle should be consistent throughout the organisation at all levels, with leadership being shown at the highest political level. This is why it is unacceptable for the make-up of the Assembly members to misrepresent the diversity of the London population that the fire service caters for on a daily basis. We believe this principle should be followed throughout the UK fire service, especially in metropolitan fire services where there is a greater diversity in our communities."



London firefighters: the city's 28% black and ethnic minority population should be reflected in the service's leadership, says the FBU



JESS HURD/REPORTAGE.CO.UK

B&EMM joined Mayor Livingstone in urging the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to resubmit nominees who are more representative of London's diverse population. The only change was one white male councillor was replaced by one white woman councillor, Angie Bray. Labour was the only party that supplied BEM councillors and assembly members to the authority – three (Cllr Liaquit Ali, borough representative, Waltham Forest; Cllr Betty Evans-Jacas, borough representative, Lambeth; and Cllr Navin Shah, borough representative, Harrow) to be exact, out of 17, or 18%. It was a missed opportunity and will not convince sceptics that the LFEPA is serious about equality or truly representing the community it is tasked to served.

A glance around the country shows London is the not the only fire and rescue authority to be found wanting on representation of black and ethnic minority communities.

All fire and rescue authorities across the country are committed to equal opportunities, yet of seven metropolitan fire authorities in the UK, only one has a make-up that properly reflects their BEM communities. West Midlands has six out of 27 councillors (22%) from black and ethnic minorities in an area with 11% BEM population – a position B&EMM applauds and a reflection of Labour's nominations to the fire authority: the Tory and Lib Dem nominations are mainly white.

Wider problem

Tyne and Wear, in contrast, has no BEM councillors (7% BEM population in Newcastle Upon Tyne), nor does Merseyside (with 5% BEM population in Liverpool) or Greater Manchester (19% BEM population in Manchester city). South Yorkshire has one BEM councillor on the fire authority (9% BEM population in Sheffield and 6% in Yorkshire and the Humber) and Strathclyde has two BEM councillors (3% BEM population in Glasgow).

Of course, there is a wider problem of representation of BEM communities on local councils. According to the 2006 Councillor Census, 4.1% of councillors in England came from an ethnic minority background – from a potential pool of 9.5%, the overall adult population from BEM background.

But these figures also show very clearly that there are many more councillors out there who could join fire authorities, helping make them more representative of the community they, we, serve.

"By representing the diversity of our cities, fire and rescue authorities send out a clear signal that they represent all members of the community equally," said Michael Nicholas. This is not about quotas or political correctness. Whether frontline staff or the leaders who make the decisions at the top, it really does matter what the make-up of fire and rescue services is in terms of its people. It makes a difference to the safety of communities."

■ Sources: 2001 Census; Scotland's Census 2001; LGAR; Fire Authorities

The picture of representation on fire authorities in terms of gender is even more serious than ethnicity. In six out of the seven metropolitan authorities, women make up between 10% and 33% of councillors. South Yorkshire stands out with just under half of the councillors being women.



RAYMOND KHUMALO

Raymond Khumalo brings a wealth of experience to his job of crew manager and is keen to encourage talented young black people to join the service

Raymond Khumalo, the only black operational firefighter in Lothian and Borders, is Blue Watch crew manager at Dalkeith Fire Station.

Raymond trained as a firefighter in Zimbabwe. He spent seven years in the service there before coming to Britain. He was born in South Africa and moved to Zimbabwe at a time when the apartheid regime denied black schoolchildren a secondary education and life in Zimbabwe looked full of promise in the early days of Robert Mugabe's rule.

Raymond tried to get into the fire service when he first came to Britain, but got knocked back and decided to take a nursing degree at Middlesex University.

"I wasn't that surprised when I failed to get in to be honest, because friends over here had warned me it was seen as a white man's job. But I was determined to try again and got accepted when I applied to Lothian and Borders," says Raymond, now 38.

Sometimes people who come to the station don't think it possible that the crew manager is black

That was six years ago. He had five years as a firefighter at Musselburgh, a stint at Marionville in Edinburgh city centre, back to Musselburgh as acting crew manager for a couple of months before getting taken on in his current job in February.

Raymond hopes his experience and promotion send out a strong signal that talent will out and black and ethnic minority men and women

can build a successful career in the fire service. But old prejudices persist among the public, as Raymond knows first hand. "Sometimes people who come to the station don't seem to think it possible that the crew manager is black. I guess that's because there aren't that many black crew managers around so people don't expect it. It will probably continue to happen until things change and more black firefighters get promoted. Dalkeith is a quite a white town too."

But, despite this, Raymond very much enjoys the job, gets on well with the crew who certainly don't give him a hard time. He also finds his watch manager very supportive and he has gets on well with mentor he has as part of the service's continuous professional development package.

"This job is quite challenging. There is quite a lot of studying and instead of someone telling you what to do, you are now doing the telling as crew manager," says Raymond who enjoys working with his team.

He also relishes community safety work, and believes in the benefit of teaching disaffected youths with behavioural problems how the fire service functions. "It's really helping. At first they didn't talk to me much, addressing questions to others. Now they have got used to having a black person tell them what to do and we have conversations and jokes."

Raymond is keen on encouraging black and ethnically diverse young people to put themselves forward for the service, and believes that B&EMM can play an important role within the FBU in offering encouragement and support.

Personal

CONDOLENCES

- To the family and friends of Anne Marie Spencer who passed away on 2 June 2007 after a long illness. Anne Marie was an equalities advisor in the London Fire Brigade and a good friend of B&EMM. She will be sadly missed.
- Les Bowman – on the sad passing of his father.

CONGRATULATIONS

- Patricia Robinson, on the birth of a new daughter – Shyann Aiesha
- Michael Nicholas, on the birth of a daughter – Grace Maya
- Victor E Muhammad – on the birth of son Zinedine Fidel
- John Hughes – on his recent marriage

PROMOTIONS

- Clayton Campbell (Crew manager) – GMC
- Nicholas Slack (Crew manager) – GMC
- Mark Forbes (Watch manager) – GMC
- Raymond Khumala (Crew manager) – Lothian and Borders
- Francois Fragne (Crew manager) – Lothian & Borders
- Andy Thomas (Watch manager) – London Fire Brigade
- Pamela Oparaocha (Watch manager) – London
- Patrick Goulbourne (Watch manager) – London



Lud Ramsey
– commendation
and thanks

SERVICE AWARDS

- Carl Smith (20 years service – West Mids)
- Jackie Harriott-Smith (20 years service – West Mids)
- Jag Hayer (20 years service – West Mids & Derby)
- Kam Basi (20 years service – Derby)
- Lud Ramsey – Commendation (CLG Equality and Diversity Awards 07)

GET WELL SOON

- Pierre Marsh (London)

THANK YOU

- Lud Ramsey (Hampshire – who has stepped down as the Reg 12 B&EMM rep)

If members have news of congrats and promotions don't be shy about it – please get in touch. Your progress is an inspiration to us all.

Contact B&EMM Executive Council member Michael Nicholas:
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