



Key Historical Achievements of BAME Labour

From Black Sections to BAME Labour

The battles and struggle for Black Representation in the Labour Party was a defining moment in British politics. It tore the Labour Party apart in the 1980s with divisions between a progressive wing of Party members and a then leadership prepared to keep Black members consigned to the margins of Labour Party Democracy.

The leadership of Jeremy Corbyn in 2015 marked a new beginning and heralds a new era in Labour Party politics. It represented a continuum of progress in Black representation in the Labour Party started in the 1980s with the establishment of the Black Sections, the Black Socialist Society in 1990 and BAME Labour in 2007. Whatever the terminology or name, the aims remain unchanged - to improve the representation of Black people in British politics, public life and to challenge the institutional racism that has blighted the ambitions and aspirations of BAME communities.

BAME Labour was instrumental in securing the 2010 Equality Act to include political parties and majority BAME representation for selections for political office. Key policy achievements included the Race Equality Duty and Public Sector Equality Duties. Since the four Black Sections MPs were elected in 1987, BAME Labour has helped propel many MPs into Parliament, into roles as councillors and as Mayor of London.

The achievements that BAME Labour made in 2018, working in conjunction with the trade unions affiliates were historical. The TUC and trade unions made this change in their structures over a quarter of a century ago. UNISON's rule book is testament to this progress, with equality and Black Representation at the heart of its rules and policies. It placed the ownership firmly in the hands of the Labour Party, to take responsibility for ensuring that its BAME members were part of the mainstream – no longer consigned to the margins of democracy.

BAME Labour and the trade unions changed the structures of the Labour Party to ensure that the voices of BAME members were, in rules, as valued as other members. For the first time in Labour's history, BAME members had a vote at all levels of the Party's democracy. This is one of the historical legacies of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership – in righting years of historical and institutional racism experienced by BAME members.

While some may want to malign BAME Labour's achievements – the principle of Black Self-Organisation is now firmly established in Labour Party Rules. These are rules from which BAME members can assert their rights to equal treatment and to begin to play a meaningful role in the Labour Party, that match their years of devoted and distinguished contribution to the Labour Party.

BAME Labour has championed the principles of gender-balance, ensuring gender-parity, and fair representation, ensuring groups are fully represented in Labour's structures, policy-making and decision-making. It has supported the retention of the 50:50 electoral college for elections, based on equal representation between members and trade unions, who have many BAME members affiliated to the Labour Party. The organisation has also ensured that there is the BAME Labour representation and policy input into the Labour Party's Annual Conference and Women's Conference as well as other regional conferences.

The challenge now is for the new Leadership team to implement and take forward Jeremy's Corbyn's legacy of putting equality and fairness at the heart of Labour's agenda, structure and culture.

©Gloria Mills 2020