



Rising

Star

Sylbourne Sydial

He firmly believes that “what the black community needs is effective voices that will stand on the political platform”

The political process is high on the agenda. Engage magazine spoke to three politicians in waiting and sought their views on the key challenges which currently face BAME businesses.

### Budding parliamentarian

**Sylbourne Sydial** was among 21 new BAME recruits enlisted last year for the Operation Black Vote (OBV) MP Shadowing Scheme. He shadowed Peter Bottomley MP (Worthing West) and Andrew Pelling MP (Central Croydon). Sylbourne is a Conservative Party member of Dulwich and West Norwood constituency and Lewisham East constituency.

Sylbourne is hoping to become the first Jamaican born British MP, but first he needs to be selected as a Conservative candidate; Engage caught up with him on the campaign trail.

A former General Secretary of the UK arm of People’s National Party (PNP) in Jamaica Sylbourne came to the UK in 1992 with an in depth experience and understanding of the political process. Sylbourne wanted to find a way to contribute to Jamaica while studying here. Like many before him, the plan was to stay three to five years and then go back.

However, as time went on he realised that he wanted to make a contribution to political life here in the UK. Although it is often assumed that the Labour Party is the natural home for BAME voters, Sylbourne did his research and discovered that the Conservative Party was the place for him:

*“I came with an open, objective mind. I realised that the values I hold are the same (as those within the Conservative party). For example, in Jamaica there is no social welfare as such – the family forms the bedrock of society”*

Sylbourne feels strongly that the challenges he has faced are in fact hurdles, which once overcome, have made him a stronger person. These challenges have included, getting known within

the party and engaging with the whole community – letting people know that you are not dealing solely with BAME issues. It is also a challenge to get on the parliamentary list, which can be a long and painstaking process.

The shadowing project that **Operation Black Vote (OBV)** presented was an ideal way to overcome both these challenges as it gave **Sylbourne direct access to Conservative Central Office**. The experience also provided him with the opportunity to be mentored by, and form key associations with, people such as Dominic Grieve MP– Shadow Attorney General, Peter Bottomley MP and Andrew Pelling MP and London Assembly Member.

Unusually perhaps, for a Conservative, Sylbourne talks of revolution. Indeed he foresees that in order to move forward we need a **‘social responsibility’** revolution. This is in line with the statements of the Conservative Party Leader, David Cameron, who has made social responsibility a central pillar of his agenda. Sylbourne expands on this, talking about where BAME businesses taking responsibility for themselves and the growth of their business by rekindling and developing the entrepreneurial spirit. We also need a ‘working together’ revolution where BAME business comes together and trusts each other through working in partnership thus leading to the combined power of the BAME pound.

Sylbourne is passionate about laying solid foundations, getting to know and understand his community and constituents – with an aim to inspire younger people and those who have apathy towards voting to use their vote. He firmly believes that “what the black community needs is effective voices that will stand on the political platform”. Sylbourne Sydial has demonstrated that he is on his way to being an effective voice.

Photo: Hannah Edy

## Rising Stars

## Politicians in Waiting

## By contrast - Fiyaz Mughal - as a prospective parliamentary candidate previously

for the Liberal Democrats, is looking to contest hard fought seats like South West Herts for the Liberal Democrats. Fiyaz started his political journey within the voluntary sector, working for a number of charities including women's employment and training organisations. For the last three years, he has been working within conflict resolution and inter faith settings. He has been a local councillor (within Oxford and Haringey in North London) and was the Deputy President of the Liberal Democrat Party during 2006 - 2007. He was also the Chair of the Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats from 2002-2006 which was a national campaigning body on BAME issues within the Party.

A Labour Party member until 2000, over time he had become disillusioned with Tony Blair and the party's approach to issues of social justice - a subject which Fiyaz is passionate about - particularly with regard to the impact on minority and migrant communities.

Fiyaz feels that access to justice has broken down for those who need assistance with family law and immigration matters - as these areas are no longer funded - which leads to greater social exclusion. As community cohesion is a matter of current debate it is time to open the discussion regarding excluded communities - why for example have some moved forward and not others.

'The challenge for me is that unfortunately there are still barriers to the selection of BAME candidates, even at local councillor level. There is still a major under representation of those from BAME communities and this stems - in the main - from the

culture of political organisations. Potential BAME politicians still have to face the credibility gap - no party has adequately addressed the sidelining of good candidates.'

Fiyaz feels that he has had a particular success in enabling the Liberal Democrats to understand that they needed to change if they wanted to attract candidates from BAME communities. He is also proud of the way he has advocated on behalf on minority communities, ensuring for example that places of worship are included in the planning process.

*Fiyaz has some very clear ideas on how to address the issues which face BAME businesses;*

- 1) Business advice and support has tended to be haphazard in its delivery, there seems to be a desire to tick boxes rather than offer the intensive one to one support which is needed on the ground
- 2) The bureaucracy surrounding business start up has to go: red tape is holding people back from starting up or growing their business. The legislation around small business needs to be repealed thus allowing for greater flexibility and enterprise
- 3) Regeneration activity needs to be targeted more effectively and it must focus on very excluded communities

To those considering a career in politics, Fiyaz would say this: 'it is possible, but take a long term approach and you can make a difference. **Find a mentor with a wide range of skills to support and guide you, but above all, tolerance and communication will carry you a long way**'.

# Rising

# Star

Fiyaz Mughal

# Rising Star

Chuka Umunna

A member of the Labour Party for 10 years, 28-year-old Chuka Umunna is being touted as a possible successor to the current Streatham MP Keith Hill – but for various reasons he refuses to be drawn into this.

**Currently a leading organiser of the Black Socialist Society (BSS) and vice-chairman of the Streatham**

**Labour Party, Chuka Umunna** (who is of mixed English/Irish and Nigerian heritage) said his involvement in politics goes back “as far as he can remember”, stemming from both “a fascination of news and current affairs” as well as from his father, who was “very involved in Nigerian politics”.

“My father was a very successful businessman,” he said, “and later on he got involved in politics in Nigeria where he undertook a complete crusade to rid the country of corruption. He also spoke out for better governance, and narrowly missed out on winning the governorship of the Anambra state shortly before he died in a car crash when I was about 13 years old.”

“I got involved in politics while at Manchester University,” said Chuka, “but not student politics.” After completing his degree at Manchester University Chuka got involved with the local party (Streatham Labour Party) and had a lot of media involvement even to the extent of advising ministers on various issues.

In terms of politics Chuka says his main drivers are inequality and poverty. It was both being on holiday in Nigeria when he was younger and growing up in Lambeth (one of the most deprived boroughs in the country) that the inequalities and diversity around him made a big impression on him.

“In Lambeth, you have the poorer places such as Peckham and Elephant & Castle sitting next to the richer Clapham and Fulham. “It pains me to know that there are about two million pensioners in poverty and one million children in poverty,” he said, “as well as two groups in society – the rich and the poor – living two completely different lifestyles.

“The middle class is reducing in number while the upper class is pulling away. This is extremely unhealthy,” he says.

Chuka feels that community cohesion is paramount and has a complete disdain of ‘them’ and ‘us’ – reasons why his thinking is more aligned with the Labour Party than another party, he says. He undoubtedly wants to ensure that changes are made to the Black Socialist Society and to **increase participation and representation of black and minority ethnic people** in the

**Labour Party.** He said that although 20% of the membership of the Labour Party are Black and Minority Ethnic persons, this is not borne out by the party.

“Without a doubt there are barriers,” said Chuka. “Labour needs to look at this and is currently looking at this. Things have got better but needs to be much better.”

He warns that although Labour has traditionally represented black people it is in danger of falling behind if representation is not increased. **“It’s not just about representation, it’s also about increasing our communities’ general participation in the political process. That’s something we must work on,”** he said.

Although he quite clearly leads an already busy lifestyle, Chuka’s work does not stop at politics. **He is editor of the online political magazine, TMP,** and has written for the Financial Times, Tribune and the Voice amongst other publications. Outside politics, he is an employment lawyer working for the West End firm Rochman Landau and is also legal adviser to the progressive pressure group, Compass.

Chuka is trustee of the Brixton-based 409 Project, which works with young offenders between 10-17 years old, and a trustee of the Anthony Bourne Foundation, which gives grants to organisations working with young people.

**But what does he think about BAME businesses and entrepreneurs?** **“I really do believe that we need to celebrate the role models that we have,”** said Chuka. I am disappointed that Damon Buffini of the private equity firm Permira came out in the way he did (surrounding negativity). We should have heard of him before.

**“It’s time people know that black people are capable of doing more than sports and music. More and more people are making it in the City however there are not enough black people making it on the trading floors of the Stock Exchange or in investment banks and this is not because of the shortage of African Caribbean graduates qualified in these areas.”**

**The next Streatham MP?**

**A definite strong contender so let’s wait and see.**