

A million voices against the far right

UNISON LGBT group strategy and action plan

UNISON's national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) committee has prioritised campaigning against the far right. This strategy outlines an approach and a programme of work the committee will undertake on a continuous basis and in the run-up to local, national and European elections. The strategy is for the national LGBT committee in partnership with regional LGBT committees and branch LGBT groups.

Our aims are to participate actively within a broad-based anti-far right coalition of trade unions, trades councils and anti-fascist organisations, such as Hope not Hate, Searchlight and Unite Against Fascism (UAF) to:

- **increase awareness of the level of threat from the far right**
- **encourage local UNISON campaigning**
- **increase voter registration within the LGBT community**
- **increase voter turn-out within the LGBT community**
- **stop the far right from winning elections and thereby gaining increased profile and resources**
- **win the battle of ideas against the far-right.**

Key messages

UNISON nationally has developed a message explaining why we are making a stand against the BNP. It explains how the fascist party's values undermine trade unionism, attack workers' rights and damage the cohesion of our society. The message underlines the choice between co-operation, partnership and working with others to achieve collective benefits versus the BNP's extremely nationalistic, xenophobic and isolationist policies that damage our members and mean a loss of jobs, rights and prosperity. Most recently, UNISON has promoted a pro-public service message, emphasising the diversity of public service workers.

As an LGBT group, we will disseminate this national message in all our anti-far right work, whilst focusing on the specific homophobic, biphobic and transphobic beliefs of the far right. It is particularly important, however, that we always highlight the far right's racism and do not simply focus on their antipathy to the LGBT community.

Evidence shows that targeted local work is the most effective in preventing BNP gains. So as well as having a strong national narrative, messages should be locally tailored within regions to motivate turnout.

Actions

Putting the fight against the far right on our agenda

- Fighting the far right to be a standing item on the national LGBT committee agenda
- fighting the far right to be a standing item on regional representatives' reports to all national LGBT committee meetings
- regional groups to be asked to include fighting the far right as a standing item on their agendas
- regional groups to be asked to include fighting the far right as a standing item in their work plans
- regional convenors' days to include a standing item on fighting the far right.

Developing a comprehensive campaign

- Continue to work nationally and regionally with external partners including the TUCs, Searchlight, UAF, the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR), Lesbian and Gay Coalition Against Racism and Show Racism the Red Card
- seek to work with other national self organised groups to coordinate activity
- liaise with Labour Link and the General Political Fund to maximise our campaigning strength and resources
- liaise with Operation Black Vote
- build up our intelligence on far right groups and their views so that this can be accessed by activists.

Disseminating our key messages

- Include a section on UNISON's LGBT webpages, with a link to the dedicated anti-BNP web area
- include a regular feature in *Out in Unison*
- publicise national anti-far right leaflets to regional and branch groups, encouraging groups to order them
- publicise Searchlight and UAF days and weekends of action to regional and branch groups, encouraging local participation
- publicise and organise - where appropriate – anti-racism and anti-fascism education courses for reps
- seek mainstreaming of anti-far right education in all UNISON training.

Mainstreaming our message at LGBT community events

- Mainstream anti-far right message in our involvement in all LGBT community events and prides
- maximise our involvement in pride events and organise IDAHO, Black History Month and LGBT History Month celebrations and events where possible, seeking opportunities to disseminate an anti-far right message at these events
- continue to have a strong national presence at UK Black Pride and publicise this event to regional and branch LGBT groups.

Building towards local, regional, national and European elections

- Assemble and circulate (via the LGBT e-bulletin and *Out in UNISON*) information to regional groups about:
 - election dates
 - election boundaries
 - elections processes
 - eligibility for registration
 - registration procedures, deadlines, and sources of advice
- seek opportunities to disseminate electoral registration forms and postal voting forms to members
- explore LGBT “member to member” canvassing, using lessons learned from the national project
- encourage regional groups to include information on regional anti-BNP activities in mailings to members
- challenge negative media stories, seeking to break myths and promote positive images.

Reporting our successes

- The Annual Report to include a section on anti-far right campaigning
- regional submissions to the Annual Report to include anti-far right campaigning
- seek opportunities to speak to other parts of UNISON and to external organisations about our work.

Developing the strategy

- Seek feedback from regional groups and branches on the strategy
- regularly update the strategy in response to feedback and learning.

How regional and branch groups can get involved

Regions should ensure that anti far right campaigning is a standing item on their agendas. Each region is asked to develop an anti-fascist action plan as part of their annual work plan. This should be drawn up in liaison with the regional anti-BNP contact. Ideas to include:

- Promote campaign at regional meetings
- encourage branch LGBT groups and activists to sign up to the campaign
- order and disseminate national UNISON literature to members
- promote voter registration and postal voting via regional or branch newsletters and regional LGBT web pages
- promote anti-BNP messages at LGBT community events such as LGBT History Month, IDAHO and pride festivals
- encourage branch groups to map activists and mobilise local membership
- work with other regional self organised groups
- build links with local groups and other local/regional organisations, such as Trades Councils or local TUCs
- work with UNISON regional anti-BNP contact in assessing merits of contacting UNISON members via email, automated phone calls, text messages etc.

Many of these actions can be undertaken by branch LGBT groups in partnership with the regional group.

Any proposals for direct mail, or particular publicity, must be discussed with UNISON head office before proceeding.

Election Law

Funding constraints are complex and potential breaches of the law are serious. Legal advice is issued to branches and regions in advance of elections. Expenditure on political activity may only be made from the GPF or the Labour Link. Coordination between the union's political work is managed by an elections board and arrangements are in place to ensure that all expenditure is appropriately authorised, allocated and reported to the Electoral Commission. **No election cost should be incurred without prior national authorisation.**

Examples of regional actions

All UNISON regional LGBT groups have been campaigning to encourage voter registration and turnout against the BNP. Here are some examples of actions.

In **Scotland**, members in the Highlands campaigned against the BNP on the streets of Inverness during the recent European elections. Members in Glasgow alerted members by text to come into town and counter-leaflet, whenever it was known that the BNP were on the streets. This was very successful and BNP did not stay long once members arrived.

Members of **South West** UNISON LGBT group found out that the BNP were planning a meeting in a small village on the outskirts of Exeter. They prepared a simple script explaining what the BNP stand for, which they circulated to colleagues and friends. A concerted campaign of phone calls persuaded the village hall caretaker that it was not a good idea for the BNP to hold a rally in their area. Half an hour before the meeting was due to take place, the caretaker and the village cancelled the meeting.

Yorkshire and Humberside regional LGBT group distributed *Pride not Prejudice* leaflets, publicising the Hope not Hate campaign and celebrating the diversity of the LGBT community, at pride and other community events across the region.

UNISON **South East** LGBT group produced a newsletter in April highlighting the need for all to vote in the European and local elections and actively oppose the BNP.

UNISON **Greater London** LGBT group worked with their regional TUC LGBT network to produce anti-BNP leaflets targeted at the LGBT community. They took these to LGBT venues and organisations and did face-to-face canvassing in LGBT bars.

UNISON **Cymru/Wales** LGBT group used a 'We are all family' theme at their pride events as a tool in the anti-BNP campaign, in light of their views of a 'normal' family being a man and woman.

Contacts

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Each UNISON region has an anti-far right contact – ask you regional office for details

Anti-fascist and anti-racist groups

Searchlight opposes racism and fascism in Britain and abroad. **HOPE not hate** is Searchlight's campaign to counter racism and fascism in elections and beyond hopenothate.org.uk .

Unite Against Fascism campaigns to alert British society to the rising threat of the extreme right, in particular the BNP, gaining an electoral foothold in this country uaf.org.uk .

National Assembly Against Racism is an independent organisation campaigning against all aspects of racial inequality. It has a lesbian and gay section – LAGCAR naar.org.uk .

UK Black Pride promotes unity and co-operation among all Black people of African, Asian, Caribbean, Middle Eastern and Latin American descent, as well as their friends and families, who identify as LGBT ukblackpride.org.uk .

Operation Black Vote is a non party-political campaign which, among other aims, urges Black people to register to vote and confronts politicians with the reality of what it means to be Black in Britain obv.org.uk .