



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Holocaust

Foreign Affairs

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

Home Affairs

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities

The Minister for Levelling Up Communities (Kemi Badenoch): ... The Sewell commission was established by the Prime Minister in response to the protests we saw throughout the summer of 2020. It was tasked with carrying out a deeper examination of why disparities exist and considering how we can reduce them. The commission published its findings on 31 March 2021, making 24 recommendations in all, focused on health, education, crime and policing, and employment. ...

The Government fully endorse the findings of the Sewell commission and our action plan is based largely on its recommendations. Its report conclusively showed something which I, and indeed hon Members on all sides of this House, know to be true: disparities do persist in the UK and racism and discrimination continue to shape people's experiences. But it also showed that most of these racial disparities are not driven by individual acts of prejudice committed by people behaving, either consciously or subconsciously, in a racist way. What the report's analysis shows is that, for the most part, negative disparities arise for reasons not associated with personal prejudice. That is why so many disparities stubbornly persist even in this progressive age when there has never been such an acute awareness of racism and so much action and policy against it. ...

The response we have published today, entitled "Inclusive Britain", presents a clear strategy to tackle entrenched disparities, promote unity and build a more meritocratic, cohesive society—a society in which everyone, irrespective of their ethnicity or cultural background, can go as far in life as their ambition will take them. The response sets out over 70 actions to level up the country and to close the yawning gaps between different groups in education, employment, health and criminal justice. In many of these areas, we have gone much further than the commission envisaged to ensure that our action plan is as ambitious as it possibly can be.

The UK is a multi-faith, multi-ethnic, multicultural success story and we believe that many of our greatest strengths derive from the diversity of our population. ... However, it would be naïve to say that tolerance and inclusion are the universal experiences of everyone who lives here, so our action plan seeks to right these wrongs with three clear aims: building a

stronger sense of trust and fairness in our institutions and confidence in British meritocracy; promoting equality of opportunity, encouraging aspiration and empowering individuals; and encouraging and instilling a sense of belonging to a multi-ethnic UK that celebrates its differences while embracing the values that unite us all.

One of the most basic, but also one of the best, ways to build trust is to ensure that every individual in our society knows that they will be treated fairly and will not be discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity. ...

The second strand in our action plan is to promote equality of opportunity, encourage aspiration and foster personal agency. ...

While some ethnic minority children outperform their white British peers, that is not the case for every ethnic group, so we will look to level up pupil attainment by understanding what works best to drive up standards and bridge the attainment gaps for good. ...

While promoting and celebrating diversity is hugely important, it is ultimately meaningless if people do not feel a sense of belonging or inclusion. That is why the third strand of our action plan is to instil a sense of belonging in those who feel that they are treated differently, left out or left behind because of their colour, class or creed. No child should grow up feeling alienated from the society in which they live. ...

When those children grow up and enter the workplace, we want to ensure that they do not experience some of the biases and unfairness that they do today. To that end, we are appointing a new “inclusion at work” panel to help employers drive fairness across their organisations. ...

“Inclusive Britain” sets out a clear and comprehensive action plan to tackle ethnic disparities, level up communities and build a stronger, fairer and more united country. ...

Taiwo Owatemi (Labour): ... We all know that significant race and ethnic disparities exist in Britain today—indeed, even the flawed Sewell report acknowledges that life chances and outcomes for black and ethnic minority people vary hugely ...

Most frustratingly, the strategy unquestioningly accepts the Sewell report’s controversial premise that there is no such thing as structural racism in our society. When the report was published last year, it was met with outrage for its failure to acknowledge that structural racism exists and ... the Government continue with the same flawed analysis; one that Baroness Lawrence rightly stated is “giving racists the green light.”

If both the Sewell report and the strategy fail to identify the root causes of racial and ethnic disparities, how can either possibly hope to tackle them? ...

The strategy fails to deliver for black, Asian and minority ethnic NHS workers—frontline workers who faced a disproportionate risk to their health throughout the deadly covid-19 pandemic. It fails to deliver for black children living in Britain, more than half of whom are growing up in poverty. ...

The strategy suggests that we can tackle race and ethnic disparities by just levelling up, but levelling up is a slogan still searching for a meaning. It is the empty soundbite for a Minister struggling to answer the question. It is not the solution to entrenched racial disparities. ...

Kemi Badenoch: ... I turn to the hon. Lady’s specific comments on the report. It is not true that the commission’s report denied the existence of structural racism. ...

In fact, the commission said that it did not find institutional racism in the areas that it examined.

A rhetorical trick is happening around this question. There is a difference between racism and institutional racism, which has a specific definition as defined by Macpherson. The commission said that there is racism and that it does persist. It has made recommendations on actions to tackle that in its report, and we have taken them up. It is quite wrong to conflate the two. We see crime in our country every day, yet we do not say that this is an institutionally criminal country. We look in the same way at accusations of racism, and it is important to distinguish where there is a pervasive institutional failing across the board that is unable to provide

services to people of colour. ... I am very committed to ensuring that ethnic minorities in public life get a fair say and have their voice. What is wrong is when people with different opinions are attacked and told they are not allowed to think in a certain way because there are rules about what black people or Asian people are allowed to say. We reject that. ...

John Hayes (Conservative): ... will the Minister ensure that every Government Department effects what she has said today and what the report proposes? ... Will she issue guidance to each Government Department to stop the nonsense about critical race theory and white privilege?

Kemi Badenoch: ... Discrimination, disparity and disadvantage all mean different things. They can correlate and they can be related. Now that we have an action plan and something written, I can assure him that we will be propagating it across Government and not just across but beyond Whitehall. ...

Chris Stephens (SNP): ... Only by acknowledging and understanding institutional inequalities will we be able to effectively tackle them in all aspects of life. That is certainly true in the world of work, where BAME people were already in a precarious position in the labour market before the pandemic, and is linked to the disproportionate economic impact on those groups of the cost of living crisis. ...

The TUC recently warned that insecure work is tightening the grip of structural racism in the labour market, with BAME workers overrepresented on zero-hour contracts. Will the Minister urge the Government to introduce the long-awaited employment Bill to tackle zero-hour contracts?

Unlike with gender pay gaps, there is currently no legal requirement for UK businesses to disclose their ethnicity pay data. Will the UK Government follow the recent recommendations of the Women and Equalities Committee and introduce mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting by April 2023, including urging employers to publish a supporting action plan?

Kemi Badenoch: We have made an action on ethnicity pay gap reporting in the report, and we will be issuing guidance to help businesses and organisations to deliver it. What we are not going to do is mandate ethnicity pay gap reporting. It is very different from gender pay gap reporting, which is binary—male and female. Men and women are represented equally across the country. Ethnicity pay gap reporting covers multiple categories that are not necessarily applicable in each area, so mandating it in a particular way could actually end up distorting and skewing the figures. What we are going to do is support organisations that want to understand what is going on in their businesses and help to progress pay and opportunity for ethnic minorities. ...

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour): Unfortunately, I find what the Minister has said to be smoke and mirrors. We started with a report that began on the premise that there is no evidence of institutional racism when those who contributed to the report and those who it is meant to support have widely rejected that idea as completely false. Why would the Minister not take the question back to the drawing board? What on earth is moral history meant to be when people have called for the teaching of black history? How can the Government claim that there is no evidence of institutional racism given the case of Child Q and everything we have heard about police institutions, educational institutions and health institutions? ...

Kemi Badenoch: ... black is a category that cuts across so many significant ethnic groups that there is no way that one history module could go into any depth. We need a model history curriculum that explains the story of Britain and all our places within it. We cannot have segregated history curriculums for people of different skin colour. ...

To continue reading this very lengthy question and answer session in full see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-03-17/debates/A7C2D672-2A1F-41C5-908B-A42ED7585608/CommissionOnRaceAndEthnicDisparities>

The commission findings referred to above can be read at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974507/20210331 - CRED Report - FINAL - Web Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974507/20210331_-_CRED_Report_-_FINAL_-_Web_Accessible.pdf)

The Government response referred to above can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-britain-action-plan-government-response-to-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities/inclusive-britain-government-response-to-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities>

Downing Street

Boris Johnson: The story of the Jewish festival of Purim reminds us that tyrants who seek to destroy the innocent do not get away with it. On this auspicious day celebrating peace and freedom I know prayers will be with President Zelenskyy and all Ukrainians as they fight for freedom.

<https://twitter.com/BorisJohnson/status/1504504526602178560>

Scottish Government

Updated Guidance: Coronavirus (COVID-19): safe use of places of worship

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-places-of-worship/>

TOP

Holocaust

House of Commons Written Answers

National Holocaust Memorial Centre and Learning Service: Construction

Barry Sheerman (Labour Co-op) [137243] To ask the Right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside representing the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body, what steps the Sponsor Body is taking to help ensure that the construction of the Holocaust Memorial Centre is conducted sustainably.

Mark Tami: The scope of the Restoration and Renewal Programme does not include the construction of the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. The UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre is a matter for the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Representatives from the R&R Programme have held preliminary discussions with representatives working on the Memorial and Learning Centre to discuss potential efficiencies in using the River Thames for both construction projects. We intend to continue these discussions once the planning process for the Memorial and Learning Centre is concluded.

The R&R Programme is currently in the design phase and, under the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019, no restoration works other than preparatory works (such as initial design works and surveys) can be carried out at this juncture.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-09/137243>

Palace of Westminster: Construction

Barry Sheerman (Labour Co-op) [137246] To ask the Right hon. Member for Alyn and

Deeside representing the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body, what assessment the Sponsor Body has made of the potential merits of transporting construction materials and debris via the River Thames during the (a) construction of the Holocaust Memorial Centre and (b) restoration and renewal of the parliamentary estate.

Mark Tami: The Restoration and Renewal Programme is committed to sustainability and to meeting its environmental obligations. Under the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019, the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body has a statutory duty to have regard to the need to protect the environment and to contribute to achieving sustainable development in exercising its functions. The Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority had been working on developing a detailed and costed plan for the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster. As part of this, the Delivery Authority was reviewing opportunities to make use of the River Thames during construction to reduce environmental and traffic impacts on the surrounding area and road networks. This included preliminary discussions with some of the relevant stakeholders, such as the Port of Tilbury and Tideway.

The work on developing a detailed and costed plan is currently paused following the decisions made by the two House Commissions in February.

The scope of the Restoration and Renewal Programme does not include the construction of the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre and the Sponsor Body has therefore not made an assessment of the potential merits of transporting construction materials and debris via the River Thames during the construction of the Memorial and Learning Centre. The UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre is a matter for the Secretary of State of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Representatives from the Programme have held preliminary discussions with representatives working on the Memorial and Learning Centre to discuss potential efficiencies in using the River Thames for both construction projects. We intend to continue these discussions once the planning process for the Memorial and Learning Centre is concluded.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-09/137246>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Ukraine: Radicalism

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [139579] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he has made an assessment of whether the Azov regiment in Ukraine's armed forces is a neo-Nazi or other far-right force.

James Heapey: We understand that the Azov battalion has an ultra-nationalist background, with founding members espousing white nationalist and ultra-nationalist views, as well as endorsing some Anti-Semitic views. Since being made a part of the Ukrainian National Guard in 2014, the battalion has made some efforts to de-politicise. All founding members left the battalion and formed a political party. We also understand that the Azov Battalion currently employs Jewish members.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-14/139579>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2867>

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2875>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2878>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

Israel Arms Trade (Prohibition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3025>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3017>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2900>

**** Nationality and Borders Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3023>

Legislative Scrutiny: Nationality and Borders Bill: Government Responses to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' Seventh, Ninth, Eleventh and Twelfth Reports

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9347/documents/160664/default/>

Online Safety Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2942>

Northern Ireland Assembly

Organ and Tissue Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/2017-2022-mandate/primary-legislation---bills-2017---2022-mandate/organ-and-tissue-donation-deemed-consent-bill/>

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

Hate Crime Legislation in Northern Ireland (closing date 28 March 2022)

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-hate-crime-legislation-northern-ireland>

Trade with Israel (closing date 30 March 2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/trade-with-israel-call-for-input>

CPS: Public interest guidance for suicide pact and 'mercy killing' type cases

(closing date 9 April 2022)

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/consultation/consultation-public-interest-guidance-suicide-pact-and-mercy-killing-type-cases-0>

TOP

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438