
UK Gangmasters



Tackling exploitation among agricultural workers

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No legislation = worker exploitation

- Estimated 3000 gangmasters operating in UK agriculture alone
 - Employing 000s workers (status varying)
 - 3-d work: dirty, dangerous, degrading
 - Many workers indigenous but growing reliance on migrant labour
 - Absence of monitoring mechanism, failure to enforce existing law = EXPLOITATION of workers
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Solution: Change the law

- Rogue operators abused workers and undermined legitimate labour providers
 - Needed to shine a light on rogues: needed a mechanism to detect and police gangmasters
 - T&G therefore proposed Gangmasters Licensing Act: registration and licensing; tough new offences for operating without a licence or breach of law; new Agency to police the law
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How: A Coalition for change

- Key audience: government. New legislation & resources needed
 - Methodology: PMB but this to be backed by strong, x-sectoral coalition
 - T&G worked with ETI to build coalition which embraced retailers, farmers, employers (incl ALP), unions and workers reps
 - Breadth impressed government – frequent references to it in meetings and in Parliament
 - T&G also built a coalition of MPs to promote PMB in Parliament and to lobby ministers
 - Unique x-sector campaign led to initial draft Bill being strengthened and onto statute books in record time
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Benefits of coalition working

- **Influence:** impressed ministers; extended sphere of influence among opinion formers
 - **Builds trust:** deepens understanding of differing viewpoints and motivators
 - **Strength in number:** coalition members signed up to same objectives – couldn't be divided
 - **Speed:** offers a ***One Stop Shop*** for government to discuss proposals. Decisions faster
 - **Interest: Uniqueness = USP** attracted attention of media and other opinion formers
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Coalition working delivers

- PMB into strong primary legislation
- Network of contacts for continued campaigning
- Greater understanding of *plough to plate* operations – helps with media, lobbying etc
- Mechanism for consulting on issues impacting on the Act: exclusions regulations, licensing criteria, Hampton
- Strength in numbers eg when opposing limits on scope of Act, changes to GLA via Hampton

Winning law change was just the beginning – many battles ahead to maintain focus and impact of Act

Where next? The organising challenge

- Gang workers to become trade union members: organised workers best defence against exploitation
 - But many challenges presented:
 - ❑ How to locate them in geographical diverse workplaces?
 - ❑ How to access them?
 - ❑ How to support them in the workplace? (training, representation, language provision)
 - ❑ Status: documented, undocumented?
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No such thing as illegal worker

- T&G's view: Gangmasters Act protects all workers covered by it *regardless of status*
 - But workers' status is a major barrier to recruitment
 - T&G will continue to campaign for channels for legitimate working: *fewer opportunities for traffickers=fewer opportunities to exploit workers*
 - Must also press for law to be implemented – possibly extended across labour force?
 - Govt claims committed to tackling abuse: Gangmasters Act mentioned in Labour manifesto as demonstration of commitment to make life better for vulnerable workers
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Where next? - use the Gangmasters Act to organise

- Register should provide information on gangmaster activity
 - Need to be vigilant – highlight abuses; publicise breaches and celebrate successes - use the media; press GLA to be proactive and robust
 - New Act must also be promoted to give workers confidence to defend themselves against abuse
 - Unions face barriers in organising: geography, location, status and trust
 - Back to basics for unions: H&S, pay, long hours, fear – all issues in the workplace
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Organising means innovating

- T&G actively recruiting migrant workers: in Northern Ireland, in Scotland, in Wales in London
 - Recruitment tailored to workers' needs eg
 - Northern Ireland: Eastern European workers, workplace support and community integration
 - Wales: Spanish/Portuguese language teaching, community
 - London: global workforce; terms and conditions issues: decent wages, hours; union recognition at Canary Wharf
 - Daily demands for materials in vast variety of languages
 - Union moving forward on how next we can support migrant workers – shop stewards? Training? PR/visibility?
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Gangmasters Act and today's T&G

■ Conclusion

- ❑ The Act speaks volumes about today's T&G – a union for every worker
 - ❑ Coalition working deepened understanding, enhanced progress – a v worthwhile endeavour
 - ❑ But only just begun – need to safeguard the legislation, maximise its impact, promote the law to workers and employers **and** remember its original purpose – *to protect workers from exploitation*
 - ❑ *Working together we will achieve this faster*
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