

Clinching a better deal

Black business clubs and associations are calling for a national movement to take them forward into mainstream activities. Mike Best reports

SINCE the '80s, business associations have provided a vital link in bringing together interested groups of entrepreneurs, and so becoming a major support system for businessmen and women who face a variety of common problems.

Lack of business opportunities, difficulties in raising capital through banks, sharing information and networking are only some of the issues tackled by such bodies.

Now, however, there are calls for a new national structure with a higher level of business acumen to take entrepreneurs into mainstream activities.

There is already widespread distrust among Black businesses over the activities of the British Chamber of Commerce (BCC).

Clyde Pile, a director of Midland Glass, is chairman of Birmingham Black Business Association (BBBA) and is also a member of BCC. He alleges that the subject of Black business has always

been a no-go area for the BCC.

"They have no interest whatsoever in the development of Black businesses. If you try to speak to them on the issue, they will refer you to the Asian group within the BCC," said Pile.

"There is a need for a national body, but we will need to move away from that of a voluntary status and put our hands deep into our pockets to finance it."

Pile has praised the work of business clubs and believe they still have an active role to play. He said they should not be undermined and must be consulted on any new structure.

Elitist

"Despite the hard times, they have survived. That means they must be doing something right.

Black business associations gave us the first opportunity to meet and share matters of common interest. Now we need to take the next step forward," he added.

Ade Sawyer, of Equinox Consulting, has been retained

by a business group to carry out a feasibility study on the issue of national representation.

He was supportive of any new initiatives and also recalled the treatment he received from another mainstream business club. "I've found mainstream associations to be very elitist. Being in business could be very lonely.

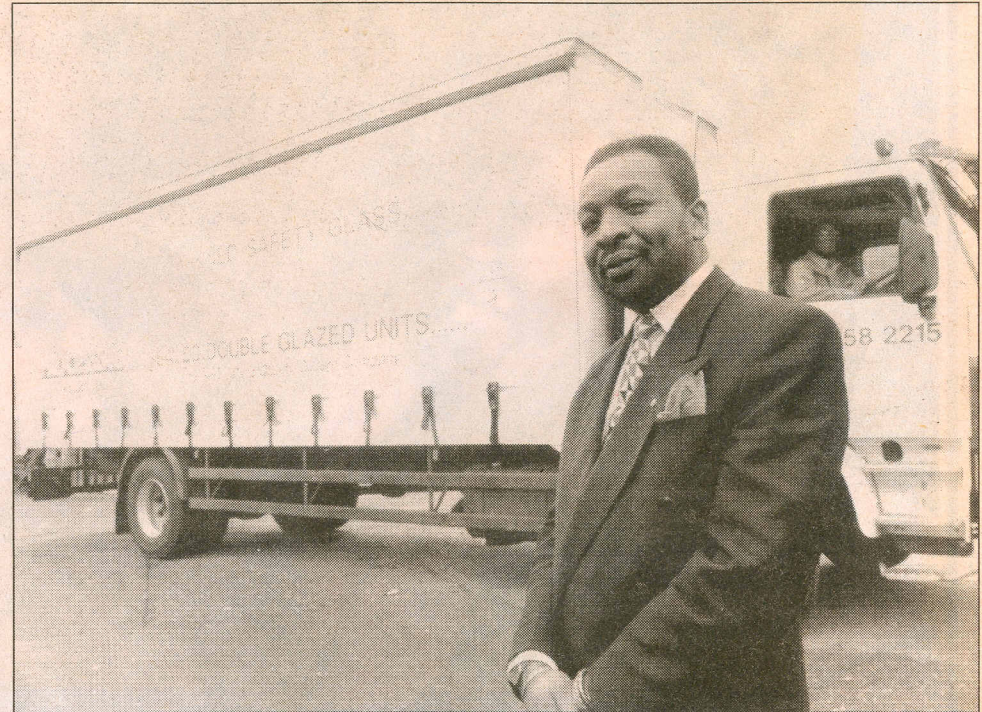
"They tend to ignore you. I stopped going to their meetings because they were not very welcoming at all," he said.

The Waltham Forest-based Black Business Association was set up in 1987 to represent the interests of African Caribbean and Asian entrepreneurs.

Under the chairmanship of Daoud Lawrence, BBA is currently assisting the Dutch government in setting up a similar organisation in Holland.

He said it was time for Black entrepreneurs to take another step forward and respond to the changes in market conditions.

"A national body has been



CLYDE PILE: Calls for a national body.

on the agenda for some time, but I would be cautious about calling it a 'chamber'. We must bury that name once and

for all."

"Organisations like BBA have created many opportunities, but changes in technology

and the Single European Market mean that we too will have to respond accordingly," said Mr Lawrence.