

Migration in a time of boom and bust: the case of the UK



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Professor Jane Hardy - University of Hertfordshire

Two faces of migration and trade unions in the UK

2008

Opening centre for migrant workers

'One-stop shop' for migrants

Language courses on offer

MIGRANT workers have been put on the path to overcoming language barriers with the opening of a new education facility in Thetford. Nearly 100 Portuguese and Eastern Europeans have benefited from the Timmy McLean Community Learning Centre, on courses run by the GMB Union. The community facility at Thetford fire station, off Norwich Road, was opened in August in

memory of the five-year-old boy who died in a house blaze. Steve Walker, regional co-ordinator of the GMB, said the centre had enabled the union and its learning representatives to run English Speakers of Other Languages courses for migrants. There were plans to expand the courses, which have been well received by learners and been met with a 100pc completion rate.

New education facility helping with English

Dozens of migrant workers have been put on the path to overcoming the language barrier after the opening of a new education facility in Thetford. Nearly 100 Portuguese and Eastern Europeans have so far benefited from the Timmy McLean Community Learning Centre, thanks to courses run by the GMB Union. The community facility at Thetford fire station, off Norwich Road, was opened in August in memory of a five-year-old boy, who tragically died in a house blaze in the town. Steve Walker, regional co-ordinator of the GMB, said the centre had enabled the union and its learning representatives to run English Speakers of Other Languages (Esol) courses for migrants to help them overcome exploitation within the workplace and marginalisation. He added that there were plans to expand the courses.



Two faces of migration and trade unions in the UK



January 2009



Structure of talk

- An overview of migration until 2004
- Migration in a time of boom and bust: 2004 onwards
- 'British Jobs for British Workers' dispute

Post war migration to the UK

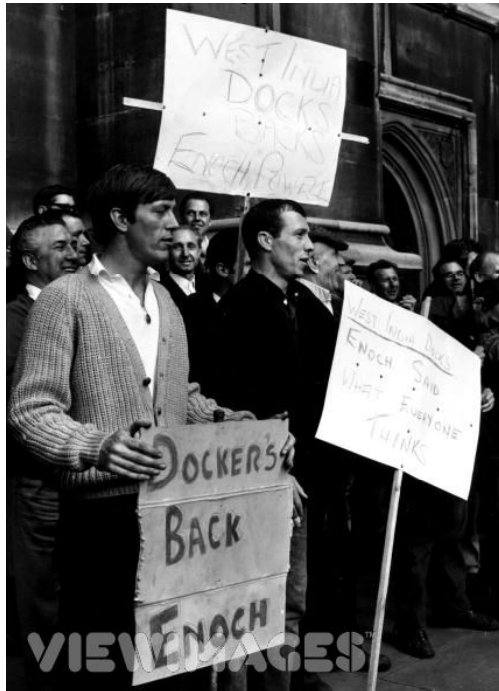
Immigrant workers arriving on the Windrush from the West Indies



Immigrant workers from Pakistan and India worked in textile factories



Mixed responses by workers in 1950s & 1960s



- Exclusion of black workers from some workplaces
- Support by dockers for anti-immigration Minister

- Writing leaflets in different languages for recruitment
- First Race Relations Act 1965

ہمارے این۔ ایچ۔ ایس کو محفوظ رکھو
تفصیلی اور علاقہ کی طرف سے
سہما آپ، بیکسروئری ہائی وے (پریس کے خلاف ہیں)؟
سہما آپ سہما ٹوکے، بدھوئے کے خلاف ہیں؟
سہما آپ سمجھتے ہیں کہ ہڈی ہڈی کے لوگوں کو ابی راکھ دینے
کا موقع دینا چاہیے؟

اگر آپ کو نسل پرستی کوئی ایسا بندہ دیکھتے ہیں جس نے اہل میں ثالث
سہما ہو، وہ ہمارے لیے لوگوں کے ہیں۔
جہاں ہیں "گروپل" لوگوں کے ہیں۔
میں ہیں ایسا اعلان دے جو ہمارے لیے لڑے گا، یہ ہمارا کام ہے!

لیڈرز ہاؤس کے این۔ ایچ۔ ایس کو محفوظ رکھو

عام بارڈر کے لیے ہمیں بھیج کر دیا ہے۔ کوئل ہمارے ہڈی ہڈی کے
ہیں اور اب وہ ہمارے ہڈی ہڈی کے ہمارے ہڈی ہڈی کے ہمارے ہڈی ہڈی کے ہمارے ہڈی ہڈی کے
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جہاں ہیں "گروپل" لوگوں کے ہیں۔
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1970s turning point



High profile Grunwick dispute of Asian women workers in 1976



Anti-Nazi League - Massive movement to counteract the extreme right National Front



Trade unions adopting policies on:

- Equality
- Anti-discrimination
- Anti-racism

Migration to the UK in an Enlarged Europe

2004 onwards

Background



- Only UK Ireland & Sweden opened labour markets
- 2004-2008 2 million Poles left to work in Europe
- 600,000 to 1m. came to UK
- 60 per cent of A8 workers in UK Polish
- Young, more feminised & mobile

Driving factors

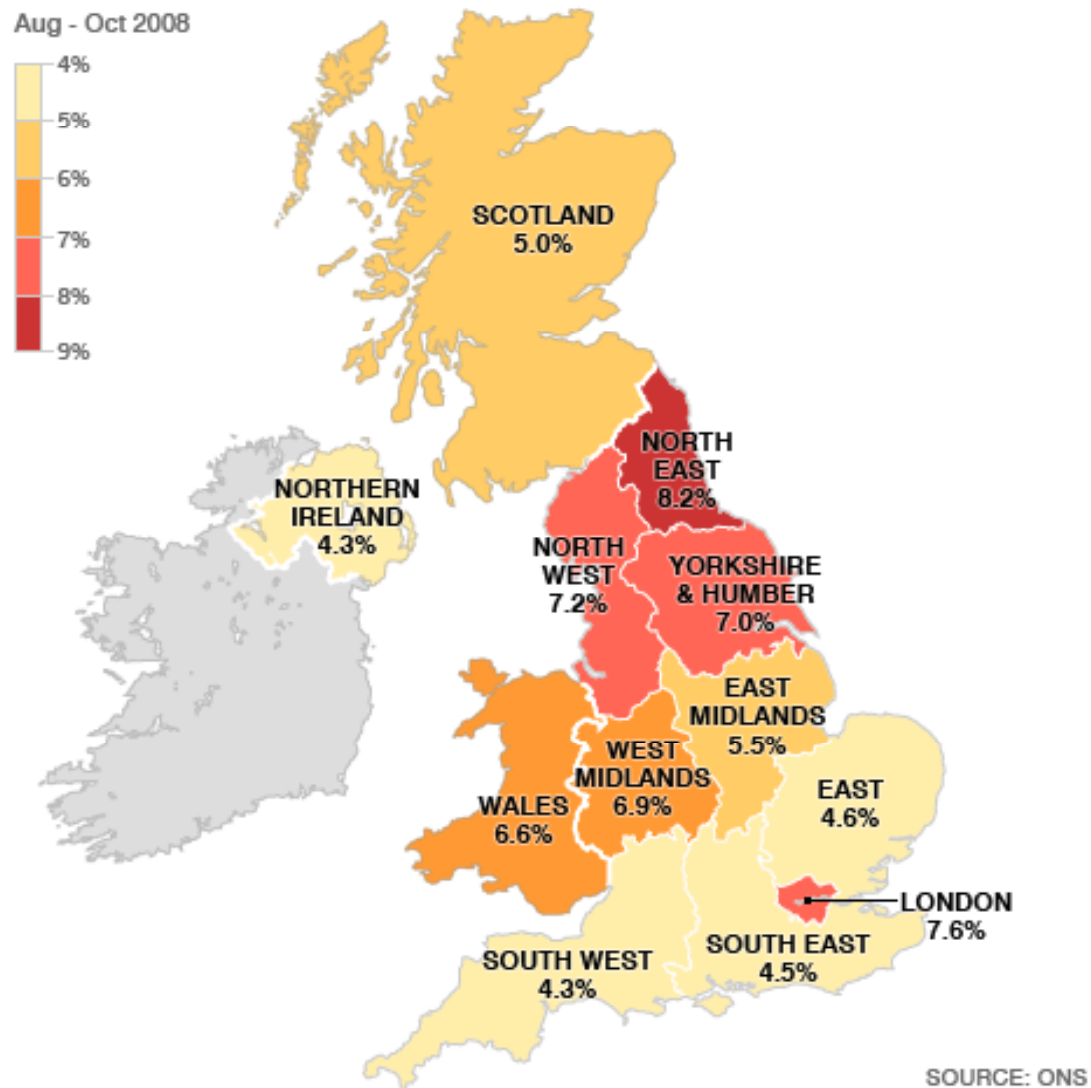
- Uneven development
- Labour shortages
- Flexible labour markets



Unemployment in selected countries 2005 to
2008 and % of EU 27 average GDP per capita

	2005	2006	2007	2008	% of EU 27 average GDP per capita (2008)
Ireland	4.5	4.2	4.6	5.6	144
United Kingdom	4.6	5.0	5.5	5.1	117
Latvia	9.1	7.6	6.4	5.3	55
Lithuania	9.2	6.4	4.6	4.5	61
Poland	18.0	16.8	10.3	7.7	65

Regional Dimension of Unevenness



Rank	TOP NUTS-2 REGION	2005/2006 GDP (PPP) per capita in Euros
1	Inner London, United Kingdom	67,798
8	Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, United Kingdom	37, 624
	15 LOWEST RANKING NUTS REGIONS	
1	Warminsko-Mazurskie	9,300
2	Podlaskie, Poland	9,100
5	Podkarpackie, Poland	8,500
6	Lubelskie, Poland	8,400

Labour shortages

Sectoral Profile of A8 workers, 2007

Sector registered	Number of A8 workers registered
Administration, business & management	317,540
Hospitality & catering	151,945
Agriculture	80,310
Manufacturing	58,810
Food/fish/meat processing	39,145
Health & medical	34,915
Retail	35,230
Construction & land	33,105
Transport	21,425

Labour Market Flexibility

Migrant workers in the food retailing value chain
- 'Picking it, sorting it, moving it, selling it'



(Official) Union responses

- Supported open labour markets in Europe
- Supported immigrants from outside EU
- Different from Spain and German unions.
- Cross border links with Polish trade union
- Union learning initiatives
- One all Polish branch

‘British Jobs for British Workers’

Raises a set of important issue regarding;

- Trade unions
- How labour markets operate?
- Xenophobia
- Neoliberalism
- State regulation of labour

The Story

- Lindsey Oil refinery workers made redundant and contract given to IREM (Italian firm) who would be employing 200-300 Italian and Portuguese workers.
- Staythorpe - Alstom hired non-union Polish and Spanish workers
- Together these ignited walkouts of construction workers on 20 sites involving 6,500 workers

Significance

- Unlawful – no ballot, no notification given to employer and sympathy strikes
- Unofficial – Not sanctioned by the unions
UNITE & GMB (did not condemn it)
- Grassroots – explosion of frustration

Causes

- System of sub-contracting and use of posted workers
- Declining influence of trade unions in UK in private sector and construction specifically
- Rapid impact of crisis since Autumn 2008 on employment

Low and declining trade union membership

Union density

- Overall 28.4%
- Public sector 61%
- Private sector 17.1%

Construction

Overall density 18%

Workplaces covered by collective agreements
28%

Controversy 1

Is 'British Jobs for British Workers' divisive?

NO:

They were turning the pressure back on Gordon Brown who had promised this in one of his speeches.

One of trade union leaders had also used this slogan

YES:

An alternative petition argued that UK and migrant workers work together. Signed by some trade union leaders.

Controversy 2

Was the dispute xenophobic?

NO:

The xenophobic aspect was whipped up media?

It was a grassroots dispute about access to jobs

YES:

The slogan (not the workers) is xenophobic

It gave confidence to far right to appear on picket lines (unprecedented)

From Boom to Bust

BOOM

- UK had reasonable rates of growth, lower levels of unemployment
- Available finance fuelled property bubble in an upward spiral
- Migrant workers central to UK economy according to government

Bust

- Last quarter decline in GDP 1.9 per cent
- Largest level of public debt on record
(from bailing out banks)
- Widespread redundancies
- Promise of large scale cuts in public sector

Prospects for the Future

Reasons not to be cheerful;

- Growth of confidence of far right BNP
- Possibility of xenophobia
- Prospect of a long recession

Reasons to be cheerful

- Unions have a good 'official' record on working with migrant workers
- Many local level initiatives to recruit and integrate of migrant workers