

# Migrant Farm Workers in EU



Charlie Clutterbuck    National Farmworkers' Union  
(UNITE Rural & Agricultural Workers Sector)

# Background

- The role of migrant workers is the history of food and farming.
- The major crops of the world are now grown on other side of world from their evolution eg wheat: US from Mid East. Coffee (origin Africa) - now Brazil (+ Vietnam).
- This movement has in large part been due to migrant labour – Tea (China) in India using Tamil labour, Sugar (S E Asia) – slaves – Caribbean.
- Much farming would not exist without massive movement of labour.



# Farmworkers



- National farmworkers union, small part of largest union – Unite
- Represent 150,000 workers, mainly on small farms
- Yet are another 300,000 migrant workers
- Same in US – 75% their farm workers are migrant – predominantly Mexican
- Lets call these new ‘farms’ ‘Plantations’
- Plantations original thought of as only tropical (Banana, Palm Oil) Not now.

# 2 sets of standards UK/EU/USA

## Traditional forms

- Permanent workers
- Small organisations
- Often dangerous
- Community linked

## Plantations

- Casual workforce
- Completely migrant
- Large Regulated
- Field Prisons

Trouble is that need 2 sets of laws, that can then cross over. Eg Plantations owners object to paying migrant workers 1-2p more than national minimum wage, bought pressure to get rid of AWB.

Agricultural Wages Board is a national body – consisting of employers employees and lawyers, independent people) to regulate the wages of farm workers and food packers, rewarding them for improved skills.

By doing away with AWB, plantation owners win, but traditional farmworkers working on family farms suffer, as they have lost all their legal rights to structured pay rises.

# UK – overall immigration

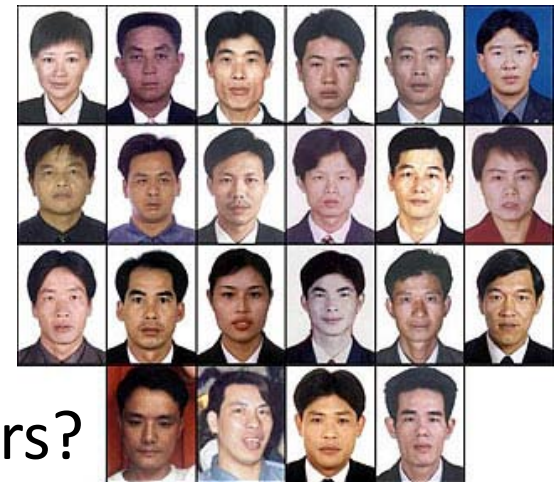


- Demand for migrant workers has increased despite rising levels of unemployment, with more than a fifth of employers planning to recruit migrant workers in the last quarter of 2011.
- However, one in six (17%) UK employers have been prevented from recruiting non-EU migrant workers due to a new cap on non-EU workers.
- With all the talk about ‘Peak Oil’ ‘Water supplies’, nobody is asking the question “What happens if ¼ million E Europeans choose to stay at home?”

# Chinese Connection



- Deaths of 20+ Chinese Cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay 2004
- What UK did as a result ?
- GLA (based on union bill/Act)
- Gangmasters Licensing Authority licenses/polices 'Labour Providers'
- Some 'traditional' farmers being classed as 'Labour Providers'.
- What lessons there may be for others?



(Cockle grounds just been shut again this week, as people not observing rules and tides)

# Role of unions

- Hard to organise in traditional farms – geographic isolation
- Can do little about H&S
- Historical antagonism between farmers and their workers



- Plantations have good HR systems
- Unions often present
- Particularly H&S
- Defend migrants, in part, in order, to stop wages undermining other union members
- However at one facility union recruited 150 members, got their holidays entitlement, only for 120 to lose their jobs.
- Got GLA Act

# EU



- EU requirements
  - in their ‘social chapter’
- UK kept out of until Labour government.
- This guarantees holidays, hours of work.
- Recently brought in law to bring parity of ‘Agency’ workers with permanent workers.
- Only for Morrison and Tesco to ‘find a Swedish loop hole’ – just last week, to avoid this law
- [EU Migrant Workers Report 2007](#)