
BFAWU BAME members Network October 2024

Challenging inappropriate language in branches

Concerns were raised in the meeting at the amount of 'banter' that was present in some WhatsApp groups that weren't banter but discriminatory and offensive. How to challenge it in a group setting where the culture has developed over a long period of time and you may be a lone voice was also discussed, it was agreed that the role of reps is to step up and challenge this sort of behaviour, that it is hard to do, but by staying silent you are effectively saying you agree with it and the culture continues.

An example was given of a situation where an individual made what would be deemed as inappropriate comments about themselves, this led to a conversation around how to approach that situation, especially when it made others feel uncomfortable. i.e. asking what colour they are (in terms of shift) and the person replying brown, though the shifts are purple, orange, blue and red. It was suggested that a good approach to this would be to explain that this made the individual uncomfortable, but also where appropriate use it as an opportunity to talk about any historic or current issues they may be facing that have led to that type of response, the group felt that sometimes this was a defence mechanism put in place to try and stop others from making derogatory comments and that we as reps in the union need to work on making sure members don't need to do things like that around us.

The group agreed that we should be championing our migrant members, who speak multiple languages, and stepping in when others may comment on how good their English may or may not be, pointing out that they are multi-lingual

Removing barriers in the BFAWU

There was a long discussion around how we ensure that members know that we are a safe space for them to be who they are, that we celebrate diversity and don't contribute to the institutional racism that is engrained in so many places in the UK.

Can we champion some of our BAME members, officers and staff in our union, do some blogs about why they are in the union etc., maybe do something during 2025 Black history month having different members, activists and reps talking about why they joined the union?

Workplace Policies

What policies are in place in our members' workplaces, are they put into practice or just documents that are gathering dust?

Do reps in branches know about the policies such as EDI (equality, diversity & inclusion) ones, where to find them and how to ensure they are adhered to.

Can we be shouting more about good things that are done in branches, workplaces and the union?

The Far Right

The group was seriously concerned about the rise of the far right and how they are integrating not only in our communities but the trade union movement too, how they are taking legitimate concerns people might have and creating huge divisive, racist rhetoric that is developing a whole narrative that blames other working people and those who are fleeing conflict for the issues we are facing and not the political decisions that have led to us being where we are today.

We need to change the way people think about these issues, through education rather than shouting at them, highlight the dangers around the content people like Andrew Tate and Stephen Yaxley-Lennon create and share and bust some of the myths and rhetoric they are pushing by explaining the truths and alternatives.

The TUC has created a whole series of educational resources around challenging the far right, there is a pilot course being run in the Yorkshire and Humber region over the coming weeks, and we will look to run some BFAWU sessions in 2025.