



Black Members Council Black History Month Statement – Marc Wadsworth, Chair, BMC

October 2020

Media reporting showed the youth, who defiantly marched on the streets of Britain in protest at the murder by US police of unarmed Black man George Floyd, were the heart and soul of the massive Black Lives (BLM) movement this summer. The global protests acted as a dramatic, long-overdue wake-up call for every part of society to change and reminded us that Britain's Black History Month in October shouldn't be held just once a year but be a constant theme in schools, colleges, universities and everywhere else. I noticed, the BLM activists raised important questions about "decolonising" the curriculum and classrooms to make sure there are more Black lessons, students and teachers. I hope my new *Comrade Sak* book about a forgotten historical, person of colour, Shapurji Saklatvala MP <https://www.peepaltreepress.com/books/comrade-sak>, contributes to making progress on that front.

The BMC issued a statement about George Floyd <https://www.nuj.org.uk/rights/black-members> and, as council members, some of us went on BLM demos to lend our support. Let's not forget, anti-Black racism, that includes police brutality and unpunished deaths in custody, like that of Black man Sheku Bayoh, which the BMC took up with the Scottish government, is still alive and kicking in Britain and other parts of the world – not just in America.

Joining forces with press regulator IMPRESS, the BMC will next month be doing conference work on improving the reporting of BLM protests, and other like them, and generally promoting journalistic best practice, using the NUJ's race reporting guidelines as a vital tool.

The BMC believes it's an abomination that the racist "Black face" stereotyping of people of colour still goes on around Christmas time in the Netherlands and Belgium, where the "Zwarte Piet" Sinterklaas festival character stalks the streets <https://nltimes.nl/2019/11/12/british-journalists-union-warns-racism-zwarte-piet-reporting>. This is something we have taken up with Brussels and Amsterdam NUJ branches and our NVJ Dutch sister union. Such things have no place in the 21st century.

As BMC chair, I spoke last month at a lively meeting of the London Magazine Branch. As a result, a commitment was given by the branch to donate £500 to the NUJ's George Viner Memorial Fund that helps Black student journalists <https://www.nuj.org.uk/rights/george-viner-memorial-fund/>. I hope other branches will similarly donate generously towards a really good cause and will give the BMC invitations to speak at their meetings about the council's work, like the London Freelance Branch, where I'm speaking next week.

The BMC has taken up the issue of Islamophobia in the media and organised a conference for migrant journalists, who, too often, are marginalised and ignored in our industry. Important alliances for change were built at the event.

In memory of pioneering journalist Claudia Jones, the BMC is hosting our annual memorial lecture, whose speaker this month is Francesca Sobande, director of digital media studies at Cardiff University. Watch out for publicity about it.

Black History Month gives us all, as journalists, time to reflect that, if we don't know where we're coming from – and fail to be honest and inclusive about it – we don't know where we're going.