



# Landworker

VOICE OF THE RURAL WORKER

## UNITE'S TESCO CHALLENGE – MAKE EVERY WORKER COUNT

*Unite calls on supermarket leader to make a real difference to meat supply workers*

## Unite in SNP stop SAWB scrap plea

By Amanda Campbell

The future for Scottish agricultural workers' rights is still in the balance after a Scottish parliamentary event to keep the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board (SAWB) was snubbed by the SNP government.

SNP MSPs chose not to attend the Unite event at the Scottish parliament in November, despite the importance of agriculture to Scotland's economy.

Unite, together with Labour MSPs have been campaigning hard against the ruling SNP government to keep the SAWB for fair wages and the protection of agricultural workers' rights.

The Scottish government's proposals to scrap the SAWB which under provisions of the Agricultural Wages (Scotland) Act 1949, provides fixed minimum wage rates, holiday entitlements and other conditions of service, would affect over 25,000 agricultural workers.

The plans are in sharp contrast to the recent UK government decision to keep the boards in England and Wales, where the government supported Unite's campaign.

"The SAWB constitutes a model of best practice in industrial relations," explained Unite Scotland regional secretary, **John Quigley**.

"The SNP claims it's on the side of working people but their tactics in trying to bury the SAWB's future shows otherwise.

He added, "The UK government recognises the unique conditions facing agricultural workers and the need for a collective negotiating body – so why is Alex Salmond intent on driving down Scottish agricultural workers pay to the absolute minimum? The Scottish government must think again."

Mark Thomas



Wanna play chicken? Unite raising awareness of meat supply chain workers

By Amanda Campbell

**Unite's campaign to alert shoppers as to how workers employed by companies in the UK meat supply chain are treated took a new turn in November when the union turned its focus to supermarket giant Tesco.**

Unite has launched a series of national demos outside Tesco stores to alert Tesco customers to the union's concerns about the treatment of workers who are involved in supplying meat products to the company.

Unite's message to Tesco is *Every worker counts*. The union has presented Tesco with evidence that workers in its UK supply chain are experiencing harsh and divisive conditions that in some cases are

abusive. Unite believes that structural discrimination exists in many parts of the supply chain that provides meat to Tesco.

Unite's joint general secretary, **Tony Woodley**, led the national campaign starting outside the Tesco store in London's Regent Street, sharing the stage with a number of the now world-famous Unite giant super chickens.

"This supermarket mega-giant takes £1 of every £8 spent on the UK's high streets. But many workers in its UK meat supply chain experience difficult working conditions.

"We believe that Tesco's procurement practices are creating divisions between migrant and indigenous workers across Britain

and Ireland," said Tony. "Tesco dictates the price of the contracts with its suppliers, they made profits of £2.1bn in 2007 so it cannot wash its hands of responsibility.

"It's time for Tesco to value its meat supply chain and make sure every worker counts. Unite is calling on Tesco to sign a minimum standards agreement and to establish Tesco ethical model factories. This will cost next to nothing but will make a world of difference to workers in Tesco's meat supply chain as well as establishing Tesco as an ethical leader.

"The power is in Tesco's hands to make a real difference."

The idea of ethical model factories is based on the belief that all

workers undertaking the same work, who are equally qualified, should be treated equally from the start of their employment – including being paid equally, regardless of employment status.

Unite is also committed to ensuring agency workers have a route to permanent employment following 13 weeks of continuous work.

The *Every worker counts* Tesco campaign is part of an ongoing Unite campaign to improve the treatment of all workers in the UK supermarket supply chain. Unite is concerned that agency workers are often on poorer conditions of employment than core workers and by undercutting directly-employed workers, divisions have been created. *For more see page 3.*



**Housing now!**  
Fight for quality rural council homes  
see page 7



**Missing the bus?**  
Keeping the lifelines open  
see page 11



## Light in the gloom

Despite all the doom and gloom around right now, Unite is out there campaigning hard for all our members and taking the fight to the very highest level – the government. Following the national crisis with our banks the government acted to protect mortgage holders and families – in the face of Tory opposition.

I said at the time I thought the government has shown it is listening to people's fears and helping the people of this country weather the economic storm. It is willing to embrace progressive politics and indeed we believe that Gordon Brown's recent efforts prove that New Labour is a thing of the past.

But it's paramount that the government holds its nerve and not let the banks continue as before, not caring about the terrible damage they did to UK jobs and communities.

One point of acute disappointment for me came later in November with the Queen's Speech. The fairly short programme of action did not include our Bill on agency and temporary workers. This is a missed opportunity for the government to right the injustices so many workers – especially agricultural and horticultural workers – are facing.

Landworker readers can be assured that Unite will continue in our fight for equal rights for migrant workers whose skills are so crucial for the future success of agriculture in this country.

Unite's campaign to alert shoppers as to how workers employed by UK firms continues by focusing on supermarket food giant Tesco – following our recent success in getting a minimum standards agreement signed with Marks and Spencer.

After our successful campaign to keep the agricultural wages boards in England and Wales, Unite is now fighting the cynical moves of the Scottish National Party who want to dump the Scottish agricultural wages board (and also to sell off Scottish Forestry Commission land).

And although there does seem a lot to be down about Unite is winning for rural workers, putting your issues on the agenda, and taking the fight to the very top. We won't stop making sure your voice is heard throughout the land.

*Tony Woodley*

**Tony Woodley**  
Unite joint general secretary

## We'll come running...

**When HM Prison Onley farm worker and Unite member David Thomas was attacked by inmates, prison officers broke the golden rule. They didn't come running to support a colleague in trouble. But thankfully Unite did.**

Decorated by the queen for services to health and safety, especially on pesticides like 245T, David had to pack up work through stress. Years later we are battling through the courts for justice and compensation.

When 25,000 farmworkers in Scotland see their agricultural wages board under threat and forestry workers north of the border see the land being put on the market, Unite has come running in their defence against the attacks of the Scottish National Party.

When 40,000 workers in the UK meat industry see discrimination against fellow workers, mostly migrants or agency workers – and used to undercut existing pay and conditions, Unite has taken up the cause.

Raising the banner for an industry-wide minimum standards agreement which guarantees equal treatment for meat workers, access to permanent work after 13 weeks and a cap on employment of agency workers Unite is taking on the biggest supermarket of them all, Tesco.

It's the biggest retailers ruthlessly squeezing down prices to meat suppliers who give them the excuse to hold down workers' conditions. Because of Unite action, Marks and Spencer has now signed up to minimum standards.

The supermarkets can't claim their 'ethical' stripes without ensuring ethical

model factories in their meat supply chain. That's the way to make every worker count... just as Unite does when you call out our name.



**Chris Kaufman**  
Unite national secretary  
rural, agricultural and allied workers

## Forest pay chop

By Mike Pentelow

**Forestry union members are bracing themselves for an attack on their real pay from the government.**

Originally there were indications that the Treasury was going to limit the Forestry Commission to make a pay offer of no more than two per cent, even though inflation was at 4.5 per cent. Now it's being cut to "significantly below two per cent" and conditional on divisive restructuring, said Edward Shephard, secretary of the Forestry Commission joint trade unions.

A "day of action" by PCS was suspended for a month in November when the cabinet office agreed to talks on civil service pay as a whole. "Forestry workers provide a healthy and educational environment for millions of visitors, as well as timber," said Unite's **Chris Kaufman**. "They must be paid a proper rate." But as *Landworker* went to press there was little sign of anything positive.

• **Forests under hammer – see page 8**



Paul Carter: www.reportdigital.co.uk

## Landworker Luminaries

TWO LANDWORKER luminaries with a quarter of a century total service to our award-winning rural workers paper were thanked and celebrated at last month's RAAW National Trade Group Committee. Retiring Editor Mike Pentelow (right) and designer Dave Turner (left) were presented with encribed tankards for their magnificent work over a sustained period. 'It's been a pleasure' said modest Mike, 'working for such an active group. There's always been such a lot to report on.'



**unite**

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# Chickens come home

*A new rights commission will investigate Unite evidence of exploiting workers in the meat supply chain*

By Mike Pentelow

Mark Thomas



From an earlier protest – now new inquiry to look at two-tier labour market

**Unite has welcomed an official inquiry into discrimination against agency workers in the meat processing sector. This will be the first ever inquiry conducted by the newly formed equality and human rights commission.**

It will be examining evidence of a two-tier labour market and the possible causes of it – such as supermarket pricing policies which force their meat suppliers to drive down costs. “This is a watershed moment for workers,” believes Unite deputy general secretary **Jack Dromey**.

“Our union has organised tens of thousands of workers in food and agriculture as part of a drive to unite all workers around fair and equal treatment of all workers,” he explains.

“We have spotlighted the two-tier labour market in the meat industry where there are more and more agency workers – overwhelmingly migrant ones – on poorer terms and conditions of employment, and the directly employed workers who have been here for generations seeing conditions falling.

“The commission will now investigate discriminatory patterns of employment that divide and it will call to account not just the employers, but also the supermarkets.”

This means that supermarkets can no longer claim to be ethical if they drive down costs along their supply chain, creating that pattern of structural discrimination.

“We are determined to win an agreement for minimum standards across the meat industry, which employs 40,000 workers, which will deliver equal treatment of agency workers and directly employed ones,” adds Jack.

## Temporary scandal

Unite also wants an end to the scandal of temporary workers not being given permanent contracts after up to four years’ working. Unite’s meat sector Combine chair, **Scot Walker**, who works for Vion near Glasgow agrees.

“The employers say they need temporary labour to fill in during short term peaks in production,” he told Landworker. “We recognise there is a need for that – but it should be on the same terms and conditions as other

workers, not poorer ones.”

There are some instances of agency workers being employed for two years or more. Unite believes that after 13 weeks the employment should be made permanent, but there is significant resistance to this from employers.

There are several ways agency workers are exploited. Scot says, “The agencies provide workers with sub-standard overcrowded housing at exorbitant costs, and charge them for services such as cleaning which are not in fact provided.

“They also compel the workers to use agency transport to the work sites, again at considerable cost to the workers, who in rural areas have no other option.

“If after they have been dropped off at the workplace there is no work for them that day, they have to wait 12 hours until the transport comes to pick them up again.

“If they complain they find themselves out on their ears, with no employment and being thrown out of their accommodation.”

The new inquiry into the industry, Scot believes, “is incredibly important for workers in the meat sector. We welcome the chance to give evidence to the inquiry as we know the bad practices that exist.

“The procurement policies of the supermarkets are driving down prices to suppliers, which makes them cut costs in employment. Permanent workers are being undercut by agency labour and even being replaced by them. It’s really damaging for members working in the sector.

“When we have taken cases of exploitation and discrimination to employers they sometimes respond with short term solutions, but the framework which causes the abuses is still there. And that has been bred by the supermarket procurement policies.

“This inquiry has the ability to make recommendations if it uncovers structural discrimination and could prove this is a direct consequence of the supermarkets’ actions.”

# Our survey says...

By Mike Pentelow

## Supermarket shoppers back Unite campaign in shock survey results.

According to a major survey a massive majority of supermarket customers support the fair treatment of workers who supply their food.

The survey, conducted by Vision Twentyone, reveals that a whopping 94 per cent of Tesco customers interviewed think supermarkets should ensure workers doing the same or similar jobs in the supply chain should be treated equally. Nearly 90 per cent were disappointed meat workers were on very poor conditions and treated unequally.

And almost three quarters said they would consider changing to another supermarket if their present one had a poor record of treatment of workers in its supply chain.

Significantly, over half said they would definitely consider changing from Tesco to another retailer over the supermarket’s treatment of workers.

The survey was commissioned by Unite, as part of its campaign for a minimum standards agreement for agency workers. Unite recently negotiated such a deal with Marks & Spencer and is now targeting Tesco. And evidence from the survey greatly strengthens the campaign.

## Label libel!

The survey also shows huge public support for clearer labelling of food – on both its country of origin and freshness.

This is another issue Unite is campaigning on. Much of the meat labelled “made in the UK” is in fact from abroad, but processed in this country. And much that is labelled “fresh” has in fact been frozen and then thawed.

When told a label on meat saying “made in the UK from assured farms” could mean it was actually sourced from Brazil or Thailand, over 90 per cent of shoppers said they were unaware of this and disappointed about it.

Three quarters would consider changing their choice of retailer if they found they had unknowingly bought meat sourced in Brazil or Thailand. And 70 per cent were disappointed that meat from abroad was not as prominently labelled as such compared to meat from the UK.

On the question of freshness, over 90 per cent were disappointed that some meat products that appear to be fresh or chilled may have been “cooked abroad, frozen, then thawed and packed for sale in the UK.”



Shoppers back union survey

www.papfotos.com

By Mike Pentelow

# Fruits of our low-paid labour

Low pay means skills shortages means food lies rotten and forgotten in the field



Something rotten in the state of our agriculture?

**Thousands of tonnes of fruit and vegetables were left rotting in British fields this year simply because there was not enough skilled labour to bring in the harvest.**

Unite has long maintained that low pay would lead to a skills shortage crisis in agriculture and horticulture, even as recently as in the 2008 pay talks. Now the shortages are biting, with retailers forced to import more food in 2008 – according to a survey by the National Farmers' Union (NFU).

The NFU seasonal labour survey revealed growers had lost

an average of £140,000 each because of a shortage of workers.

"Our survey shows that losses this year are far greater than last year," said NFU's Richard Hirst. "This indicates business confidence is now being shaken by the concerns over insufficient seasonal labour."

He called on the government to allow more migrant workers under the seasonal agricultural workers scheme (SAWS), and not to end it as planned in 2010.

But the cause of the crisis runs far deeper, as was pointed

out after the 2008 agricultural wages board pay award of 4.3 per cent, by Unite's food and agriculture officer, **Chris Kaufman**.

"My strong fear is that it is far too little to counter the growing labour crisis which has seen migrant workers returning home, and an ageing workforce (with half over the age of 55) not being replaced by young workers," he said.

"We will continue to sound the alarm that food security is at severe risk at home and abroad as the skilled and unskilled labour shortages intensify."

## MARK OF SUCCESS!

By Amanda Campbell

**A 17 year old Romany, with only five years of formal primary education, was recently named best horticulture and landscape design student of his year group at Oatridge College in West Lothian.**

**Mark McKenzie**, whose family has a home at Fauldhouse in West Lothian but spends much of the year on the road, decided to go to college.

Since Mark was just 10 years old he has worked in his father's garden landscaping business, which takes the family all over the UK and Europe. He came top of his class at Oatridge after studying for a certificate in landscape construction and design.

He has now returned to college, to study part-time for his higher national certificate in landscape management.

Mark was 15 when he took the decision to study. He says, "I can't think of another trav-

eller who has done it, but I just knew that I wanted to better myself.

"I was a bit scared when I went to the Oatridge open day, because I didn't know if I was up to the standard of literacy and numeracy that was needed, but I decided I could give it a try. I was at a bit of a disadvantage because I had no real secondary schooling, but I had the advantage of a lot of practical experience of working, and in the end I came through with flying colours."

The only formal education Mark received after primary school was two months of distance learning organised by Save the Children, making his achievement all the more remarkable. Mark is also a keen activist for travellers' rights.

"I'm very proud of what I am," he says. "We have a long heritage and a culture that has been handed down for hundreds of years. Being a traveller means that within limits, you can go where you want and be what

you want. There may be some, a tiny minority, who cause problems, but that's the same in all societies and all I want is to see travellers being treated the same as everyone else."

But life in Scotland and elsewhere is not always pleasant for travellers. "About a year and a half ago our caravans at Livingston were stoned by a gang of teenagers and windows were smashed and so on. That shouldn't happen."

He says, "I'm just here to do my best and it seems to be paying off. Once I finish this course I would like to be allowed to go to Ohio State University in America to continue my studies there.

"I've no intention of abandoning my Romany background or the way of life. Everyone I know, friends, all my uncles, everyone, is involved in landscaping and that's all I have ever wanted to do. Luckily all my family and friends are supporting me."

Mark – now has a future in agriculture



# Better trained, better paid

**Unite's Chris Kaufman is urging all agricultural and horticultural workers to improve their skills – and so increase their pay – through the training opportunities available in the industry's new career structure.**

This was negotiated by the union in 2005 and enables those entering the industry on the lowest grade of £5.74 an hour to increase their pay by almost 50 per cent, to £8.45 an hour on the top grade.

And about 40,000 are entitled to an immediate rise of 10.4 per cent (65p an hour or £26

a week). That is the estimated number of those who are being paid £6.24 an hour as a standard worker (grade 2) but have the experience to be paid £6.89 an hour as a lead worker (grade 3) if they can prove their qualifications.

But workers will not get the better pay they deserve until they inform the employer and produce their qualifications – there is no back pay to when they qualified for the increases.

These qualifications can be obtained through courses run by the national proficiency tests council, which is at Stoneleigh Park,

Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, CV8 2LG (tel 02476 857300, email [information@nptc.org.uk](mailto:information@nptc.org.uk), web [www.nptc.org.uk](http://www.nptc.org.uk))

Most of the courses are also run by Lantra Awards, at Lantra House, Stoneleigh Park, near Coventry, Warwickshire, CV8 2LG (tel 02476 419703, email [awards@lantra.co.uk](mailto:awards@lantra.co.uk), web [www.lantra-awards.co.uk](http://www.lantra-awards.co.uk))

Lantra, the skills council for land based industries, also offers eight apprenticeship schemes in the rural and agriculture sector. Those who wish to find out what apprenticeships are available in their area should call Lantra

Connect on 0845 707 8007, or call the free helpline on 08000 150 600 (or visit the web on [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)).

These qualifications – and proof of other practical experience in the industry – can then be recorded on a 'skills passport' to help get work. It was launched in 2008 by Lantra, and Land-Force (a website dedicated to jobs in the land sector).

More information about it can be found through Lantra (contact details above) or Land-Force, 105 London Street, Reading, Berks, RG1 4QD (tel 0870 770 1107, web [www.land-force.org.uk](http://www.land-force.org.uk)).

## What skills do you need to go up a grade?

### Grade 1 (initial grade) on £5.74 an hour

After 30 weeks' continuous employment with the same employer you have a right to training to qualify for Grade 2 at the employer's expense.

### Grade 2 (standard worker) on £6.24 an hour

You qualify if you work without a supervisor, with animals, control machinery, or drive a tractor. If not, you need one vocational qualification from Table 1 or one relevant certificate of competence from Table 2.

### Grade 3 (lead worker) on £6.89 an hour

You need either four certificates from Table 2 or one qualification from Table 3. You must also have worked in agriculture for two out of the last five years or for the same employer continuously for six months.

### Grade 4 (craft) on £7.39 an hour

You need eight certificates from Table 2 or one qualification from Table 4 (there are also proficiency tests in categories for agriculture, horticulture and forestry). You must also have worked in agriculture for two out of the last five years or by the same employer continuously for a year.

### Grade 5 (supervisory) on £7.83 an hour

You have to have day-to-day responsibility for supervising work and implementing management decisions, or have responsibility for the instruction and supervision of staff.

### Grade 6 (farm management) on £8.45 an hour

You must have management responsibility for an entire farm (or part of it run as a separate business), or have responsibility for employing, disciplining and dismissing staff.

### TABLE 1

- certificate in horticultural skills (formerly City and Guilds horticultural skills tests)
- certificate in land-based studies
- national vocational qualifications or scot-tish vocational qualifications at level 2 in:
  - agricultural crop production
  - livestock production
  - livestock production (beef)
  - livestock production (dairy)
  - livestock production (pigs)
  - livestock production (poultry)
  - livestock production (sheep)
- mixed farming
- production horticulture
- forestry (establishment)
- forestry (harvesting)
- arboriculture
- BTEC first diploma in agriculture\*
- BTEC first diploma in horticulture\*
- apprenticeship in agricultural crops and livestock (previously foundation modern apprenticeship)
- apprenticeship in production horticulture (previously foundation modern apprenticeship)
- apprenticeship in trees & timber (previously foundation modern apprenticeship)

\*awarded by Edexcel (which can be contacted at One90 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BH; 0844 576 0028; [www.edexcel.org.uk](http://www.edexcel.org.uk)).

### TABLE 2

- tractor driving & related operations
- fork lift truck operations
- safe operation of all terrain vehicles (atvs)
- machine maintenance & related operations
- vertebrate pest control
- granular fertiliser application
- safe use of pesticides
- safe use of mowers
- safe use of hedge trimmers
- safe use of pedestrian controlled two-wheel tractors
- safe use of abrasive wheel machines
- safe use of plant machinery
- safe operation of dumper trucks
- basic stockmanship & welfare
- milking & dairy hygiene
- pig husbandry skills
- pig unit supervision
- livestock husbandry
- transport of livestock for drivers/attendants
- safe use of sheep dips
- safe use of veterinary medicines
- planning and supervising the safe use of veterinary medicines
- artificial insemination (cattle)
- sheep shearing
- chainsaw and related operations (felling small trees)
- chainsaw and related operations (felling medium trees)
- chainsaw and related operations (felling large trees)
- chainsaw and related operations (felling severe windblown stems)
- stump grinding operations
- brush cutting operations
- brushwood chipper operations
- forest machine operations (harvesting)
- forest machine operations (forwarding)
- forest machine operations (skidding)
- forest machine operations (establishment)
- certificate in working safely in agriculture/horticulture
- certificate in controlling risks to health and safety in agriculture/horticulture
- certificate in managing people's health and safety in agriculture/horticulture
- first aid at work

### TABLE 3

- national certificate in agriculture
- national certificate in horticulture

### TABLE 4

- level 3 agricultural crop production
- level 3 livestock production
- level 3 livestock production (beef)
- level 3 livestock production (dairy)
- level 3 livestock production (pigs)
- level 3 livestock production (poultry)
- level 3 livestock production (sheep)
- level 3 mixed farming
- advanced national certificate in agriculture
- BTEC national certificate in agriculture\*
- BTEC level 3 production horticulture
- advanced national certificate in horticulture
- BTEC national certificate in horticulture\*
- BTEC national diploma in horticulture\*
- level 3 treework (forestry establishment)
- level 3 treework (forestry harvesting)
- level 3 treework (arboriculture)
- BTEC national diploma in forestry and arboriculture\*
- BTEC national certificate in forestry and arboriculture\*
- BTEC higher national certificate/diploma in agriculture\*
- BTEC higher national certificate/diploma in horticulture\*
- BTEC higher national certificate/diploma in countryside management\*
- advanced apprenticeship in agricultural crops and livestock (previously advanced modern apprenticeship)
- advanced apprenticeship in production horticulture (previously advanced modern apprenticeship)

\*awarded by Edexcel (which can be contacted at One90 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BH; 0844 576 0028; [www.edexcel.org.uk](http://www.edexcel.org.uk)).



By Amanda Campbell

By Mark Metcalf

# SAWS TO EXTEND?



**The government is set to consider raising the quota of migrant workers allowed into the UK under the seasonal agricultural workers scheme (SAWS) and extending the time workers can stay from six to nine months.**

Speaking in a short debate in the House of Commons, in November, immigration minister Phil Woolas said government policies needed to recognise that where necessary, migration can address labour shortages when they arise.

"The public would not understand what was happening if they saw that fruit and crops were not being picked," he said.

The minister said he had to report back to the European Commission by the end of 2008 on what impact the possible relaxation of current restrictions on Bulgarian and Romanian workers' access to the labour market could have on labour supply.

He acknowledged that the labour issue had wider implications, for instance on food miles and carbon footprints. "We cannot square those circles without a vibrant, prosperous British agriculture sector," he said. "That means we must have labour – there's no getting away from that."

"Technology can of course make changes – but I have yet to see a machine that can pick strawberries as well as students."

Industry groups including the NFU have welcomed the minister comments. NFU spokesperson Philip Hudson said Phil Woolas' response gave him cause for optimism. "He showed a willingness to listen to the industry's concerns."

## Agri-pass visit

**The 'agri-pass project' which enables employees to apply for jobs in other EU countries through the internet was explained by German trade unionists to Landworker's Ian Beeby recently.**

Thomas Hentschel, of the IGBAU trade union is doing a research project on migrant workers in Germany, the Czech Republic, and Spain. Ian showed Thomas and his family the conditions for migrant workers at G's Marketing, in Cambridgeshire.

The farm and pack house employs 5,000 seasonal workers picking salad crops for the main supermarkets. "G's Marketing is one of the best firms that I have come across for treating their migrant workers well," said Ian. "They have their own sports hall and have regular social events and good permanent accommodation."

Also on the visit were NFU's Michael Britten, and Lantra's Madge Moore – the two main people dealing with the agri-pass system in this country. It was a helpful meeting for all concerned.

# Too scared to join the union?

*Agriculture needs migrant workers, and the workers need a union. But are many now just too scared?*

"Gaining the confidence of workers from different communities can take a long time and for every two steps forward we usually have to take one back" said a clearly disappointed Unite regional organiser **Ray Jones** after, despite their initial agreement, he was unable to persuade a group of migrant agricultural workers from across North Yorkshire to be interviewed for the *Landworker*.

"Quite simply they are terrified of losing their jobs. And although I've assured them they won't be named they believe that the agencies they are employed by will still be able to identify them from any article and then will dismiss them to prevent the union organising" says Ray.

Yet without Unite, the workers, mainly from Poland and Lithuania, are certain to continue to be mercilessly exploited and it's clearly in both their own interests and Unite's that they join as soon as possible.

"We know from talking to workers that some have ended up with as little as £38 take home pay after a 60 hour working week. The agency employing them has charged them £110 each for sharing with three others in a caravan parked on the farmer's land where they are working.

"Some of these workers have been charged £350 for a bus journey from Krakow in Poland to the United Kingdom and have found that their guaranteed job has disappeared within two days. They are therefore desperate for any kind of work and the agencies are able to handsomely profit from their labours," says Ray.

In such a situation relatively small victories can be vital as they help build workers confidence in Unite.

"Getting the agencies to pay migrant workers the holiday pay they've earned has been incredibly difficult. I was delighted when just recently I rang

up on behalf of a worker who'd told me she'd been constantly refused holiday pay and the agency accepted she was owed some money. She got £800 and that victory will gradually become known amongst other migrant workers within the Polish community in which she lives," adds Ray.

### Organise!

Unite now has two Polish speaking organisers in Yorkshire and Humberside whose support at disciplinary meetings has been increasingly welcomed within the community.

One of them, **Andrzej Zaborowski**, originally from Gdansk says that he is, "keen to make sure Polish workers know they can join Unite and link up with other workers of different nationalities to improve wages and conditions for both."

Ray Jones believes it's the way forward. "It's a massive help that we've got people from the communities, to become Unite organisers. We've probably had 20 meetings in the Polish Community Centre in Leeds and we are still struggling at times to get people to buy into the union.

"But I must say that the Saturday morning health and safety sessions we've held recently have been well attended which is pleasing" says Ray who admits to being sickened at the sight of workers being forced to queue outside agencies in Leeds each morning to see if there's work for them.

"I think we are making progress, even though it's much slower than I'd like. If we had employment protection for the workers from day one it would help, as if a worker was then unfairly dismissed we could go to industrial tribunal. Our main aim though remains convincing the workers to join in good numbers and then later getting people to be elected as union reps to negotiate with management," he adds.



**Andrzej Zaborowski – migrant workers should join Unite**



Hands off our housing – at the DCH conference

Real houses for rural workers – more council homes needed

# Social housing is a rural issue

The fight for more, high quality, council housing to be built in rural towns and villages continues

By Keith Hatch

**Amongst 200 trade unionists, tenants and councillors who travelled from 53 local authorities for November's Defend Council Housing (DCH) conference in London, Unite members let their voices be heard.**

Over 1.7 million people nationally are waiting for an affordable home – an estimated 700,000 people in the countryside. The number of homeless households in rural areas has more than doubled during the past five years.

Unite deputy general secretary **Jack Dromey** addressed the packed hall and said the tide had turned, but more needed to be done. "There is a desperate need and now £8m is being invested in three million new homes.

"Councils must buy up empty homes being built by developers, and build more new homes, decent council housing, that people want to live in. This is a defining moment in our country and housing. Government must act to meet our housing needs and promote the construction industry."

Conference organiser **Alan Walter** commented, "The conference showed a determination by tenants and trade unionists across the UK to stop privatisation, and win investment in council housing. We should be proud that there are still nearly 2.5 million council tenants today – we've proved those who predicted the 'end of council housing' wrong!"

He added, "The private market in housing has failed working people in the countryside. Instead of unconditionally bailing out bankers, developers and builders government needs to dictate clear terms. The quickest way to provide secure housing that is genuinely affordable to working people and to give a boost to the economy is to start building a new generation of first class council homes."

## Devastating effect

The shortage of affordable housing in rural areas is having a devastating effect on countryside communities. Counties in the south west are being particularly badly hit, as small, picture postcard villages become the target of second home owners.

Dorset has been highlighted as one of the worst places. Many

young people are priced out of the market while retiring workers in tied cottages face the prospect of having to leave villages and move nearby towns. Average house prices are more than 15 times local incomes, one in 30 homes was a second home and waiting lists had doubled in five years.

**Richard Nicholls**, chair of Dorset CPRE, said, "The problem is that the planning system is up against providing housing for rural workers. There shouldn't be a big issue, it's estimated that if you build five or six houses per village you will sort out the shortage. But most low cost rural homes are built by contractors to get planning permission for more expensive housing developments.

"With the credit crunch contractors are dropping expensive schemes, meaning low cost housing isn't being built either. Then you have the second home syndrome, which is particularly bad in areas like Dorset, Cornwall and Devon. We need the reintroduction of proper council housing."

The nature of rural work, with its tendency to be short-term, low wage and seasonal, makes things difficult for those trying to stay in the villages where they grew up, and makes control rented housing vital.

If we fail to secure accommodation for people on low pay and suffering poor conditions in the countryside, the danger is that local communities will die off. We would have a 'virtual countryside', full of pretty villages with no one living in them.

## Get involved

**Paul Kimber** is a Unite branch secretary and local councillor in Weymouth. He's dealt with housing issues as a union rep and believes rural members need to get involved.

"I recently chaired a group looking at housing policy in Weymouth and Portland for the next eight years. The credit crunch will mean a bigger call than ever for social housing as people find they can't pay their mortgages.

"We need to act locally and the way to approach this is by union members and branches getting involved with local authorities – by letter, council meetings, Parish Councils or meeting with local councillors – to find out what they are doing about it."

Paul believes, "Money isn't really the problem – the government has allocated money. The difficulty in rural areas is that once you say you'll build social housing there is a certain amount of snob value.

"The debate on housing is now more relevant than ever. Most rural councils have handed over stock to housing associations, which is not ideal, but there is democracy in housing associations, and as these control most rural social housing we should be getting involved."

## Tied story

**Bob Lanning**, a Unite organiser based in Bournemouth, is regularly called on to support retiring farmworkers living in tied cottages.

"In the majority of recent cases, the farmer's cottage is on or adjacent to the main farm," report Bob. "If it's a farm dealing with livestock then these cottages are needed for existing employees.

"The main problem for retiring farmworkers is if they chose to remain in the property once they retire. In a great many cases the farm owner calls in the fair rent assessor, resulting in the rent being set at the current market value. From the size and location of most of these properties, the rent becomes either unaffordable or a huge drain on their resources.

"The alternative can be reliance on local services ie the council. This could result in being moved away from the community that you have lived in for a great many years."

Bob supports members in whatever way he can, but admits this can be pretty limited. "The best assistance would be for more affordable rural housing for both purchase and to rent."

**• If you can't find affordable housing, have had to move to find a home or are facing an uncertain retirement without secure accommodation, Landworker wants to know. Write to Landworker, Unite, 35 King Street, London, WC2E 8JG. Or phone 020 7420 8947 or email landworkerletters@unitetheunion.com**

# Scottish forests under the hammer

By Mike Pentelow

## SNP plans shameful sale of our woodland

**A plan to hive off 25 per cent of Scotland's public forests to commercial interests has been vigorously opposed by forestry commission unions.**

The proposal is being made by the Scottish National Party (SNP) government to raise £200m, which it says will be used to fight climate change. But this is just a "red herring" to camouflage the real purpose of raising revenue, says **Robert Beaney**, chair of the forestry unions and forestry members in Unite.

At least 200 jobs could be at stake, and commercial exploitation of the forests could in fact increase climate change, said members of Unite's national forestry committee in November.

The proposal is to lease the land to private companies for 75 years. At present the publicly owned forestry commis-

sion is committed to selling timber at whatever the market price, and also protecting the environment by safeguarding wildlife, promoting green energy, and keeping areas open for recreational use.

It is unlikely private interests would be motivated to do any of this, said members of the national committee.

"The forestry commission is committed to provide timber whatever the market price," said **Chris Tucker**. "Private companies will just keep it if the price is low, and wait until it goes up again before offering it for sale."

"Nor will they be interested in protecting wildlife or keeping land open for public recreation as it does not make a profit. They will just drop all that and that will make the climate worse."

Robert Beaney said, "The unions are fully in favour of protecting the environment but don't see how this will help. We feel that climate change is just a red herring and this is really just to get money."

"The forestry commission supports partnerships that produce wind farms and hydro plants for the benefit of the environment. It is unlikely multinationals interested only in profit will persevere with this. So climate change will in fact suffer from these proposals."

"There could be about 200 forestry commission jobs or more at stake going to foreign multinationals. And although there are rules supposed to protect employment of those transferred they are full of loopholes."

The unions have already got the support of Labour's environmental spokesperson in Scotland, Sarah Boyack. "This is not a minor change, it's a fundamental shift which would see over a quarter of our public forests being managed by big forestry companies," she said.

"Effectively the SNP would be selling off our family silver and handing it over to big overseas firms."



# Campbell campaign boost

By Mitch Howard

**Landworker's campaign to raise £10,000 to help member Oliver Campbell clear his name of murder was boosted in November when an important union committee voted to make a donation.**

Unite T&G region I finance and general purposes committee, which covers the south east and East Anglia, agreed to contribute £500 to Oliver's cause.

Oliver Campbell was convicted in 1991 of shooting an off licence owner in Hackney during an armed robbery. At the police station, without a lawyer present, Oliver had made a confession which he later withdrew.

He served 11 years before being released on licence. He is an active agricultural section member and lives in Ipswich.

His lawyer needs £10,000 to take the case forward, including engaging a clinical psychologist who could provide expert evidence to show how Oliver was led to confess to a crime he did not commit.

**John Fitzpatrick**, chair Unite T&G region I's race equality committee, said, "The committee decision is good news for the appeal which we are now taking out to branches."

After hearing Oliver speak at the region's Black history month event in October, John is convinced of the man's innocence. "We showed the DVD about Oliver's case and then he explained the issues to the meeting."

"When you meet him you realise that Oliver is incapable of this crime. I urge all members to support this appeal for our member who has a learning disability and who needs to clear his name."

Oliver's branch secretary **Teresa Mackay**, added, "Oliver received a positive response from members at the Black history month event who identified with what he has gone through. Requests have been coming in for the free campaign DVD which explains the case in a dramatic way."

- To get your copies of the DVD and **Landworker** article explaining Oliver's case, call Teresa Mackay on 020 8800 4281 or email [Teresa.Mackay@unitetheunion.com](mailto:Teresa.Mackay@unitetheunion.com)
- **Landworker** urges members to contribute to the appeal by sending a cheque made out to "Unite (Oliver Campbell)" to Alex Ryan, Finance Department, Unite, Transport House, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN.

## Cuba Solidarity Campaign



## Cycle Cuba Challenge

22 April - 04 May 2009

Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution

Unique sponsored cycle ride to raise funds for vital educational equipment. Deliver aid direct to a school for visually impaired children in Havana.

Cycle an exhilarating 370km to the salsa beat. Experience dramatic landscapes and vibrant Cuban culture first hand. Meet the Cuban people at cultural and workplace visits. Special invitation to attend May Day Rally addressed by Raúl Castro in Plaza de la Revolución.

£199 registration fee plus minimum sponsorship.

Full details and registration pack contact: [tours@cuba-solidarity.org.uk](mailto:tours@cuba-solidarity.org.uk)  
[www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/tours](http://www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/tours) Tel: 020 8800 0155

In aid of the Music Fund for Cuba. Registered charity 1096283

# A model of sustainable agriculture?

Cuba's simple farming methods have proved astonishingly successful

By Mike Pentelow

**A massive delivery of land from the state to farm workers was the first action decided by the new Cuban government last year (2008).**

"At least half a million more hectares can be delivered to the people," said Cuban environmentalist **Roberto Perez** in an interview with *Landworker*.

"We realise we need more farmers and people in land because food production is key at this time," he said, "and there is more land available than people working it, so it is a real challenge."

"As long as people can produce food they will have access to the land and be able to build their houses there. We are hoping this will encourage more to take up farming."

This latest phase of land reform and decentralisation is currently being discussed in a grass roots consultation of the people through meetings in councils, communities and workplaces, he added.

There are two strong incentives to farm the land, said Roberto, apart from being the highest paid workers. "One is that most people spend 80 per cent of their income on food, so they can save that if they produce their own."

"The other is that they can now trade most of their produce in markets, whereas before they could sell only ten per cent of it."

"As a result agricultural workers are paid on average three to four times the minimum wage from selling food. In fact they make more money than doctors or university professors."

There are three key priorities for the new government that took over when Fidel Castro stepped down in February, 2008. The first is further land distribution to the people; second is further transformation to sustainable agriculture; and third is the urban agricultural movement. Land distribution started when the revolution succeeded in 1959.

"Under the Batista dictatorship the big companies and families that owned the land brought in cheap labour from outside rather than hire Cubans," said Roberto.

"This caused misery in the countryside, so the peasants and rural workers – 60 per cent of the population, were very active in fighting for the revolution."

"After Batista was overthrown the new government reduced the maximum size of private farms to 27 hectares (56 acres). In the process most of the land which had been in the hands of American companies and a dozen Cuban landowning families was delivered to more than 200,000 Cuban families."

"Many of them preferred to move to towns rather than be farmers so gave their land to the government. By 1970 about 75 per cent of the land was in the hands of the government."

"This was when Cuba started the process of using conventional agricultural machinery, pesticides, and toxic fertilisers, and concentrated on producing sugar cane and tobacco for export to Eastern European countries in exchange for petrol and food."

"That support was lost in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Not only did we lose oil, but also spare parts for agricultural machinery, and markets for our sugar and tobacco products."

Having needed to produce just 20 per cent of its own food Cuba suddenly needed to produce it all as the Eastern European imports stopped, and the American blockade prevented supplies from other countries. This all had to be achieved without petrol fuelled machinery, or chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

## Sustainable

So the massive transformation from conventional methods to organic and sustainable agriculture was forced on the country to feed its population.

"The government realised that access to the land rather than its ownership was all important," continued Roberto. "So it delivered an extra 30 per cent, about 150,000 hectares, to different groups of people growing food in basic units and co-operative production."

"Before these changes small individual farms took up only 14 per cent of the land, and co-operatives another 9 per cent. But the small individual farms became four times more productive than the huge government farms."

## Organic

So 40 per cent of state farms were redistributed and organic methods were introduced. Now 80 per cent is

organic, which needs just five per cent of the previous amount of pesticides and fertilisers. More workers are also needed.

"More than 350,000 people work in food production, and five million out of the population of 11 million are in agriculture," said Roberto. "People use oxen instead of machinery." The oxen do not compact the soil or pollute the atmosphere as much as tractors.

"As a result Cuba's carbon footprint is small enough to be sustained by the planet's ecological systems – in fact a WWF report has said that Cuba is the only country in the planet that has the minimum requirements for sustainable development."

"And it has all proved to be a more efficient way of producing food," added Roberto.

This has all been supplemented by the urban garden movement. Originally an ad hoc response to the food shortage crisis of the 1990s it's now an integral part of the system, by using allotments and any open ground in urban areas for growing fresh fruit and vegetables.

"In 2005 we produced more than four million tons of vegetables in town streets," stated Roberto. "About 70 per cent of Havana's vegetable needs were produced inside the city." Overall urban gardens provide over 80 per cent of the country's vegetables, freeing up the countryside for more starch crops, such as rice."

All this has greatly improved the Cuban diet. Life expectancy is the same as in America, yet they consume just an eighth of the energy.

The current consultation of the Cuban people will also be considering how to make the ministries of agriculture, sugar and food more efficient.

"The last 20 years have been very hard, but we are still here, alive and kicking. Now we need to think together, about finding a way, and getting ready for life without Fidel."

\* Roberto Perez is the environmental and biodiversity conservation director of the Antonio Nunez Jimenez Foundation in Cuba.



Back to the land – simple organic methods have made Cuba's agricultural sector a runaway success

Roberto Perez

# A fascinating tale

*The T&G Story – a history of the Transport and General Workers Union 1922 – 2007, by Andrew Murray*

IT was almost unbearably moving. Families in London's Chinatown gathered four years ago in a memorial ceremony for their lost sons and daughters drowned in Morecambe Bay while cockle picking. The chilling picture endures – the cold waters rising as they phoned home to China on their mobiles whilst desperately hoping for help nearby.

As one of the few outsiders present, I offered the meagre comfort that the imminent passage into law of the gangmasters' licensing act would mean never again could such workers be so callously exploited, and their deaths would not have been in vain. It was because our union was identified with this fight that I had been invited.

Long time Landworker readers will know the RAAW in the T&G (and its predecessor the national union of agricultural and allied workers) had campaigned for 50 years for such controls. Joan Maynard MP had nearly succeeded.

Coming back with the increased clout and resources of the T&G in the new millennium, had enabled us to assemble an impressive industrial and political coalition – including supermarkets, legitimate gangmasters, NFU and cross-party support – which held on for victory.

It showed how the aims of countless union members trying to protect and advance their living standards could be translated into the political action needed to achieve those goals.

**Andrew Murray's** book charts the progress of many such campaigns, spanning the years from 1922, the foundation of the Transport and General Workers Union to 2007,

its merger with Amicus to form Unite. It shows the breadth of the T&G's reach into so many industries and social, economic and geographical areas; and the depth of its roots, going back to the Tolpuddle Martyrs (our union joined the T&G in 1982), coachmakers and building workers of the early 19th century.

## Giants

Giants of the past come to life – from West Country farmworker Ernie Bevin who's genius welded the 1922 mergers of transport and dockers' unions into the carefully balanced regional and industrial structures of the T&G; Frank Cousins and Jack Jones who saw the union's strength and influence grow as they put their faith in lay activists and stewards.

In Murray's own opening words, "The Transport and General Workers Union holds a central place in the history of 20th century Britain and Ireland. It was the largest, most representative and important working-class organisation in Britain for much of the century, and its influence ...helped shape the broad social development of the country."

Skilfully interweaving the union's industrial struggles with their historical background, through war and peacetime, the T&G is a constant presence, adapting to changing landscapes – to the present day globalisation where we have to organise across international boundaries.

Ours is a story to be proud of. The unsung army of thousands of volunteer reps who give up their time and energy to speak up for their fellow workers on pay, safe and decent working conditions, rural services.

By **Chris Kaufman**

What other organisations can attract millions of subscribers and train up their reps in the skills they need? Media moguls, landed interests and millionaires hate us because we challenge their idea of the natural order – and their power.

You're never far from a fellow T&G/Unite member. Others will later write more considered histories of the union. But Murray has spun a fascinating tale of a remarkable organisation. A tribute to its millions of members over the years and their power to move mountains when the times and tactics are right.

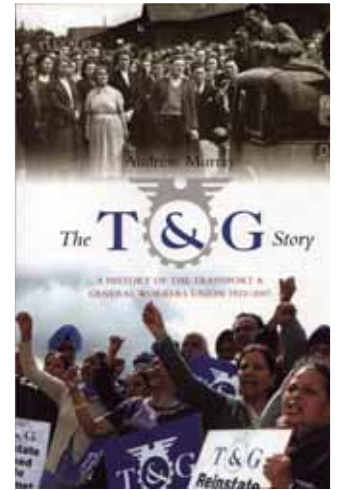
Make sure you snaffle a copy. The next exciting chapter awaits...and you can expect to be part of it.

## Order your copy

To order your copy of *The T&G Story* by Andrew Murray and published by Lawrence and Wishart, contact Admin dept, Unite, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN. Normally £14.99 it's available to *Landworker* readers for just £10.

## Win a copy!

We have five copies to go to the first five correct answers to the question: "Who was general secretary after Arthur Deakin?" Send your answers with your name and address by Monday February 2 to the Editor, *Landworker*, Unite, 35 King Street, London, WC2 8JG



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# Rural buses – the new dinosaurs?



By Keith Hatch

*Are the days of the rural bus numbered?*

**Public transport in rural areas can be scarce and not really of much use, say those living and working in the countryside. People, young and old alike, find buses too expensive, non-existent or have timetables that simply don't fit in with their work patterns.**

In 2008 the campaign for better transport produced a report, *Rural uses; an endangered species*. It called for both operators and government to support local buses, and prevent them entering into a spiral of decline.

It said that rural buses are vitally important to rural communities, pointing out that they are essential in combating social exclusion, improving access to jobs and services for the 20 per cent of rural households with no car. They can bring in visitors and tourists, are important to local economy and help combat the significant rise in rural traffic.

The report commented that, "If the countryside is to avoid becoming a ghetto, lived in and visited only by the rich then it must be made available to a wide range of people and income groups, including people without cars."

Unite member **Brian Hegarty** works for Stagecoach in Newbury, covering a mix of rural and town services, and is the local union branch secretary.

"I've been a driver since National Bus days so have seen rural services shrink from nearly every village having a bus to only the larger villages having a regular service. At the moment another two routes are to be given up at the end of 2008, as unprofitable. I don't think the impact on passengers is ever taken into account.

"My feelings about the future of rural services are not good. Services to smaller villages may not survive. Village life has changed over the years, people no longer work on farms and large estates needing public transport. Many villagers now choose to live the good life in the country have two cars, work in town and have no

need for public transport. Some probably see the bus as a nuisance rather than a lifeline as it was in years gone by."

Brian adds that services in his area suffer from a lack of patronage. "It seems to me that we carry mainly the older generation, and we are gradually losing these. The other problem is lack of funding from the local councils who always want services done for as little as possible.

"My own personal view is in years to come the service bus will go to be replaced with small community buses the kind we see around Newbury taking the elderly to doctor's surgeries. The days of the rural bus in small villages are numbered."

In Yeovil, **Pat Pippard**, secretary of Unite's retired members' association believes the lack of transport is a real problem, and has even affected membership.

"Some of the buses around here are very limited. We have lost quite a few members because they can't get to meetings. One member from Shepton Mallet had to give up. In the past we used to get a lot of people from Sherbourne, but we had to run our own bus."

Pat pointed out services are very variable, while some places have good coverage others have none at all. This can exclude people on low income, not only from meetings but from work opportunities. "In a lot of villages you have to drive, and not everyone has the income that would pay for a car, particularly young people just starting out.

"Perhaps if they were subsidised more people would start using buses. They could then become self-supporting and successful," added Pat.

Unite cannot allow these rural lifelines to be the next dinosaurs.

• **If you have a bus story for us contact Landworker at the usual addresses (see page 2).**

**'Services to smaller villages may not survive'**

Brian Hegarty



Lonely – where have all the buses gone?

Carlos Garcia

## Get on course with Unite

"Education, to be meaningful in the context of our new union Unite, must focus on the needs of the union and its members, particularly our activists." So says Unite's director of education, **Jim Mowatt**.

He told *Landworker* that in putting together the 2009 course programme the education department has taken a 'strategic approach'. "On inspecting the programme of courses which we've circulated for the first half of 2009, it's obvious where our priorities in Unite lie.

"Providing courses for all our workplace reps is our number one target. For me, as director that means that every workplace rep on receiving their credentials, should go on a course within six months – whether they are a shop steward, health and safety rep, equalities rep or a union learning rep."

Jim continued. "Because of the sheer mix of our vast membership, it's important that we put on courses which are accessible and timely for the different needs of our different membership. That's why we have whole raft of resi-

dential courses as well as local courses both on a block-release and a day-release basis.

"The best people to judge the success of our courses are the sisters and brothers who attend them, comment on them, learn from them and help develop better ones for the future."

• **If you'd like to find out more about this year's courses, contact your local regional office or call 020 7611 2500 for more details.**



# STAY SAFE

Health & safety from **Ian Beeby**



John Harris www.reportdigital.co.uk

## A dangerous business?

**You may have missed the recently released agricultural accident statistics for the year up to March 2008. Instead of being published and highly publicised at the Royal Show in July they are now released at the end of October, buried among all the other industry figures.**

You also have to go looking for them on the HSE website as they no longer produce the booklet about accident figures. That is a terrible failure because it used to contain case studies which showed why incidents happened and their effects afterwards.

Although the government like producing figures they hate letting us know just how many people have been injured and killed at work. Usually they like to promote the people injured at work, as skivers.

In the year to the end of March 2008, the number of people killed on farms was up by three to 39. This compares with 72 killed in construction and so these two industries make up just under half the people killed at work.

According to the HSE, in total 229 people were killed at work, but this does not include people killed at work whilst on public roads. Although construction has more workers killed by numbers, agriculture kills more by the number per 100,000 workers which

works out for every 10,000 workers a person will be killed. The quoted figure is 9.7 per 100,000 for agriculture and 3.4 per 100,000 for construction.

When you compare this to the all industry standard of 0.8 per 100,000 you can now see how dangerous working in agriculture is. And now for the bad news – the government doesn't seem to care about how many are injured or killed, and why do I think this? Because they think that health and safety rules are a burden on business and want to reduce that burden with a 'light touch' to enforcement and reduce the number of inspectors.

The number of major injuries to employees was up by 20 per cent to 525. Unfortunately I cannot find out how many people were injured in total including the self employed. But 26 per cent more people (1,072 in total) reported injuries that kept them from returning to work for more than three days. Nearly one out every 200 workers suffered an injury that kept them off work for three or more days.

Also remember that agriculture has a history of seriously under-reporting accidents – with the best guess of only one in five incidents reported.

Another 15 per cent of accidents were caused by moving or falling objects and falls caused nine per cent. Surprisingly nine per

cent were also caused by animals.

So are the figures getting better? Well that depends on who you ask. We now only kill about 40 people compared to the 100 when I started working. But the number of full time employees is now 10 per cent of what it was then.

With all these incidents how many prosecutions were there by the HSE? Well there were 565 prosecution cases in all industries with 537 cases leading to convictions. The number of prosecutions is down a third compared to 2002/03. If you want to see all the data go to [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/industry/agriculture/injuries.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/industry/agriculture/injuries.htm)

### Inspectors

Another recently released report commissioned by Unite and done by the Centre for Corporate Accountability (CCA) and titled *Lack of investigation* also makes interesting reading.

In the field operations directorate, the bit that affects us, the number of inspectors went down from 916 in the year 2003 to 680 last year – a 26 per cent decrease, and they have to cover most industries including ours. This is why so little preventative work is now being carried out.

In 2006/7 10 per cent of major injuries were investigated, along with one per cent of three day injuries, 25 per cent of danger-

ous occurrences and two per cent of accidents to the public.

The good news for us is that 25 per cent of serious accidents in our sector were investigated. That is 25 per cent of reported accidents and so if we include the non-reported ones then only five per cent were investigated. This all comes from data supplied by the HSE although it took a long while to receive it.

For those of you who think I am having a go at HSE inspectors, let me make it clear that I am not in any way criticising them. But I and many other people interested in safety are annoyed about the way the very top people just accept the funding cuts without questioning that policy.

If we want to see a serious reduction in the number of deaths and injuries at work, then the people responsible for the cuts should take the blame and maybe if a few ministers were prosecuted for putting the lives of workers at risk it would make a lot of difference.

If you would like to see the report *Lack of investigation* then contact your union office or **Susan Murray at Transport House, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN.**

**• If you would like anything covered or have an idea for an article please e-mail me on [ian.beeby@btopenworld.com](mailto:ian.beeby@btopenworld.com) or phone 01223 833 860.**

# International landworker

Latest news from Europe

By Jeff Apter

## FRANCE

### Inadequate package

French farm unions and representatives of producers have slammed the agriculture minister's establishment of a 250 million euro emergency package as "inadequate". The plan to help agriculture came mainly to compensate a big rise in energy prices and animal feed.

The announcement followed major demonstrations by an estimated 10,000 small livestock, dairy and grain farmers outside supermarkets, government offices and along roads throughout France to protest at falling purchasing power and for more regulation of the sector. In particular the price of wheat and milk has fallen sharply.

### Misleading ad

The court of appeal in Lyons, south-east France threw out an appeal for a fine of 15,000 euros on the former manager of Monsanto France and the company's distribution head for "misleading advertising" for the Round Up weed killer.

The court said that glyphosate, Round Up's active constituent, had been classified as dangerous for the environment by the EU and so could not be presented as biodegradable and something that leaves the ground "clean".

## Austria and Switzerland

### Organic champs

These two European countries have come out as the champions of the world's organic food producers with this type of production accounting for more than 10 per cent of each country's agricultural produce. Neighbours Czech Republic and Slovakia were close behind.

In 2006, only 0.65 per cent of the world's agriculture was cultivated for organic produce – three times the amount in 1999. During that time in Europe 200,000 farms covering seven million hectares had been converted. To qualify, the land in question must not use chemical-based pesticides or synthetic fertilizers nor must the crops grown be genetically modified.

Great Britain and Ireland trail well down behind Scandinavian and Baltic countries in the organic production league.

## EU

### CAP re-jig

Farm ministers from the 27 EU member countries have agreed to re-jig the common agricultural policy (CAP).

While only Latvia opposed the final compromise at the meeting, agricultural workers' unions and small farmers'

organisations across Europe have slammed the draft agreement as a death blow to family run farms and other smallholdings.

If adopted, milk quotas will be progressively increased by 1 per cent annually except in Italy, which will benefit from a one-off 5 per cent rise and be subject to heavy fines if it goes over this threshold.

The agriculture ministers also agreed to increase the percentage of funds destined for the lasting development of the countryside to 10 per cent by 2013 in exchange for national governments reducing the co-financing of such policies.

As Landworker goes to press, the final text – to be discussed at the full EU summit in December – is expected to meet further resistance from unions across the continent and also from French President

Nicholas Sarkozy whose country chaired the EU in the second half of 2008.

## FAO

### Cereal rise

The United Nations food and agricultural organisation (FAO) in its half yearly report says that world cereal production has risen strongly and should be able to cover short term food needs but this should "not create a false sense of security".

The Rome-based FAO states that the financial crisis will have a negative impact on the agricultural sectors in many regions of the world and especially in developing countries. Price rises can be expected in 2009/2010 that "will provoke even more serious food crises than those seen recently", it says.



## Wortley Hall breaks for Landworker readers



10% Landworker discount!

Wortley Hall is situated in the picturesque village of Wortley standing in 26 acres of formal grounds and woodland between Sheffield and Barnsley in South Yorkshire, formally being the family home of the Wortley family for hundreds of years.

In the past the Hall has been a Royalist garrison, and was used by the American armed forces as a base during the last war. When they left in 1945 the Hall fell into decay.

Wortley Hall had been built from the wealth of the Wortley Family, this wealth being derived primarily from coal mining in the South Yorkshire area.

In 1950, it was taken over by the trade union, Labour and co-operative movements led by the socialist pioneer Vin Williams a former miner. It was bought outright from the Wortley family in 1959 and over the years has been restored to its former glory.

The Hall itself is a treasure trove of historical pieces of architecture including period fire places, wood panelling and carvings and an array of decorative works of art and history. In the grounds there is an ice house, sunken garden, terraced garden, a fossilised tree stump estimated to be 300 years old and an oak tree of a similar age to the Major Oak in Sherwood Forest.

The Hall is run on co-operative principles, on a 'not for profit' basis. Any annual surplus is spent on improvements. The main business is providing facilities for trade unions – several

trades unions use our facilities including Unite. Social events, weddings are also catered for as is bed and breakfast for cyclists, walkers and short break holidays.

Recently the stable block has been converted into two self catering cottages. Each cottage has three bedrooms where six people can be accommodate in each, both are fully equipped and have gained four stars with the British Tourist Board. They are available for rent and form a perfect base for exploring this part of Yorkshire. For those people who prefer not to cook, the Hall is available for bar meals or dinner in the Courtyard Restaurant.

Currently, Unite are raising funds in order to assist with the cost of refurbishing the function room and bar areas. The function room will be reorganized in such a way that larger meetings can be accommodated for, and will be fitted out with all the necessary educational equipment.

Accommodation rates are very reasonable with B&B starting from £42 per person per night and self catering from £230 per cottage per week. Unite Landworker readers can claim a further 10 per cent off! When booking please state you are a Landworker reader to claim your discount.

**For further information contact Wortley Hall, Wortley Village, Sheffield S35 7DB, phone 0114 288 2100 or see the website [www.wortleyhall.org.uk](http://www.wortleyhall.org.uk)**

# SOAPBOX

# Letters to the editor

Paul Carter: www.reportagejournal.co.uk



## Green collar jobs

By Graham Hall

**Workers are more interested in jobs and a square meal for their families before any sacrifice for the environment.**

Often trade unions are principally concerned with the protection of jobs rather than the environment – as in British Columbia with the conflict involving forestry logging.

Understandably the trade union attitude has been a defensive one, whether protecting job security or on health and safety issues such as the use of pesticides in the working environment.

But it's now being realised that economies have to be developed in a sustainable way that is beneficial to the workplace and nearby communities. There is a common cause for trade unions and environmental organisations which can benefit both.

Often job creation, short term interest, and the environment are incompatible. If we have a socialist approach we may favour jobs over the environment, or if we have a green philosophy, then vice versa.

It is time to loosen these confines and to open up the debate. Trade unionists are capable of intelligent and creative thinking. Many of us admired the inspirational thinking of the Lucas Aerospace workers in the 1970s when they came up with a plan to convert the company's resources into the development of socially useful products. The TGWU backed the plan, which included medical equipment, alternative energy sources, and transport systems.

Trade unionists can challenge the corporate view of the world that threatens jobs and the environment. We need to move to clean energy and a fair trade policy that benefits low income and working people and protects workers' rights as well as the environment.

Producing hybrid and clean cars, public transport, efficient heating and lighting systems, and clean renewable power plants can create jobs. Workers and communities need protection from toxic chemicals through policies of alertness to the dangers and of safer alternatives.

If meaningful action is taken to slow global warming it will cost jobs in certain industries as it would in any time of economic change. It does not help the redundant workers to know that jobs are being created somewhere else or in some other industry. Displaced workers need jobs in their community, not the knowledge that others are benefiting from their sacrifice.

We should go beyond negotiating severance packages to secure proper retraining, financial support and unconditional wage replacement for a specified period where jobs are to be lost for environmental reasons.

During the 1950s the European coal and steel community provided economic relief and retraining during periods of overproduction. At the end of the second world war the USA introduced the GI Bill which enabled members of the armed forces to retrain properly.

We should promote the creation of 'green collar' jobs – those that do not destroy natural resources and provide a long term economic future.

### What no letters?

Sadly we were not awash with letters this issue and so are unable to bring you a traditional letters spot this time. We'd love to hear from you, send your missives by post to the

Editor, Landworker, Unite, 35 King Street, London, WC2E 8JG or email [landworkerletters@uniteunion.com](mailto:landworkerletters@uniteunion.com) Ed **Instead we can offer you this point of view from our Belfast Unite education officer, Greg Sachno**

## Food security at stake



*And the cupboard was bare? Clear food supply strategy needed*

**The decision by the UK government to put £500bn into the banking system to avert wholesale collapse seems to be warmly welcomed by the banks. Frankly if my employer gave me the equivalent of stuffing nice crisp £50 notes in my hand and said "pay it back... eventually, if you want to" I'd warmly welcome it too!**

In crisis, the banking industry, went cap in hand to the state and asked for help. For the rest of us jobs will still be lost as the economy dives into recession, houses repossessed and real misery for many.

For trade unions times such as this often bring about clearer understandings of how to formulate new and better political alternatives.

One of those arguments relates to food security. Clearly we can no longer allow for our supply to be based on the absurdities of market forces with the fluctuations of prices and availability. In 2008 we saw food shortages in developed countries such as Egypt and Vietnam.

What can be done? The UK government can take some simple steps, like controlling food exports as a starting point, ensuring adequate supplies of produce within UK borders, thus limiting our dependence on foreign imports.

It could effectively bring in to public ownership farms with an acreage of 100 acres paying farmers compensation for those not willing or able to come under common ownership. Within that framework say a farmer has 300 acres, 200 acres would be put down to sustainable food production, which the farmer would then be responsible for selling within a 30 mile radius – including to local school canteens, factories and workplaces. The remaining 100 acres could be used for the cash crop which then could be sold on the open market.

Is this mad? Maybe. Democratic accountability, training farmers and farm workers in diversifying and business planning would all have to be put into the mix. But we need to create the debate within our union and communities to galvanise opinion.

If we cannot trust the market to run the banking system, how can we trust it to put food on our plates? Unless we develop a clear and coherent strategy to our food supply, the reality of riots from food shortages in the UK's towns and villages I believe is a very real, almost certain threat.

Can we do it? My grandfather, lifelong socialist, prisoner of war, active TGWU member in the 1926 general strike, never lived to see the day, when a Labour government nationalised the banks. I did though.



## Hedging their bets!

**Pictured is hedgelayer Julia Thomas of Oxfordshire, in November's annual North Cotswolds hedgelaying match. Julia has been laying hedges for eight years – but her son recently beat her in a match.**

**The competitors laid hedges in the midland style, with the brush left on the livestock side to prevent grazing of the new growth.**

www.paphotos.com

Christian Schweiz

## What's in a pub name? No.31



By Mike Pentelow

# The White Horse Inn

## 24 West Street, Cromer, Norfolk

**A union for local agricultural workers was formed at a packed meeting in this pub in November 5, 1889.**

Called the Federal Union, Cromer District, its first secretary was George Edwards (who in 1907 formed what became the national agricultural workers' union).

The objects of the Cromer union were to improve "the social and moral well being" of its members, to assist them to secure allotments, to represent them on local authorities and in parliament, and "to assist members to migrate and emigrate."

Membership contributions were eight shillings (40p) a year. But when they were on strike or victimised they were paid more than that in a single week – ten shillings (50p).

George Edwards cycled to villages in a 12 mile radius and after just nine months had enrolled over 1,000 members. He was offered £1 a week to be a whole-time officer, but said he would take only 15 shillings (75p) until the members received an increase in wages.

Before long an amalgamation with a Norwich general labourers' union took place and within a year membership grew to 3,000.

The first big dispute of the new union took place in nearby Hindolveston where the men were offered just 3s 6d (17.5p) an acre to cut meadow grass. When they rejected this they were locked out, and the employer threatened to set his dog on George if he went near his place.

George replied that he was sure that in less than a week the employer would ask to meet him. This indeed happened and he negotiated a rate of five shillings (25p) an acre.

While the dispute lasted the men had received their full ten shillings a week lock-out pay.

The next dispute was when a hundred members at Great Plumstead, near Norwich, came out demanding a shilling increase in wages. The farmers' brought in strike breakers. There was enthusiastic support from members in all the villages, however, and after a strike of nearly a month the men gained the full shilling increase.

## On the shelf BOOK REVIEWS

**Build It! DIY Projects for Farmers, Smallholders and Gardeners** by Joe Jacobs  
(£12.99, published by Good Life Press Ltd)

This book is aimed at the smallholders, farmers and gardeners amongst us, but it's equally useful for those with an interest in DIY. Joe Jacobs, the author, has written an uncomplicated and enthusiastic guide encouraging people to build all sorts of projects many would think beyond their capabilities.

**Build It!** is true to its title and suitable for either the experienced DIY person or those who feel less confident. In many ways it's an inspirational read, approaching renewable energy, water conservation and most other projects in a practical, common sense way.

If undecided over the price of the book, I can only say the cost is very quickly recovered with the helpful tips and practical advice Joe offers. The second volume is due out next year and I for one am looking forward to reading it.

**A Guide to Traditional Pig Keeping**  
by Carol Harris  
(£15.95, published by the Good Life Press)

This is far more than just a guide to traditional pig husbandry, it's a comprehensive reference book covering all aspects of the pig industry from pig-pen to plate!

It starts by asking the reader whether they would make a good pig-keeper and runs through choosing a suitable breed, costings, welfare, marketing and meat production to recipes and even poetry. It certainly is comprehensive.

Pig-keeping is not for everybody although the book explains that it is also pitched at smallholders and farmers who might be planning to diversify. The huge interest in self-sufficiency and rural living ensures a market for the book and so if your friend or relative is considering retirement and wants an almost total commitment to what are wonderfully productive animals you should buy this book for them.

## Gardenwise

Winter 2008

By Phil Saunders

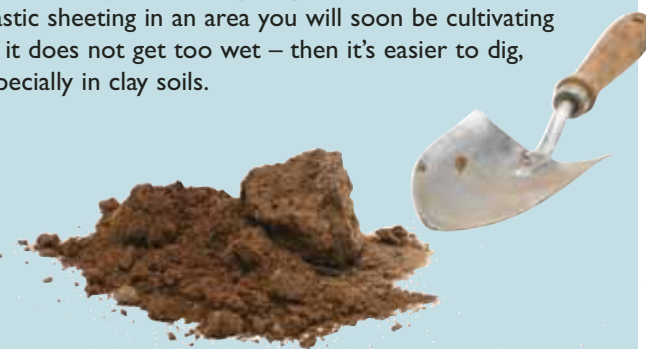


The New Year has begun and the gardening calendar starts again. Winter may be freezing, wet and windy but the dormant period is vital for gardens so enjoy the heavy frosts and beauty of this season.

### Dig in

Think about extending your vegetable and fruit space. In these harder economic times it's a good idea. Other people might like to grow with you or help in the labour for a share of the produce. Now is the time to prepare these new plots.

Winter digging is a task that is best finished as soon as possible, so get it done quickly. Cover the soil with plastic sheeting in an area you will soon be cultivating so it does not get too wet – then it's easier to dig, especially in clay soils.



### Stake out

Plant bare root trees, shrubs and roses now as long as it isn't freezing. Remember to pay attention to staking and check on previous plantings. Buy smaller plants – they establish themselves more quickly and often don't need staking. They are also cheaper! Watering is still vital.

Bare roots can be thoroughly soaked in muddy water before planting to give them a good start. Lay out paving and paths and do other hard landscaping work when weather permits.

### Plan ahead

Repair and maintain things you always meant to during the growing season like fences, cloches and polytunnels. Renovate overgrown hardy evergreen and deciduous hedges by cutting hard back; they soon recover.

Order and browse through catalogues for seed and plants. Growing from seed is an exciting and economical way to propagate and in February you can begin sowing vegetables under cover. If you have surplus then share and exchange seed with others.

### Organic

This year cut down on chemical products used – it's often cheaper and certainly safer to garden organically.

I discovered a great practical website at [www.makingy-ourown.co.uk](http://www.makingy-ourown.co.uk). A number of garden, ecological and other projects are well explained – great for the winter months.

**Aggie** by Ken Wignall



**BY THE VOLTA** By Mike Ward

*This peaceful river flows  
On by  
Away from shackles she is  
Free  
Making her journey to  
The sea*

*Escaped from forces where she  
Toiled through hydro's  
Her beauty they despoiled*

*But will the sacrifice she  
Makes  
Power the hydro's  
Generate  
Providing riches for the  
Nation  
Benefit all, the population*

*So flow on gentle  
River  
Dream the bounty  
You deliver  
May banish poverty  
Forever*

\* Note – the River Volta has been flooded over a large area and a Dam erected in order to provide power for six Hydro Electric Turbines



# GLA – licence revoked after ‘scandalous’ breach

By Amanda Campbell

The gangmasters licensing authority (GLA) has recently revoked the licence of a Northamptonshire gangmaster following allegations of ‘unsafe accommodation and an injury to a worker’.

The GLA warned Kettering-based gangmaster A14 Vehicle Hire it must stop supplying workers or it faced prosecution.

The move came after investigations found workers in ‘over crowded and unsafe’ housing-in one case, 15 work-

ers and four children were found living in a four-bedroom house. Investigators also found a breach of safety regulations after one worker was run over by a leek rig.

Paul Whitehouse, from the GLA described the set up as, “scandalous, with no regard for the individuals who suffered. While we are satisfied that the evidence gathered to date justifies the immediate revocation of the licence, we are still assessing exactly what happened and gathering further evidence.”



John Harris www.reportdigital.co.uk

# POCA to stay welcomed

By Mike Pentelow

**The recent announcement that Post Office Ltd is to retain the Post Office card account (POCA) will be welcome news to rural communities up and down the country.**

Welcomed by rural watchdog, the commission for rural communities, the move will help protect the interests of the rural Post Office network and its customers, especially those without bank accounts or who are vulnerable. It will also help people avoid having to travel further to access their benefits, state pension and tax credit payments.

The rural population is increasingly ageing and faces added difficulties if essential services are removed; with the onset of a global recession there is an even greater need for people to have local access to these vital services.

The commitment to continue the contract with the Post Office until at least 2015 is an especially welcome development, helping ensure the future stability of the Post Office network.

# Forging ahead

Blacksmith Kathleen Shortland (pictured) has adapted to modern demands by forging ironwork for the home and garden, such as curtain rails, spoons, forks, candlesticks, plant holders, and bedsteads.

“I was trained in the ancient skills of the blacksmith at Hereford College of Rural Crafts, and now using them in a modern setting,” she told Landworker. She has a forge at the Kew Bridge Steam Museum in Brentford, west London. She is pictured demonstrating her skills at Reading’s Museum of English Rural Life.



Peter Arkell

# TRACTOR-TASTIC!



November’s Newark vintage tractor show featured lovingly restored mechanical mementos like this Case engine above (top), from 1917. Three wheel designs were popular for a while with a drive wheel, land wheel and front guide wheel. Its lopsidedness made right hand turns on a sidehill virtual suicide.

Christina Schwetz