



Amicus response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion Consultation

Introduction

- 1.1. Amicus is the UK's second largest trade union with 1.2 million members across the private and public sectors. Our members work in a range of industries including manufacturing, financial services, print, media, construction, not for profit sectors, local government, education and the NHS.
- 1.2 We welcome the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's consultation. Participation, integration and cohesion are key issues for the UK and it is important for the Government to involve trade unions, employers and community groups in the development of policy and action in this area.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Integration and social cohesion needs to go beyond the debate about how black and minority ethnic communities (BME) can be integrated into society. It should be about creating a society where everyone can participate and contribute to economic, social and political life. This involves tackling all inequalities, including discrimination and barriers that are present because of sex, race, disability, sexual orientation and identity, religion and age.
- 2.2 Amicus is concerned that much of Government's agenda in this area is in the context of terrorism and security. Combating terrorism and security are significant issues in this country, but it is important that action and laws to tackle these issues should not impede on applying justice consistently and lead to the erosion of human rights in this country.
- 2.3 We support that the Government is consulting widely, but it is key that BME communities' participate in the development of policy on integration and social cohesion.

- 2.4 Employment is central to the integration and participation of all groups in society. BME groups, particularly those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, have higher unemployment and lower pay than their white counterparts.
- 2.5 Poverty leads to social exclusion as poor people have less access to decent housing, education, transport and employment and are more likely to suffer poor health. Government action and support needs to be targeted at socially and economically disadvantaged people to improve cohesion and participation in the UK. Improving employment prospects is key in tackling poverty and social exclusion in the UK.
- 2.6 Racism and fascist views are gaining support in this country and need to be tackled by the Government. The Government and local authorities must take a leading role to combat these tensions by challenging the myths and misinformation by the press that fuels the support for the far right in some communities.
- 2.7 Trade unions have an important role to play in building social cohesion and participation and to work towards equality in the workplace and the wider community. Therefore, we hope that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion will consult fully with trade unions and other stakeholders on proposals that the Commission will recommend to Government following this consultation.

3. Integration and Community Cohesion

- 3.1 Integration and social cohesion needs to go beyond the debate about how black and minority ethnic communities (BME) can be integrated into society. It should be about creating a society where everyone can participate and contribute to economic, social and political life. This involves tackling all inequalities, including discrimination and barriers that are present because of sex, race, disability, sexual orientation and identity, religion and age. The Equalities Review is due to report in spring of this year and the Government should ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach to the policy initiatives that are developed by the Equalities Review and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.
- 3.2 Amicus is concerned that much of Government's agenda in this area is in the context of terrorism and security. Combating terrorism and security are significant issues in this country, but it is important that action and laws to tackle these issues should not impede on applying justice consistently and lead to the erosion of human rights in this country. Security is a significant issue in this country, but it should not impede on applying justice consistently and the erosion of human rights in this country.

3.3 We support that the Government is consulting widely, but it is key that BME communities' participate in the development of policy on integration and social cohesion. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in Bradford found that statutory agencies were not hearing the views of certain groups within the South Asian community. The views of middle class, well educated professionals in the community were being heard, but certain groups' views were not, i.e. some women and the LGBT community.¹ Policy and action in this area will not be effective if BME communities feel that it is being imposed on them by the Government without their full involvement.

4. The Labour Market

4.1 Employment is central to the integration and participation of all groups in society. BME groups, particularly those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, have higher unemployment and lower pay than their white counterparts. The interim report from the EOC on the experience of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women and work found that they were achieving good qualifications, with very similar ambitions to white girls. Yet they are facing discrimination in the labour market as they are more likely to be unemployed, less likely to be in senior roles and are concentrated in a narrow range of jobs and sectors even more than white women.²

4.2 It is important the Commission extends its remit beyond the cohesion and integration of BME communities to other disadvantaged groups in society. Poverty leads to social exclusion as poor people have less access to decent housing, education, transport and employment and are more likely to suffer poor health. A disproportionate amount of women, (particularly women who are lone parents or pensioners), BMEs and disabled people are poor. Government action and support needs to be targeted at socially and economically disadvantaged people to improve cohesion and participation in the UK. Improving employment prospects is key in tackling poverty and social exclusion in the UK.

4.3 We are attaching Amicus's responses to the Equalities Review which gives more detail on inequalities in the labour market and our recommendations to tackle inequalities and discrimination in the workplace. Trade unions are in a position to take a central role in improving the labour market experience of workers in this country and the Government should ensure that we are fully consulted and involved in the development of policy and action in this area.

¹ *Minorities within minorities: beneath the surface of community participation*, JRF, December 2006, Ref 1977

² *Moving on up? Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women and work*, EOC interim report 2006.

5. Combating racism, negative attitudes and the far right

- 5.1 Racism and fascist views are gaining support in this country and need to be tackled by the Government. Research by the University of Kent found that the vast majority of people value the principles of equality and social justice, but that prejudiced attitudes are expressed by a majority towards illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. Additionally, a minority of respondents expressed negative feelings towards Muslims and gay men and lesbians.³
- 5.2 The Government and local authorities must take a leading role to combat these tensions by challenging the myths and misinformation by the press that fuels the support for the far right in some communities. In particular, we are concerned about the growing support for the British National Party (BNP). Amicus and other trade unions are playing an important role in campaigning against the BNP and were active in doing so in the 2006 local election campaign. Amicus will be supporting the anti-fascist fortnight that will be taking place on 24 March and 8 April where there will be a series of activities in local authorities where the BNP poses a serious risk.
- 5.3 We have also supported Love Music Hate Racism, an organisation which uses music to fight against racism. Music events are held throughout the country aimed at uniting young BME and white people. We have sponsored "Who shot the Sheriff?" a documentary film about the role of music in the fight against fascism, supported a charity concert in Liverpool in October 2005 in memory of Antony Walker and four music carnivals in Leeds, London, Manchester and Liverpool aimed at keeping racist organisations out of 2006 local elections.

6. Conclusion

- 5.4 Trade unions have an important role to play in building social cohesion and participation and to work towards equality in the workplace and the wider community. Therefore, we hope that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion will consult fully with trade unions and other stakeholders on proposals that the Commission will recommend to Government. In particular, the Commission must ensure that BME communities have the opportunity to contribute to policy and action on integration and social cohesion.

³ *Equality, Diversity and Prejudice in Britain*, Results from the 2005 National Survey, Abrams and Houston, University of Kent, Report for the Cabinet Office Equalities Review

Our contact details are as follows:-

Siobhan Endean
Head of Equalities
Amicus
35 King Street
London WC2E 8JG

Telephone: 020 7420 8907
e:mail:siobhan.endean@amicustheunion.org

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