



We must continue to support the Windrush Generation

22 Jun 2021

**To mark Windrush Day GMB Southern Region activist
Charlaine Nkum reminds us of the ongoing concerns of
Windrush generation workers**

It has been 73 years since the Commonwealth “Windrush” generation were invited by Elizabeth II to aid the financial recovery of the UK after World War II. Many Commonwealth citizens sought opportunity and flocked in their numbers to seek employment and rebuild a new future within the UK.

The British Nationality Act 1948 gave automatic citizenship of the UK to citizens of its colonies. Members of the Commonwealth could immediately enact their citizenship and be known as a British subject, free to permanently live and work in the UK.

Some of these workers came to the UK on the HMS Empire Windrush in 1948 – hence the ‘Windrush Generation’.

However, as years have progressed so have various immigration rules. The UK government tightened its borders and created an open platform of hostility for Commonwealth citizens. The most controversial element came when Caribbean diplomats, MPs and various charities drew

media attention to the fact that the rule of exempting Commonwealth citizens from immigration detention and deportation from the United Kingdom was discreetly removed by the former Home Secretary, Theresa May.

As a result, many Commonwealth immigration statuses have been rejected - not only to those who were Commonwealth citizens by default, but also to their children. Citizens of the Commonwealth have been stripped of their citizenship, making them destitute and stateless within the UK.

This has affected around 57,000 people. Citizens have lost their jobs, access to bank accounts, access to the National Health Service (NHS) - and some have even faced removal from the UK. This epidemic is still ongoing despite earlier media coverage. The UK government is responsible for the disparities in immigration rules and for British hostility which have combined to infringe the rights and dignity of these Commonwealth citizens.

The government has misunderstood the severity of the injustices caused and needs to continue to pursue measures and resolutions and implement them to close any loopholes in this detrimental immigration rule.

Black women at a Windrush protest

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It is important for us to acknowledge this is a trade union issue. Many citizens from this era have worked tirelessly, contributed significantly towards the UK economy and some are still contributing today.

Many of our GMB members have become victim to this hidden ruling. One member actually lost their job within the NHS because he did not have official documents to satisfy the employer. They were also refused housing and became homeless. After gathering 40 years of documentation which included letters from HMRC, National Insurance contributions and pension records to provide to the Home Office, they were still denied British citizenship and Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK.

It is important for us to collaboratively work with other unions and the TUC to continue supporting members and victims of such detriment by doing the following:

- Pressure the Home Office to review their detention policies and rules; mainly where immigration detention is enforced without time limit when detaining citizens



- Place pressure on the government to create a suitable compensation scheme for Commonwealth citizens and their families who have been victim to such immigration changes. This is to include losses of their income, accessing the NHS, housing and banking services
- Pushing for the creation of a race advisory board within the Home Office. This would enable employees to have a full understanding of their British colonial history and to appreciate the contributions of various Commonwealth citizens, whether it be through building economy, teaching UK children, caring in the NHS or serving in the military
- Use media resources in a more meaningful way, such as an increase in positive migration stories and less use of propaganda
- Supporting organisations such as the Windrush National Organisation and Windrush Lives aid in seeking justice and defending the Windrush generation against the current hostile environment

As the GMB national race network of black trade union activists we will continue to highlight discrimination and poor treatment against our Windrush colleagues, family and community. Stay in touch online - and join our event on 23 June to learn more about the fight.

Charlaine Nkum
GMB Southern Region activist

