



**Submission on behalf of
The Workers Party
in response to the consultation paper
*A Sense of Belonging: Delivering Social Change through a
Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014-2024*
OFMDFM**

The Workers Party is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, secular socialist party. We are anti-racist in the sense that we accept the scientific consensus that 'race' as an objective descriptor of human diversity does not exist. More importantly, we are also anti-racist in the sense that we oppose violence and discrimination against people perceived to be 'different' for whatever reasons. Races do not objectively exist but hate-crimes and other abuses against ethnic minorities are very real and the Stormont government and other bodies in our society must work to end them.

Added to well established ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland (the Chinese, Indian, Jewish and Traveller communities), there has recently been an increasingly visible rise in migrant workers from very diverse backgrounds. It is fair to say that large numbers of people in NI embrace this rise in immigration as a positive development: the 2012 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey found that 43 per cent of respondents believed immigration to be 'good' or 'very good' for the economy, while half viewed Northern Ireland's new diversity as having a 'good' or 'very good' cultural impact¹. The figures suggest that immigrants have indeed delivered for the local economy. According to recent research from Oxford Economics, far from constituting 'a drain on the public purse', between 2004-2008 migrant workers contributed over £1.2 trillion Gross Valued Added to the NI economy².

¹ http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2012/Minority_Ethnic_People/index.html Last accessed 5th October 2014

² FGS McClure Watters and Perceptive Insight Market Research, 'The Economic, Labour Market and

However, this rise in the numbers of migrant workers has also been accompanied by a significant increase in racially motivated attacks and intimidation of ethnic minority people. PSNI figures for 2013/14 show that there were 982 racist incidents in NI, an increase of 232 (30.9%) over the previous year³. Moreover, according to 2014 *Peace Monitoring Report*⁴ from the Community Relations Council, many more crimes go unreported, a failure which is exacerbated by the presence of paramilitaries in some of the affected areas.

It is our view that since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement the Stormont Government has been remiss in its duty to protect people from hate crimes. This is a part of the overall unwillingness of the chief parties in Stormont Coalition to tackle sectarianism at its roots in terms of education, housing, 'peace-walls' and flags and emblems.⁵ The continued existence of segregated communities in an environment of low-paid work and chronic unemployment and of poverty conditions sow the seeds for much of the racist scapegoating and violence that we have seen in working class areas. As journalist Peter Geoghegan notes:

*The public administration of 'Race Relations' in Northern Ireland is undermined by a fundamental tension between a discourse of Good Relations and normalisation stressing equality and social diversity and a set of structures and practices which privilege sectarian identities. Although the Agreement includes a commitment to diversity beyond the 'two traditions' the text itself is a product of sectarian division and, in many important respects, continues to reproduce this bifurcation.*⁶

In relation to sectarian 'bifurcation' at government level, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) notes that, "the current Good Relations Policy: Together Building a United Community (TBUC) perpetuates the 'two communities' approach and omits consideration of race relations in any action plan."⁷

kills Impact of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland' (2009), p. 4. Available at: <http://www.delni.gov.uk/the_economic_labour_market_and_skills_impact_of_migrant_workers_in_northern_ireland.pdf> Last accessed 5th October 2014.

³ http://www.psnipolice.uk/2013_14_press_release_for_web.pdf Last accessed 5th October 2014

⁴ <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Peace-Monitoring-Report-2014.pdf> Last accessed 5th October 2014

⁵ See the Workers Party Anti-Sectarian Charter in the Appendix to this document for a fuller treatment of this idea.

⁶ Peter Geoghegan, 'A Study of Race Relations Policy in Northern Ireland', in *New Geographies of Race and Racism*, Eds. C Bressey, C Dwyer, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 201

⁷ NICEM submission, August 2014.

There has been a need for leadership on the part of the Stormont Parties in developing a culture of anti-racism within a robust and accountable legal framework and with adequate long-term funding. The major Parties of the Stormont Coalition have failed to meet this need. We could be forgiven for thinking that issues related to racism have not been of a high priority for the Stormont Administration. Work on the strategy which resulted in the 2014 *Sense of Belonging* document started back in 2007. On top of this, the remit of the previous Race Relations Strategy expired in 2010 and nothing has taken its place in the intervening four years. Indeed, we note with concern that the current strategy was only released in the wake of mass demonstrations in June 2014 responding to Islamophobic and racist remarks made by the First Minister. This lack of urgency mirrors the inability of the main Stormont Parties to reach an agreement on a sharing and cohesion strategy for many years, and the absence of a strategy to deal with poverty, despite legally-binding promises made in the St. Andrews Agreement.

In terms of 'the discourse of Good Relations', the *Sense of Belonging* document has admirable goals. The strategy seeks to 'establish a framework:

- to tackle racial inequalities in NI and to open up opportunity for all;
- to eradicate racism and hate crime;
- along with Together: Building a United Community, to promote good race relations and social cohesion'.

The question is does the Strategy incorporate a set of budgeted, detailed outcomes which outline how these goals will be realised? The Workers Party agrees with NICEM that there are "negligible commitments on practical actions to implement the RES" (Racial Equality Strategy).

We note the failure of the strategy to consider the impact of EU enlargement, a political event which has instigated a rapid change in the composition and size of Northern Ireland' BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities. Urgent and on-going research must be carried out into the conditions of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. To its credit, the *Sense of Belonging* document recognises this weakness, stating that, 'Failure to address this issue systematically will mean that we never get beyond tokenism. Monitoring frameworks that have been developed incrementally or organically are not fit for purpose. Public bodies need robust information to monitor inequalities, develop evidence based policy and to plan

service delivery.’ It is to be hoped that the Government will implement extensive research as a matter of priority. In the meantime, recent research from the Joseph Rowntree Trust shows the extent of deprivation in ethnic minority households in Northern Ireland, which finds that people from minority ethnic groups appear to be over-represented in low-grade, low-pay jobs.

‘There was some evidence that recent migrants earn below the average local wage, even below that of other lower grade employees. Minorities consistently report that underemployment is problematic. A large proportion of recent arrivals are highly educated and skilled, but have found it difficult to gain recognition for their qualifications and experience.’⁸

More evidence is needed on how benefit agencies meet the social security and labour market requirements of people from minority ethnic groups. More evidence is needed on the problems that people from minority communities have when dealing with health and welfare services. Further and on-going research needs to be carried out into needs of children from ethnic minorities at school and into English language provision for adults.

We note that the expression ‘equality of opportunity’ is prevalent in the Racial Equality and TBUC documents. We note that ‘opportunities’ might be hard to measure whereas well-defined outcomes can be timetabled, measured and evaluated. As a result, we agree with the Common Platform group that, ‘the RES needs to be primarily an outcome-based strategy for Government-led action which delivers on the Government’s national and international obligations in relation to protecting the rights of those vulnerable to racism and racial inequality, and enables collaborative civic action towards that end.’⁹

More generally, while the Workers Party has no problems with the promotion of equality of opportunity, and good relations, between people of different perceived ‘racial groups’, we note that racism and racist incidents thrive in unequal societies and that in terms of who gets what Northern Ireland is a very unequal society in

⁸ Alison Wallace, Ruth McAreavey and Karl Atkin, Poverty and Ethnicity in Northern Ireland, p.4.

relation to both outcomes and opportunities. Racist abuse and discrimination must be met by the strongest application of the law and the law must be based on strict formal equality between persons. But in reality, this will only go so far if poverty, poor schooling, 'no-go' areas and institutionalised sectarianism persist along with multi-millionaires, gated communities and a supine media. Only a government which is committed to substantive equality of outcomes can hope to remove racism from our streets. The Workers Party believes in a society based on substantial equality between citizens.

The now-shelved Shared Futures document (2005) made some comments on inter-culturalism, which are relevant to the current debate. According to the author, 'If we follow these principles we cannot go far wrong':

*First, everyone in Northern Ireland deserves to be treated as an individual, equal with every other ('vindication of the human rights of all') - not a mere cypher for a 'community'.
Second, each of us must mutually recognise our common humanity ('achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust') - rather than engaging in a perpetual and sterile battle for ethnic power.
And third, the state must be neutral between competing cultural claims ('promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level' and encouragement of 'integrated education - in its widest sense - and mixed housing'). (1.1.13)¹⁰*

As a secularist Party we agree that the state in Northern Ireland must be neutral between competing cultural claims. Cultural -including religious- claims must be the domain of civic society and the state must make no special claim to any particular expression of the many and varied cultural expressions that groups and individuals make. Peter Robinson's remarks on Islam earlier this year make it clear how far the current Stormont Coalition is from recognising this.

Further to this, we note that since the end of the Cold War a widespread public anxiety about immigration has been intensified in the USA and Europe, which finds its clearest expression in popular culture in a racialised discourse around safety and terrorism. There have also been developments changing structure of the state and the organisation of sovereign power. This can be seen for example in bureaucratic

⁹ Online at <http://www.ictuni.org/download/pdf/commonplatform1.pdf> Last accessed 5th October 2014

fusion of migration and security. The racialised 'other' is now woven into a narrative of existential threat, which largely exists, for the moment, outside our borders but which may return at any time to wreck the kind of horror that was visited upon New York in 2001.

Moreover, the 'others' also live among us and the young among them may be 'radicalised' at any moment. They are the new 'enemy within'. Hence, many civil and human rights have been abrogated in the name of defending the country from 'asymmetric warfare'. It is our opinion that this view of the world is a self-serving fiction aimed primarily at the workers in the developed world, who are seeing their standards of living falling and their states become more militarised. In other words this is the dominant ideology of our era just as the Red Scare dominated the fear mongering of an earlier time.

As with all ideology, there is some truth to the story but the solutions offered by capitalist states only offer misery and death to the poor world and fear-mongering and state intrusion to those living in the rich countries. Any state, provincial government or political party which is fully committed to anti-racism must stand up to this dominant ideology in the name of our common humanity.

Writing in 1935, WEB DuBois made the following comment on the racism that kept blacks and whites apart in the Southern States of the USA. It also has a message Northern Ireland in 2014:

...the theory of race was supplemented by a carefully planned and slowly evolved method, which drove such a wedge between the white and black workers that there probably are not today in the world two groups of workers with practically identical interests who hate and fear each other so deeply and persistently and who are kept so far apart that neither sees anything of common interest.¹¹

¹⁰ Online at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/a-shared-future-strategy> Last accessed 5th October 2014. The words in brackets are quoted from the Good Friday Agreement.

¹¹ Black Reconstruction (1935) Online at <http://www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/sites/all/pdf/class/Du%20Bois-Black%20Reconstruction%20in%20America.PDF> Last accessed 5th October 2014

APPENDIX

Workers Party Anti-Sectarian Charter

Workers Party 5 Point Citizenship Charter

1. Secular, democratic government

- a review of the structures of government introduced under the Good Friday Agreement
- First Minister and Deputy First Minister should give a lead and change the political institutions which are themselves built on and sustain sectarian division and segregation
- the formation of an official opposition at Stormont, introduction of majority rule and the removal of 'nationalist' and 'unionist' designations

2. Integrated Education

- a public commitment to the introduction of an integrated education system at pre-school, primary and secondary levels
- an abandonment of the flawed concept of 'Shared Education'
- the formation of a single teacher training college failure to do this is a statement of unwillingness to confront the vested interests which sustain and perpetuate sectarian division and segregation

3. Integrated Housing

- a formal and public commitment to the development of an integrated housing strategy for Northern Ireland
- the convening of an Integrated Housing Strategy Task Force to develop specific proposals, identify opportunities and prepare an implementation schedule.

4. 'Peace Walls'

- gates can be opened and walls can come down now.
- barriers in non-residential areas should be opened first
- social and economic regeneration programmes should support the removal of walls, barriers and gates

5. Public 'Anti-Sectarian, anti-racist and anti discriminatory' Pledge

- All political parties, statutory, voluntary, sporting and cultural bodies to sign up to an 'Anti Sectarian, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory' pledge committing them to actively oppose sectarianism, racism and discrimination and to actively support programmes and initiatives which negate intolerance, prejudice and bigotry.