



## UNITE salutes the Windrush Pioneers



**T**his week marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush, the first ship to arrive in Tilbury Docks after the Second World War.

The original ship belonged to Germany and was used in the war where it was captured, refurbished and renamed Empire Windrush.

Between 10,000 to 20,000 people from the Caribbean were involved in the war efforts. During this period a massive hurricane in the Caribbean damaged 90% of banana trees and almost 50% of coconuts in Jamaica which affected the livelihood of many.

After the war, Britain's population had fallen by 1.4 million and there were skill shortages. Residents of the Caribbean being from the Commonwealth were therefore a source of potential labour. In 1948, the BBC World Service broadcasted adverts saying that "you are needed to come and build the mother country". Adverts also said that "you could earn £25 per week". This was aimed predominantly at service men who were asked to return after the war to rebuild Britain.

The Empire Windrush arrived in Tilbury Docks 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1948. A ship with almost 500 passengers from the Caribbean. No preparation had been made for men, women, and children's arrival. Whilst some had addresses to go to, many spent the first couple of weeks in an air raid shelter under Clapham South station.

From 1948 to 1952 there were about 2000 people arriving each year, but by 1957 onwards, the number had increased to about 40,000 per year.

The most common sectors Windrush workers were employed in were manufacturing, construction, hospitality, postal services, NHS, hospitality, railways and the bus service. The closed shop operated in these industries so they joined trade unions and some became reps.

Sir Bill Morris, the former General Secretary of T&G, now Unite, is a product of this generation.

Unite is proud to celebrate the Windrush generation on Windrush Day, 22 June. We celebrate the dreams and success of those brave young people who persevered despite the racism they faced. We will continue to campaign for justice for those affected by the Windrush scandal.

Acting National Officer for Equalities, Maureen Scott-Douglas stresses “the Windrush community were asked to help rebuild this country. Many have now passed away but the legacy of their generation lives on.”

Generations of black people have made a positive difference to the lives of many people in our society through their hard work and dedication to not only public services but across all industries. They have contributed to the Trade Union and the Labour Movement in Britain and continue to be involved in Unite.

Chair of Unite National Retired Members Committee, Monica Taylor, talked about her family journey to the UK, in the late 50’s from the St Kitts in the Caribbean. She shared how “the Windrush generation brought with them their solidarity and their joy but faced open hostility from many. Despite this, they succeeded to build their future with dignity and hope which remains today”.

Monica also says that the UK has been slow to remember the thousands of men and hundreds of women from former British Caribbean colonies, who when told “your country needs you”. They came forward, not once but twice, signing on the dotted line in defence of the “Motherland”. She further states that “we have come a long way and more needs to be done, we must keep raising awareness of the plight of the Windrush Generation”.

## **Join the campaign**

**by getting involved in Windrush Day events around the country**



[www.unitetheunion.org/equalities](http://www.unitetheunion.org/equalities)  
@unitetheunion @UniteEqualities

[equality@unitetheunion.org](mailto:equality@unitetheunion.org)  
unitetheunion1 020 7611 2500