



National Policy Forum consultation on work, pensions and equality

June 2018

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. ASLEF is pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the Labour Party's consultation on work, pensions and equality. The Labour Party policy document on this area highlights the fact that growing numbers of families are struggling to make ends meet because of cuts to the social security system and pressures on the resources of local authorities. In-work poverty is at record high levels, real wages are lower than 10 years ago and pay gaps persist. The result is more poverty and more inequality and we are seeing a greater reliance on food banks and loans. We know that child and pensioner poverty have increased and disabled people in particular bear the brunt of austerity measures. In the workplace, young people and women are disproportionately affected by unfavourable working terms and conditions.
3. For years ASLEF has been calling for an end to austerity measures and for better protections for vulnerable and disadvantaged people. We have the most restrictive trade union legislation in the Western world and ASLEF believes that part of Labour's strategy for addressing and reversing the trend of increasing poverty and inequality must be to reverse attacks on trade unions, such as the draconian Trade Union Act of 2016 and previous anti-trade union legislation, and to meaningfully consult with trade unions about enforcing and strengthening workers' rights, particularly in light of possible Brexit-related changes to legislation. Strong trade unions can help to ensure that workers are protected, empowered and are able to defend their rights and tackle discrimination.
4. The work of union reps brings huge benefits to our economy and their work results in millions of pounds of savings to employers by reducing the number of Employment Tribunal cases,

reducing working days lost due to workplace injury and reducing work related illness. They also contribute to overall profit gains because unionised workforces that feel valued are generally more engaged and productive and are able to identify issues and suggest improvements to workplace systems. Given the important role that they play, ASLEF calls for legislation for statutory rights for trade union equality representatives' facility time.

5. As a union ASLEF has done a lot work around tackling gender and racial stereotyping in the workplace. We work with several train and freight operating companies to identify how they might encourage more women and minority groups to consider applying for positions on the railways, which is a sector traditionally dominated by white males and still perceived as such. We have also given companies feedback on areas where they could improve (e.g. providing toilet facilities for female drivers) and highlighted the value in carrying out annual equal pay audits. Another area we are building on is to mobilise and empower our young members, who are the future of our movement.
6. With an insecure and uncertain employment market for young people, investment in housing and transport could create thousands of jobs as well as creating apprenticeships, skills and training in engineering, building and other areas for the next generation. As a union we welcome apprenticeships and training as a way of getting more young people interested in a career on the railway and as a first step towards a job.
7. We are concerned that transport poverty is restricting a growing number of people who are dependent on public transport from accessing employment because fares are continually increasing while wages have stagnated. We would therefore like to see measures taken such as freezing fares and maintaining concessionary schemes for pensioners, young and unemployed people.
8. An additional barrier faced by disabled people is that they are so often denied equal access to rail travel. This restricts their employment opportunities and prevents them from integrating fully into society. We would like to see investment in making more stations step free access and we would also like to see an increase in the availability and visibility of staff on the network. Passengers like staff to be readily available to help vulnerable or disabled passengers, provide information and act as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour. Cuts to railway staff are often

counterproductive and deter people from using transport at night due to lack of assistance and concerns for their safety in empty stations.

9. To achieve Labour's aim of a just and inclusive society we need to remove the barriers that restrict opportunities and choices for vulnerable and disadvantaged people in all areas including housing, transport and work. Equal access should be at the cornerstone of Labour's transport policy, and transport operators must be forced to comply with the Equality Act 2010.

Mick Whelan  
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