

# Gig Watch

## *Studiecirkel – migrantarbete del 2*

### *Innehåll:*

- Organizing migrant workers – a union branch handbook
- Secrets of a successful organizer – utdrag

### *Uppgifter till texterna:*

- Välj ut ett eller flera stycken ur varje text som du tycker är intressanta, som du kan presentera på cirkeln.
- Vad finns det för likheter och skillnader mellan handböckerna? Vad säger det om sammanhangen och syftet de tagits fram för?
- Hur skiljer sig beskrivningen av migrantarbete i Storbritannien jämfört med hur det ser ut i Sverige?
- Vilka av dessa strategier är applicerbara i en svensk kontext, och vilka är mindre applicerbara?
- Vad tycker du om den beskrivning och de strategier som tas upp i handboken? Känns de relevanta/effektiva?
- Finns det några strategier i handböckerna som är relevanta att ”låna” till det sammanhang där du är organiserad (om du är det)?

## Organizing migrant workers - Content

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# Introduction



A migrant worker is someone who has come from abroad to work in the UK.

The UK has a very long tradition of demanding the labour and skills of migrant workers to sustain our economy. But there has also been a long tradition of hypocrisy. While we have needed and relied on the contribution of migrant workers, we have rarely acknowledged or welcomed them.

Today, with expansion of the EU and migration becoming even more common, the issue is being used by the right-wing media to stir up hatred and racism and also by many politicians pandering to popular prejudice. This enables employers to exploit migrant workers whose unfamiliarity with our laws, language, and culture make them particularly vulnerable.

The trade union movement itself has not always been a good friend to migrant workers, often mistakenly viewing them as willing help-mates to employers seeking to cut wage rates and other terms and conditions.

UNISON can be proud that it has always had a progressive outlook on the immense contribution migrant workers make to our economy, public services, culture, and communities. This outlook has been instilled through the union's commitment to equality and justice; its determination to deliver effective recruitment and organisation throughout the public services; the calls raised by our own membership for migrant workers to be welcomed into UNISON; and for anti-migrant worker laws, regulations, attitudes and propaganda to be challenged.

But the situation is complex across the UK. For example, in Scotland there is a great

deal of effort and resources being invested in encouraging inward migration to replenish a labour force severely reduced by a dwindling population. This contrasts strongly with England where politicians often seem to be falling over one another to be seen to be tough on immigration.

UNISON also recognises the international dimension to labour migration and supports the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) "rights-based approach" to migrant workers (see Key contacts).

UNISON's organising approach recognises that it is only through collective effort that sustainable solutions can be found to these problems. However, the challenges faced in organising migrant workers mean that the standard approach needs to be adapted to address these particular issues.

Migrant workers are no different from other workers in wanting fair pay, terms and conditions, a safe and healthy working environment, and to be treated fairly, with dignity and respect. Like other workers, they want a say in the workplace and a chance to influence policy decisions in the wider world.

And, like UK workers, migrant workers are not a homogeneous group, purely defined by their relationship to the economy and their immigration status. Naturally there may be issues of nationality and language, but just as with UK-born workers, gender, race, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, age and faith may have implications for organising.

We know from anecdotal evidence that many workers who are members of minority groups come to the UK because it is seen

as a more tolerant society than their own. Their hopes can be dashed not just by public prejudice, but by having to rely on their own migrant community for support, where the prejudices they sought to escape may still prevail.

UNISON acknowledges that migrant workers may well find the UK more progressive than their own country in its acceptance of diversity and in challenging discrimination. UNISON would not offer membership to those actively seeking to 'import' values contrary to the union's values of equality and fairness for all, but will work with those who may need information, advice and support about our approach.

UNISON sees a clear difference between a group of migrant workers who may be experiencing new and progressive attitudes for the first time and, for example, settled migrant workers in management who hold on to prejudices and discriminatory beliefs.



Photograph: Simon Rawles

# A note on immigration status



Immigration status is a particularly complex issue. Different rules apply depending upon where a migrant worker comes from and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 made it unlawful for anyone to provide unregulated immigration advice or immigration services.

Immigration advice can only be given by a person who has had the appropriate training and holds the necessary licence from the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (see *Key contacts*).

For more detailed information, seek advice from the organisations listed in *Key contacts*.

Where legal advice is needed on immigration that affects someone's right to work, the case should be referred through the regional office to the Employment Rights Unit at UNISON head office.

It is important to know whether the workers you are seeking to organise have permission to work in the UK, because it seriously affects their rights. It is also important to note that immigration status is not necessarily fixed. For example, a person's status can change as their application to work in the UK progresses.

At the time of writing, the government is implementing a points-based approach to replace the existing work permit system.

Workers from the European Economic Area (EEA) are almost certain to be entitled to work here, although they may have had to register on the Workers' Registration Scheme first. There are specific restrictions on some nationalities, such as workers from Romania and Bulgaria.

An individual who is aged 16 or over, who is subject to immigration control (someone

who does not hold a UK, EU or EEA passport) cannot legally work in the UK unless:

*that person has been given valid and subsisting leave to be in the UK by the government and that leave does not restrict them from taking the job in question or the person comes into a category where employment is also allowed.*

For a full list of who may take up employment in the UK without a work permit, see *Right to work* section.

## EEA nationals

With the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, citizens of any country in the European Economic Area (EEA) are entitled to work in the UK without special permission and without a work permit. The EEA consists of the following countries:

Austria	Latvia
Belgium	Liechtenstein
Bulgaria	Lithuania
Cyprus	Luxembourg
Czech Republic	Malta
Denmark	Netherlands
Estonia	Norway
Finland	Poland
France	Portugal
Germany	Romania
Greece	Slovakia
Hungary	Slovenia
Iceland	Spain
Ireland	Sweden
Italy	UK

Swiss citizens also have the right to work in the UK, although Switzerland is not in the EEA.

Migrants from eight of the 10 countries that joined the EU on 1 May 2004 are required to register with the Home Office under the Accession State Worker Registration Scheme, if they plan to work for a UK employer for more than one month. The countries are: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Since 1 January 2007, Romanians and Bulgarians have had the right to travel throughout the EU, but the government has placed restrictions on employing workers from these countries.



# Right to work



Migrant workers' rights to work are subject to their immigration status.

There are a number of different categories of migrant workers who have varying rights to work in the UK. The main categories are:

- nationals from the European Union or European Economic Area (EEA) who have a right to travel, live and work in the UK
- accession state nationals, who have the right to travel, live and work in the UK by registering with the Home Office for the first year of employment
- nationals of all other countries: who require a work permit
- Commonwealth-working holidaymakers: individuals between the ages of 17-30 who can work in the UK for up to two years
- nationals of Switzerland and British overseas territories, who require clearance to enter the UK but do not require a work permit
- students from outside the EEA who can work part time
- overseas students who work under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme for a limited time
- the Sector Based Scheme addresses labour issues in food manufacturing
- the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme – some industries with a shortage of highly skilled workers have been granted work permits, including health services, computer services, managerial service, and financial services.

These categories are subject to change as the government (and future governments) introduce new laws or amend existing legislation.

UNISON must also be mindful of the immigration status of migrant workers and the union's ability to recruit and represent workers who are in an 'irregular' (or in government terminology – 'illegal') situation. Such workers may be:

- migrants who are in an irregular situation because they entered the country illegally
- migrants who entered the country legally but lose their regular status because they have overstayed or changed or left their employer
- those who 'become irregular' because of changes in legislation or government rules.

In line with current UNISON policy, the union supports a change in the law to regularise the status of migrant workers, regardless of how they came to be in an irregular situation. In dealing with specific cases, organisers may wish to explore other avenues to seek to regularise a worker who has 'lost' their immigration status. Whatever a worker's immigration status, UNISON believes they have the right to be treated fairly, with dignity, and with respect.

It remains to be seen how the recently introduced fines for businesses employing undocumented workers (up to £10,000 per worker) will impact on the present situation.

# Rights at work



Regular or 'legal' migrant workers in the UK may often be unaware of their rights at work, and this lack of knowledge makes them vulnerable to exploitation.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) produces a downloadable leaflet in 11 languages for people coming to work in the UK giving information about their legal rights and includes useful links to sites providing advice such as Citizen's Advice.

The leaflet covers key issues as follows:

*Welcome to the UK*

*Starting work in the UK*

*National Insurance and tax*

*Worker or employee?*

*Your rights as a worker*

*Working time rights*

*Agriculture*

*Health and safety protection*

*Protection from discrimination*

*Union membership*

*Special rights for agency workers*

*Additional rights for employees*

*Enforcing your rights*

*Useful organisations.*

This information is also available at:  
[www.tuc.org.uk/international/index.cfm?mins=288](http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/index.cfm?mins=288)

Health and safety protection is dealt with in more depth in a leaflet produced jointly by the TUC and Health and Safety Executive available at:

[www.tuc.org.uk/h\\_and\\_s/index.cfm?mins=403](http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm?mins=403)

A guide for health and safety organisers working with migrant workers is available at:  
[www.tuc.org.uk/extras/safetymw.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/safetymw.pdf)





# Tackling the myths about migrant workers



In seeking to organise migrant workers, it is essential you have information to hand that enables you to respond to misleading propaganda that encourages mistrust, fear and hatred. On the next pages are some of the most common myths about migrant workers, with UNISON's response. As a trade union with more than 1.3 million members in public services, UNISON knows how important migrant workers are to the economy. UNISON also welcomes migrant workers as individuals, just like its other members: people who want to work, live their lives, make friends, raise their families, and make a contribution to the UK.

Britain has a long history of encouraging migrant workers to come to its shores and take on the jobs that no-one else can or will do. Each new group of migrant workers is accompanied by scare stories, half-truths, distortions, and downright lies.

Such propaganda is expected from malicious racists and may be absorbed by people ignorant of the facts. But today there is a more sophisticated attack on migrant workers from the right-wing press and politicians seeking the populist vote.

For example, early in 2008, one of the *Daily Mail's* journalists issued an appeal for:

“...anonymous horror stories of people who have employed Eastern European staff, only for them to steal from them, disappear, or have lied about their resident status. We can pay you £100 for taking part, and I promise it will be anonymous, just a quick phone call.”

It is not difficult to imagine the outcry there would have been if “Eastern European” had been substituted with, for example, “women”. When an established newspaper can get away with openly soliciting for such scaremongering stories, it is essential that the truth is heard.

# Myths about migrant workers



## Break the lies and tell the truth

### Myth no.1: 'We are being swamped with migrant workers'

On purely statistical terms, the most recent figures available show that in 2006:

- 400,000 people left the UK for a year or more
- 591,000 people arrived to live in the UK for a year or more
- 157,000 of those who arrived came here to study.

By any measure, a difference of 191,000 people is not swamping. It is less than a third of 1% of the total population.

But the issue here is not so much statistics – although these are important – so much as perception. With all the negative coverage the issue gets, it's not difficult to see why some people are lulled into thinking we are being "swamped".

The British cannot lay any claim to being a "pure bred" race. Throughout history, Britain has attracted migrants from different parts of the world and many citizens have origins in other countries. Meanwhile, more than 5.5 million Britons live outside the UK.

UNISON believes that "swamping" is an emotive term exploited by racists to whip up fear and avoid any measured debate about migration.

### Myth no.2: 'We don't need migrant workers'

This is simply not true. For example, migrant workers make up:

- 19% of social workers (22,000)
- 16% of care workers (105,000)
- 11% of housing/welfare workers (19,000)
- 10% nursing assistants (23,000)
- 8% of education assistants (29,000).

In the building trade, the Federation of Master Builders estimates that some 87,500 new builders are needed every year – and they simply can't be provided by the UK labour market alone.

It's the same story with our caring services, hospitality trade, farming industry, food packing and preparation, and a host of other industries too.

The UK has a falling birth rate and an ageing population. If we don't bring in migrant workers, the work won't get done. And without enough people working, there won't be enough people paying tax, so taxation will increase for everyone.

UNISON believes that migrant workers make an essential contribution to our economy: they arrive fully qualified, they pay tax, and they spend their income in the UK. And of course, we also benefit through their work in our public services, and in their contribution to our culture.



**Myth no.3:**  
**‘Migrant workers  
 cause unemployment’**

Migrant workers are most prevalent in areas where the most jobs are available. Migrant workers come here to work and to earn a living. What sense does it make for them to go looking for work where there are dole queues?

Underlying these arguments is “the lump of labour fallacy”. This is the idea that there is a set amount of work to go round, and that if you increase the number of workers, unemployment must go up and wages must come down. But that just doesn’t stack up. Immigration actually increases the size of the economy. As production increases, so does the demand for extra support goods and services.

That’s not to mention the taxes and National Insurance that are paid into our economy as well.

Migrant workers actually add large levels of entrepreneurship and self-employment,

thereby creating new jobs for the UK workforce. This can also act as a spur to local people to start their own business, giving further impetus to economic growth.

UNISON has looked at the facts and believes that unemployment is not caused by migrant workers, but by global trends in production and investment.

**Myth no.4:**  
**‘Migrant workers  
 undercut our wages’**

Migrant workers do not take jobs at a lower wage than someone else doing the same job. The myth is not comparing like with like. What has happened is that migrant workers tend to work in the lower paying industries. This means their average pay as a group – when compared with the average pay of UK workers – is lower. Migrant workers are not ‘undercutting’ wages. They are simply working in lower-paid jobs. Migrant workers also work in high-paying business jobs in the City and in the professions.

Of course there are migrant workers who are exploited by unscrupulous employers just out to make a quick buck by flouting employment laws and by not even paying the legally required national minimum wage. All too often migrant workers find themselves the victims of employers who exploit their lack of understanding of the UK's laws.

UNISON says that we need better legal protection for ALL workers to ensure they are paid correctly, without unlawful deductions, and that all workers are treated fairly.

### **Myth no.5: 'Our public services can't cope with the influx of migrant workers'**

Let's remember that without migrant workers we wouldn't have the benefit of our public services to start with. And as net tax contributors, they make an important financial contribution to the economy too – putting more money into the public coffers than they take out. Also the vast majority of migrant workers from Europe are healthy young adults without dependants, so it is unlikely that they will be a heavy burden on the NHS or our education system.

The evidence suggests that many workers from the "A8" Eastern European countries return home well before retirement age, and therefore put very little strain on the government purse in respect of providing services into their old age. A report from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) found that amongst migrant workers

from the Czech Republic: 48% stayed for a couple of weeks; 42% for a few months; 22% for a few years; and just 11% for the rest of their lives.

It is also common to blame migrants for 'queue jumping' public housing or receiving priority treatment on waiting lists. However this is not backed up by the facts. A study by the Equality and Human Rights Commission revealed that new migrants made up less than 2% of the total number of people in social housing throughout the UK and that around 90% of those living in social housing were born in the UK.

It is important to recognise that there are places that experience some pressure on their public services – especially in smaller, rural towns where migrant labour is often needed to support the local agricultural industry. But such pressure is not the "fault" of migrant workers – it is the UK's failure to invest properly in providing social infrastructure in such communities.

UNISON believes that improving investment in public services is the answer to dealing with such pressure. Migrant workers should not be scapegoats when they are so badly needed.

### **Myth no.6: 'Migrant workers come to Britain as it's a soft touch for benefit scroungers'**

The clue is in the name: migrant *workers*.

Migrant workers come to the UK because they want to work. Often they can earn better wages here than in their home



Photograph: Simon Rawles

### **Myth no.7:** **‘Migrant workers mean increased crime’**

This is not true, according to the Association of Chief Police Officers. Peter Fahy, Chief Constable of the Cheshire constabulary and co-author of a study on the subject said:

*Migration has had a significant impact on UK communities in past years, but while this has led to new demands made on the police service, the evidence does not support theories of a large scale crime wave generated through migration. In fact, crime has been falling across the country over the past year.*

UNISON says that reports of large-scale crime waves associated with migrant workers are racist scare stories aimed at causing community strife.

country and they often send money home to support their families. It’s clearly an economic relationship at heart, and mutually beneficial, with spin-offs for both parties in economics, understanding and culture.

Many migrant workers return home after two years or less. If we are to believe migrant workers are benefits cheats and the UK is such a “scrounger’s paradise” why do they ever leave?

UNISON believes the UK’s prosperity is dependent on successfully bringing migrant workers here to address our labour shortages.

***Myths about migrant workers,*** a shortened version of this information is available as a leaflet (stock number 2702) from [stockorders@unison.co.uk](mailto:stockorders@unison.co.uk) or through the online catalogue at: [www.unison.org.uk/resources](http://www.unison.org.uk/resources). You can also download it from [www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/17352.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/17352.pdf)

# Key tasks at regional and branch level



Here is a list of key tasks at regional and branch level that provide a framework for developing effective recruitment and organisation of migrant workers.

## Key tasks for the Regional Management Team

1. Identify an officer as the regional migrant worker's contact with responsibility for:
  - a) co-ordinating the region's organising work with migrant workers
  - b) acting as the contact point for the Migrant Worker's Unit and the Migrant Workers' Organising Knowledge Bank.

This officer's contact details should be published on the Migrant Worker's Organising Knowledge Bank, and passed on to branches.
2. Identify and allocate resources necessary to:
  - a) Encourage and enable migrant worker activists to participate effectively in a regional migrant workers' network, including provision of a forum.
  - b) Develop a regional map of migrant worker employment, including migrant worker communities, social and faith groups.
  - c) Develop an accessible directory of key partners in other agencies and migrant worker groups and inform branches how they can contribute to and access this information.
3. Work with key regional contacts to identify region-wide bargaining and campaigning opportunities.

4. Add a link to the national migrant workers' web pages from your regional web page. Publish the name and contact details of your region's migrant workers' contact and also information about key local support and advice agencies.
5. Ensure migrant workers' voices are heard in regional publications.
6. Review the region's achievements and report successes and challenges for inclusion on UNISON's national Migrant Workers' Organising Knowledge Bank.

## Key tasks for the regional committee (or equivalent)

1. Establish a position on the regional committee (or equivalent) for someone who is responsible for working with the migrant worker contact. (This may initially be held by an existing member of the committee, but the ultimate aim must be for this position to be held by a migrant worker.)
2. Identify key migrant worker activists and encourage their participation in all regional decision-making processes and forums.
3. Consider how to promote participation in the regional migrant workers' network and forum.
4. Review the regional development plan to identify the potential for work on organising migrant workers.

## Key tasks for the **branch committee**

1. Establish a position on the branch committee for someone who has responsibility for co-ordinating branch organising and recruitment work with migrant workers. (This may initially be held by an existing committee member, but the ultimate aim must be for this position to be held by a migrant worker.) Advise the regional office of this member's contact details and publish them in branch communications.
2. Begin the process of ensuring branch mapping includes migrant workers and build this in to the branch development and organising plan with appropriate resources, identifying key migrant worker communities, social, and faith groups.
3. Develop a network of key contacts in the workplace and in the community. Establish a directory, which is available to branch activists for the purpose of creating organising plans.
4. Establish a migrant workers' network in the branch.
5. Work with migrant worker members to identify key opportunities and issues for bargaining and campaigning.
6. Identify key migrant worker activists and encourage their participation in all branch decision-making processes and forums.
7. Review the branch development and organising plan, and feed back your experience to your regional migrant worker's contact.



# Mapping



Mapping is the process by which organisers identify the location of their members and prospective members and key information about them. This information is used to assist in the targeting of key workplaces or groups of workers for recruitment and organising initiatives.

Mapping migrant workers includes the standard information about job, gender, race, age, hours of work, terms and conditions of employment, etc. However it should also include details like nationality and language. This information is especially useful in, for example, developing networks of migrant workers with a common language.

## Mapping migrant workers

In some cases, migrant worker members and potential members may prove difficult to locate and map.

- The employer may be reluctant to release information about how many migrant workers they employ, their locations, and the kind of work they are involved in. This may be simply through a lack of proper record-keeping, or may be for more serious reasons. For example, they may wish to prevent trade union organisation or be anxious about the public perception of their employment of migrant workers.
- The workers themselves may be reluctant to identify themselves because of the negative attitudes of their employer, fellow workers or the community, or because of their immigration status. It could also be

because they identify not only as migrant workers, but also as members of a group discriminated against on other grounds, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or age.

- They may be suspicious of trade unions because of bad experiences in their home countries. Workers from Eastern Europe may have experience of trade unions as corrupt arms of the state. Workers from South America will be aware that trade union activists are often the target for violence by corrupt regimes and big business.
- There may be “hard-to-find” or “hidden” workers in temporary or agency work and/or with irregular work patterns, including seasonal work, or those engaged for short one-off projects.

It is therefore important to bring together information from a range of sources and, in doing so, to establish a network of key partners. They will usually be able to assist, not only in the geographical mapping, but also with advice about relevant national and cultural issues. There may well be a network of this kind already in existence. Good places to check on this are the local Regional Development Agency (the body responsible for local economic development initiatives, including labour force matters, such as the need for migrant labour), local authorities and voluntary sector organisations.

It should also be noted that migrant workers may misunderstand our approach or miss out on opportunities to get involved, if we are unable to deal with any language barriers effectively.



## Sources of information for mapping migrant workers

### In the workplace:

- migrant workers
- branch officers and stewards
- members
- the employer
- other trade unions.

It is unlikely that all the information you need will be available through these sources. It is therefore important that you look to work with agencies used by migrant workers or locate venues where they meet outside of work in the community.

### In the community:

- migrant worker organisations
- community organisations and clubs
- faith groups/places of worship
- charities
- advice agencies
- places of education (especially relating to language classes)
- Regional Development Agency (RDA).

Don't forget that many of these organisations may have UNISON members working for them. In addition, you probably have members who work as volunteers for charities, or who attend relevant places of worship. Developing partnerships with



such organisations through members can be an important approach and may encourage members to participate in UNISON activity.

The RDAs (and their Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish equivalents) have responsibility for regional economic development and regeneration. They are responsible for considering their region's needs for migrant labour, and some have already established partnerships designed to provide information and support for migrant workers.

Most of these organisations are listed in phone directories. Information is also available from local authorities and advice agencies, such as Citizen's Advice or your local law centre. Some may be quite informal groups and so may not be found so easily.

In developing partnerships with migrant workers, organisers will also come across many campaigns, including anti-racism, immigration, and migrant workers' rights. These all have potential for demonstrating UNISON's wider support for migrant workers. However it is important to note that the union's guidelines, *Democracy in UNISON*, advise on who it is appropriate to campaign with, and the need to keep your regional office informed of any joint branch work or region-wide campaigning.

The internet can also be a source of information. For example, a simple search for 'migrant workers Liverpool' comes up with a number of results. You may not always find detailed information on groups, but you may be able to identify key groups and individuals already engaged in working with migrant workers.

It is important to ensure that UNISON maintains a presence where migrant workers come together. This could be through providing posters and leaflets in appropriate languages, or organising regular advice 'surgeries', perhaps alongside other agencies.

### **Other information**

For further information about campaigning and working appropriately with different groups, see our guidance:  
*Democracy in UNISON*  
[www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/13305.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/13305.pdf)

# The language barrier



Many, but not all migrant workers, will have some difficulty communicating in English.

All sorts of racist assumptions might be made about someone's intelligence, lifestyle and attitudes on the basis of their first language and/or limited skills in English.

In fact it is not unusual to find a migrant worker taking a job for which they are overqualified solely to give themselves the opportunity to acquire sufficient English for the field in which they are qualified.

However, a limited ability to communicate in English can have a severely debilitating effect on being able to properly understand an employment contract, rules, instructions, and notices. In the worst situations, for example, this could lead to serious health and safety breaches. It can also lead to feelings of exclusion because of an inability to engage socially with co-workers who only speak English.

It is important to recognise that the impact of the language barrier goes far further. It affects a migrant worker's ability to understand information outside of the workplace – from simple transactions in shops through to accessing housing, education and social benefits.

This can be a source of enormous frustration and stress for the limited English speaker. It can have a knock-on effect for the migrant's work and their relationships with co-workers and employers, as well as a knock-on effect on their home and family life, because they are unable to provide effectively for basic needs.



# Breaking through the language barrier



## What **UNISON** is already doing

It is important to be realistic about what UNISON can provide in the way of addressing the language barrier. Our expertise is as a trade union – organising, campaigning, negotiating, and representation. Our resources are not sufficient to provide a fully multi-lingual service. However, key materials are available in languages other than English and UNISON can also help direct workers to other organisations that offer assistance in the appropriate language. (See Key contacts.)

UNISON is developing a dedicated migrant workers' section on UNISON's website where key information and information about other support organisations will be available in a range of languages.

UNISON is also starting ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses for members around the UK in conjunction with the Workers' Educational Association. This is an important resource and should be widely publicised as a benefit of joining UNISON. For more information on the ESOL course, please contact your regional education officer or regional learning and development organiser.

## **UNISON materials**

UNISON provides the following key membership materials in other languages, which are available through the online catalogue:

- the leaflet, '10 good reasons to join UNISON' (stock number 2130)
- a membership application form (stock number 1088)

These materials are published in English and Welsh and are also available in the following languages:

Albanian	Arabic
Bengali	Chinese (Mandarin)
Czech	Farsi
French	Gujerati
Hindi	Polish
Portuguese	Punjabi
Russian	Somali
Spanish	Turkish
Urdu	

This list of languages and the documents available, are subject to amendment and are updated as required.

## **Breaking the language barrier at meetings**

These are the key questions to be asked when preparing meetings where there are likely to be language barriers:

- What language(s) other than English are used?

- Are there one or two people in the group who can interpret effectively and accurately – and for ALL members of the group?
- Is there a person outside of the group who can interpret and is available?
- How much extra meeting time is needed for interpreting one language? For two or more languages?
- What materials are available in the relevant languages?

When there is no-one in the group who can act as interpreter, other people who could be considered include:

- a branch member with the necessary language skills
- a volunteer from a migrant workers' community organisation, club, or faith group
- a volunteer from an advice agency
- a regional office contact who can help or advise on possible sources of interpreters.

To secure the services of an interpreter, it may help to hold the meeting at a migrant workers' community centre, club or place of worship. As well the increased chances of finding an interpreter at such a venue, it also raises UNISON's profile among other migrant workers.

As a last resort, a paid-for interpreting service might be considered, but this is not cheap.



## Breaking the language barrier in publicity

Before translating material, consider the following:

- Does it need translating?
- Is your document or something similar available elsewhere? Can it be communicated more effectively through discussion at a meeting?
- Can it be used again?

Translation can be expensive (around £100 per 1,000 words at 2008 prices, depending upon the language and the amount of technical language involved). Is there a way of generalising the material, so it can be easily used on other occasions? Can you share it with another organiser in the branch/ outside the branch/at regional level/other campaigners.

### How will you do it?

Who will translate the material? How will you check the quality of the translation?

### What will it cost?

Again, if it is campaigning material, consider if you can share the cost with others working on the same campaign.

If you make the decision to have a document translated, make sure you use a reliable translator. Documents should not simply be run through a web-based translation service without the result being proof read by a native language speaker, if at all possible.

If your branch has a website, make sure it links to the migrant workers' pages on the national UNISON website.

It is strongly recommended that any publicity includes a reference to the independence of UNISON from employers, the government, and business interests. This is because of the possible negative perception of trade unions amongst migrant workers arising from experiences in their country of origin.

Remember if you produce material in other languages, it is important to be clear that the branch is not able to offer a fully multi-lingual service. Suggest that enquiries should be made through someone who can communicate in English.

Finally, if material does get translated, please send an electronic copy of it (stating the language it is in) along with an English language version to your regional migrant workers' contact for their organising information and for inclusion in the Migrant Workers' Organising Knowledge Bank.

# Bargaining



The negotiating agenda offers the chance – not just to raise migrant workers’ issues – but also to involve migrant workers directly in the process. This is not just about getting their voices heard, even though this is important. It is also about empowerment and encouraging participation in the union’s activities.

## **Bargaining to break the language barrier**

The bargaining agenda can be used to take up language issues with the employer. As well as providing for the language needs of migrant workers, it also brings in issues of staff development and service provision.

Key issues that could be raised under the bargaining agenda include:

- health and safety guidance in other languages
- information and advice, for example, a welcome pack with details about key local services, produced in a range of relevant languages
- paid time off and course costs for language courses. These could be:
  - (a) English language for those with limited English language skills
  - (b) other languages for staff working alongside migrant workers or coming into contact with service users with limited English
- introduction of a voluntary interpreters’ list, with possible interpreter’s allowance
- plain English documents, contracts and signage.

## **Bargaining to break other barriers**

Other bargaining opportunities include:

### **Combating racism**

Employers’ employment and service delivery policies should explicitly include the need for migrant workers to be entitled to protection from racism and to have access to anti-racist training and events, etc. This sends two important messages: one to those who believe that migrant workers are ‘fair game’ for racist behaviour; and one to migrant workers, who may be unaware of their rights to speak out against racism.

### **Access to education and training courses**

Migrant workers should be provided with support to attend a range of courses. As well as those designed to acclimatise them to living in the UK, they should include rights at work, housing, education, and other social benefits. In addition, they should be offered education or training that allows them to develop their knowledge and skills in their chosen line of work.

### **Leave arrangements**

Migrant workers’ home countries may be thousands of miles away and the conventional two weeks’ summer holiday or the typical one day’s leave to attend a family funeral, for example, may be inappropriate to their situation. Bargaining could include a claim for the right to accrue leave entitlement and hold it over for a year

to enable a longer holiday – an arrangement which should not be restricted purely to migrant workers. Equally a claim could be submitted for leave entitlement to be ‘front-loaded’ – making it unnecessary to have long initial periods accruing an entitlement to leave before being able to take it.

Please ensure that any agreements negotiated are sent to your regional migrant workers’ contact for onward transmission to the Migrant Workers’ Organising Knowledge Bank.





# Campaigning



It is not for organisers to impose campaign issues, but it is their role to make sure that issues are identified. Campaigning issues should arise ‘organically’ through talking with workers and discussing any problems. However migrant workers, in particular, may be reluctant to initiate discussions around problems at work – either through fear of repercussions or through lack of understanding of their entitlements as workers.

Some common problems have already been identified by migrant workers as potential campaign issues, and organisers could use some of these topics to raise questions about whether these are causing difficulties.

## Language courses

UNISON continues to campaign and make representations about the reduction in the number of ESOL courses available for migrant workers. Alongside the bargaining agenda for improved language facilities in the workplace, it is important that pressure is kept up on this issue.

## Health and safety

It is essential that health and safety information and instructions are made available in the appropriate languages. The tragic deaths of 21 cockle-pickers in Morecambe Bay in 2004 was just one example of how unscrupulous employers fail to ensure adequate protection for their workers. This infamous case, led to a high level campaign that resulted in the creation of the Gangmasters’ Licensing Authority – a regulatory body.

## Workplace immigration checks

Checks may be carried out by immigration officials or employers at any time. Such checks can be alarming, insensitive, and intimidating, and can be used to bully and harass workers.

## Changes in immigration status

Immigration status can change for a number of reasons, including a change in government regulations. This was the case when the government changed the regulations in 2007 around the “shortage occupation list”. This resulted in thousands of senior care workers being threatened with having their work permits withdrawn.

## Defence campaigns

UNISON has a long history of supporting campaigns to defend members (and/or their families) threatened with issues like deportation. Establishing a local campaign with a broad base of support can be a useful way of raising the profile of the case and the issue more generally. Such campaigns must always be run with the informed consent of the individual concerned, and in consultation with the regional office. More information on campaigning with groups outside UNISON can be found in the guidelines, Democracy in UNISON.

## Living wage campaigning

UNISON has had success in organising and winning living wage campaigns, which can have a significant impact on the income of low paid migrant workers.

Please ensure that information about successful campaigns is sent to your regional migrant workers' contact for onward transmission to the Migrant Workers' Organising Knowledge Bank.



Photograph: John Harris

# UNISON's welfare and migrant worker tax services



For many migrant workers, there may be issues beyond the workplace for which they need support, for example, helping with registering for National Insurance, taxation, housing, education, etc. In particular, access to public funds is limited for new migrants, so financial support is especially important.

UNISON has its own welfare department – a potentially attractive benefit for migrant workers – which can advise and refer members to the appropriate agencies. The benefits of the welfare service may also provide a basis for recruitment activity.

## UNISON welfare

[www.unison.org.uk/welfare](http://www.unison.org.uk/welfare)

This service offers a unique confidential advice and support service for UNISON members and their families, including:

- debt advice
- listening and support
- financial assistance
- breaks and holidays
- personal advice.

There are many ways that UNISON welfare can support migrant workers, for example, by providing weekly financial assistance to cover basic living costs such as food and fuel for up to six months. This can be an important benefit for those, for example, ineligible for state benefits, pending a decision on immigration status.

Other support on offer includes:

- assistance for travel to appointments for a maximum of six months
- bereavement breaks – travel abroad can be considered in cases where a well-being break is sought and where the deceased (dependant or parent) was resident in another country.

UNISON welfare can also take account of dependants in the home country and money sent overseas when assessing an application.

A full copy of the criteria and forms for these services can be downloaded from the welfare pages on the website.

Confidential discussions with a national caseworker are available on 020 7551 1620.

UNISON welfare also provides a debtline service giving confidential advice and support. This is accessible by phone on 0800 389 3302 (8am to 9pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 1pm Saturdays) or email: [help@debtclinic.co.uk](mailto:help@debtclinic.co.uk)

More information about this service is available at:

[www.unison.debtclinic.co.uk](http://www.unison.debtclinic.co.uk)

## UNISON migrant worker tax service

[www.twdreturns.co.uk](http://www.twdreturns.co.uk)

This service makes sure that migrant workers are paying the correct amount of tax and that any tax already paid in error is returned as soon as possible.

Using this service ensures that all the necessary paperwork is completed and all correspondence with HM Revenue & Customs is dealt with. The fee for the service is £50, and it comes with a guarantee that unless there is a tax refund of at least £50, either as a cheque or by paying less tax from wages, the difference will be refunded up to a maximum of £25.

More information is available by calling 0800 058 2211 (English speaking staff only).

# Key contacts



## Trade unions

### **UNISON**

Tel: 0845 355 0845  
Textphone: 0800 0 967 968  
[www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

#### **Communications**

For news stories/organising stories  
Email: [infocus@unison.co.uk](mailto:infocus@unison.co.uk)  
For communications advice, contact your branch or regional communications officer.

#### **Learning and organising services**

(including ESOL courses):  
[www.unison.org.uk/laos](http://www.unison.org.uk/laos)

#### **Legal**

For legal advice, contact your regional office.

#### **Migrant worker tax service**

Advice on tax for migrant workers.  
[www.twdreturns.co.uk](http://www.twdreturns.co.uk)

#### **Migrant workers unit**

[www.unison.org.uk/migrantworkers](http://www.unison.org.uk/migrantworkers)  
Email: [labourmigration@unison.co.uk](mailto:labourmigration@unison.co.uk)

#### **Overseas nurses' network**

[www.unison.org.uk/healthcare/nursing/overseas](http://www.unison.org.uk/healthcare/nursing/overseas)

#### **Regional contact information**

[www.unison.org.uk/about/regions](http://www.unison.org.uk/about/regions)

#### **Welfare**

Confidential discussions about welfare issues at a national level: 020 7551 1620.

Debtline service: 0800 389 3302  
(8am to 9pm, Mon to Fri, and 9am to 1pm Saturdays)  
Email: [help@debtclinic.co.uk](mailto:help@debtclinic.co.uk)

## **Trades Union Congress (TUC)**

Tel: 020 7636 4030  
[www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

### **TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment**

Tel: 0207 467 1204  
[www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk](http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk)

The TUC Commission to look into and advise on the issues surrounding vulnerable employment.

### **workSMART**

[www.worksmart.org.uk](http://www.worksmart.org.uk)  
Advice from the TUC on a wide range of work-related issues.

### **International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**

[www.ituc-csi.org](http://www.ituc-csi.org)

The ITUC promotes and defends workers' rights and interests, through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions.

## Employment

### ACAS

Helpline Mon to Fri, 8am to 6pm:  
08457 47 47 47  
For Minicom users: 08456 06 16 00  
[www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service is a public body that promotes good workplace relations. Its national helpline can answer employment questions and provides general advice on rights at work for employees and employers.

### Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate

Enquiry line 0845 955 5105  
(Mon to Fri 9:30am to 4.30pm)  
[www.berr.gov.uk/employment/employment-agencies](http://www.berr.gov.uk/employment/employment-agencies)

The Inspectorate is part of the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), which carries out routine inspections of agencies and investigates complaints about agency conduct.

### Gangmasters' Licensing Authority (GLA)

To report concerns about gangmasters:  
0845 602 5020  
Email: [intelligence@gla.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:intelligence@gla.gsi.gov.uk)  
[www.gla.gov.uk](http://www.gla.gov.uk)

The Gangmasters' Licensing Authority (GLA) regulates those who supply labour or use workers to provide services in agriculture, forestry, horticulture, shellfish gathering and food processing and packaging.

### Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

Infoline: 0845 345 0055  
[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

Infoline is the HSE's public enquiry contact centre and provides access to workplace health and safety information, guidance and expert advice. **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

[www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a UN agency that brings together governments, employers and workers of its member states in common action to promote decent work throughout the world.

### National Insurance

[www.dwp.gov.uk/lifeevent/benefits/ni\\_number.asp](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/lifeevent/benefits/ni_number.asp)

Information and advice about applying for a National Insurance number.

### National Minimum Wage

[www.direct.gov.uk/employment](http://www.direct.gov.uk/employment)

Information about starting work, the minimum wage, tax and benefits.

### Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC)

[www.rec.uk.com/home](http://www.rec.uk.com/home)

Some agencies (usually the better ones) are members of the REC, which sets standards for its members.

## General

### **Citizens' Advice Bureau**

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Free, confidential, impartial and independent advice on debt and consumer issues, benefits, housing, legal matters, employment, and immigration through local offices.

[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

Online CAB information and guidance including frequently asked questions in seven languages and fact sheets to download.

### **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)**

Helpline England: 0845 604 6610  
Helpline Wales: 0845 604 8810  
Helpline Scotland: 0845 604 5510

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

Information and advice on human rights, equality and overcoming discrimination.

## Government and other agencies

### **Financial Services Authority (FSA)**

[www.moneyadeclear.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.moneyadeclear.fsa.gov.uk)

General advice about financial products and services. Contains useful information on areas such as opening a bank account and the options available to migrant workers for providing proof of identity.

### **Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

[www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

Website includes comprehensive list of foreign embassies and commissions etc in the UK.

### **Home Office Borders and Immigration Agency**

[www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk)

Responsible for securing the UK's borders, enforcing immigration and customs regulations. Also considers applications for permission to enter or stay in the UK, citizenship and asylum.

### **Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC)**

[www.oisc.gov.uk](http://www.oisc.gov.uk)

An independent public body set up under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, responsible for ensuring that all immigration advisers fulfil the requirements of good practice.

## Regional Development Agencies

The RDAs (and their Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish equivalents) are responsible for regional economic development and regeneration, including the need for migrant labour. Some have already established partnerships designed to develop information and support for migrant workers.

### North West

[www.nwda.co.uk](http://www.nwda.co.uk)

### Migrant Workers' North West:

[www.migrantworkersnorthwest.org](http://www.migrantworkersnorthwest.org)

### Yorkshire

[www.yorkshire-forward.com](http://www.yorkshire-forward.com)

### North East

[www.onenortheast.co.uk](http://www.onenortheast.co.uk)

### West Midlands

[www.advantagewm.co.uk](http://www.advantagewm.co.uk)

### East Midlands

[www.emda.org.uk](http://www.emda.org.uk)

### East of England

[www.eeda.org.uk](http://www.eeda.org.uk)

### South West

[www.southwestrda.org.uk](http://www.southwestrda.org.uk)

### London

[www.lda.gov.uk](http://www.lda.gov.uk)

### South East England

[www.seeda.co.uk](http://www.seeda.co.uk)

### Wales

[www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)

### Scotland

[www.scottish-enterprise.com](http://www.scottish-enterprise.com)

### Northern Ireland

[www.investni.com](http://www.investni.com)

## Campaigning and support organisations

### Federation of Poles

Tel: 020 8741 1606

[www.zpwb.org.uk](http://www.zpwb.org.uk)

The recognised representative organisation of the Polish ethnic group residing in the UK. Available in English and Polish.

### Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

Tel: 020 7251 8708

[www.jcwi.org.uk](http://www.jcwi.org.uk)

An independent national voluntary organisation, campaigning for justice and combating racism in immigration and asylum law and policy.

### Migrant Gateway

Tel: 020 7288 1267

[www.migrantgateway.eu](http://www.migrantgateway.eu)

A two-way international resource for information, advice and guidance. Since 2006, Migrant Gateway services have supported and signposted people moving to live and work in Europe and people who work with them.

### Migrants Rights' Network

[www.migrantsrights.org.uk](http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk)

An organisation working for a rights-based approach to migration, with migrants as full partners in developing the policies and procedures which affect life in the UK.



## **Multikulti**

[www.multikulti.org.uk](http://www.multikulti.org.uk)

An independent body providing information, advice, guidance and learning materials in community languages.

Multikulti also maintains a register of local and national agencies which offer services to communities in: Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, French, Somali, Spanish, Turkish.

## **Oxfam**

[www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)

Works predominantly abroad, but in the UK, focuses on ensuring that people have sufficient income to live on, public attitudes to poverty, and gender and race equality.

## **Refugee Council**

London advice line:  
020 7346 677

Yorkshire and Humberside advice line:  
0113 386 2210

East of England advice line:  
01473 297 900

West Midlands advice line:  
0121 234 1950

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

The Refugee Council works with asylum seekers and refugees giving direct help and support, and also to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed.

The Scottish equivalent body is at:  
[www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)

## **The Runnymede Trust**

[www.runnymedetrust.org](http://www.runnymedetrust.org)

An independent voluntary funded organisation that promotes a successful multi-ethnic Britain.

## **Shelter**

Free helpline:  
0808 800 4444  
[www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

Provides advice on housing rights and campaigns on housing issues.

## **Show Racism The Red Card**

**England and Wales:**  
[www.srtrc.org](http://www.srtrc.org)

**Scotland:**  
[www.theredcardscotland.org](http://www.theredcardscotland.org)

An anti-racist educational charity, which aims to combat racism through positive role models, who are predominately but not exclusively footballers.

# Glossary of terms



<b>A2 nations</b>	Bulgaria and Romania, who joined the EU in January 2007
<b>A8 nations</b>	Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, who all joined the EU in May 2004
<b>Asylum seeker</b>	Those who apply for protection under the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees
<b>EEA</b>	European Economic Area – the countries of the EU, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway
<b>EHRC</b>	Equality and Human Rights Commission
<b>ESOL</b>	English for Speakers of Other Languages (educational courses)
<b>EU</b>	European Union – An economic and political partnership between 27 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK
<b>GLA</b>	Gangmasters Licensing Authority – a body regulating those who supply labour or use workers to provide services in agriculture, forestry, horticulture, shellfish gathering and food processing and packaging
<b>Migrant worker</b>	Someone who has come from abroad to work in the UK

**Migrant Workers’  
Organising Knowledge Bank**

UNISON’s Migrant Workers’ Organising Knowledge Bank is a living store of information and ideas. Its aim will be to share information and good practice and will include: organising plans, successful bargaining and campaigning initiatives, as well as contact information on partners in organisations outside UNISON

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**OISC**

Office of the Immigration Service  
Commissioner

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**Refugee**

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country

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**Regional Development Agency**

Regional organisations leading regional economic development and regeneration. There are equivalent organisations in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (see links section above)

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**Undocumented worker**

A migrant worker in the UK who does not have documents confirming a legal right to work

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# ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS



Dennis Williams, United Steelworkers

How do we address a problem in the workplace? The usual answer, if we have a union, is to file a grievance, setting paperwork in motion.

But the grievance procedure can be invisible, slow, and fruitless. And many problems aren't technically grievances. They're simply the result of someone else having power over you.

To solve the school mold problem, Steve Hinds and the other teachers started with a grievance—but they didn't end there. They turned up the heat with a series of actions that built their group's unity and confidence, culminating in the day everyone wore

surgical masks to school and walked out of a meeting with the superintendent.

Whether or not a grievance is part of our plan, we're more likely to win if we take action on the job. Our actions should be:

- **Visible and public**, so that members are aware of what is taking place and the result.
- **Collective**, involving as many members as possible.
- **Confrontational**, mobilizing members to face the decision-makers who have the power to resolve the problem.

“Not only does worksite mobilization work, it shifts the power for the next fight,” says Hetty Rosenstein, longtime president of a public employees union in New Jersey.

“When workers confront management at the worksite, and as a result they correct something that is wrong, or they improve their conditions, or they get a fired worker reinstated, a power shift occurs right before their eyes.

“It happens in real time and workers witness it. Management holds the power over the situation—and workers take it away.”

Mobilizing not only gets results, but also shifts power for the next fight.



## MAKE A GAME PLAN

Once you've identified a good organizing issue (see Lesson 4), you need a plan of action.

### THE THREE BASICS OF A PLAN

- 1. What exactly do you want?** It's amazing how far along folks can be in a campaign without having identified what solution they're after, and whether or not it's winnable. The teachers had clear demands for how the city could fix the mold problem.
- 2. Who has the power to fix the problem?** It's not enough to say "management." Figure out which person in management could say yes to your solution. The teachers zeroed in on decision-makers at the city level.
- 3. Which tactics can work?** Aim your actions to build the pressure on the decision-maker you've identified. Consider how much pressure it will take to win, and where your leverage is.

Jim West, jimwestphoto.com



### **GETTING BUY-IN**

To get people on board, your strategy must be clear and credible—people have to understand it and believe it can work. Practice explaining the plan simply and quickly.



## HOLD SMALL MEETINGS

New people are more likely to come to a small meeting.

You might have the impulse to start by inviting everyone in the workplace to a meeting. It's natural to think "strength in numbers" and assume people will feel more confident if they can see lots of people in the same room. But that's not likely to happen at the beginning of your campaign, and it doesn't have to be a goal.

Instead, said Andrew Tripp, who helped organize a union in a big Vermont hospital, "new people are more likely to come to a small meeting that includes a friend or co-worker they know. And at that meeting, they are more likely to participate than at a large meeting where their presence has little impact.

"You cannot have a conversation at a large meeting. But you can in a small meeting, and you can build a relationship." (Remember Lesson 2: relationships are key.)



Read more in *A Troublemaker's Handbook 2*.

When you're starting out, a "small meeting" may be as small as two people. According to Tripp, that's how workers won their organizing drive: "We had small meetings with 670 nurses who gave us a verbal commitment to the union, and we got 672 yes votes out of about 1,000 cast."





## **FIVE PEOPLE CAN DO A LOT**

Members of Rising Stars, the young worker committee of Office and Professional Employees Local 2 in Washington, D.C., learned a similar lesson when they were first getting started.

Their first meeting drew 10 excited people. But the group “got bogged down in the ins and outs of trying to get started,” said organizer Caniesha Seldon. So people “trickled off.”

“We kept waiting for more people [to join],” Seldon said. “Then you lost the ones you had because you’re waiting and not giving them anything to do.”

She learned from the experience, though. The group was revived the next year and is now going strong.

“A lot of people start with really big expectations when they send out a meeting notice, and get really disappointed when only five people show up,” said Seldon. “But a dedicated group of five people can do a lot of things. People will see what you’re doing if you keep doing it.”

**People will  
see what  
you’re doing,  
if you keep  
doing it.**



## GETTING THE BALL ROLLING

Say there's a problem where you work. Maybe you have a supervisor who humiliates someone in front of co-workers. You've tried reasoning with him, but nothing changes. You want to do something.

- **Think clearly about the problem** you're facing. Try to get past the emotion—the anger, resentment, shame, or whatever you're feeling about it. Write down the simple facts.
- **Resist the urge** to act only on emotion, or to do something all by yourself. That's often when you're most vulnerable, and you might make more trouble for yourself than for the boss. Instead, take a deep breath and reach out to co-workers.
- **Find someone at work you trust**, and share the facts you've written down. Ask for an honest opinion. If you both agree that this is a serious problem, see if you can come up with the names of other co-workers who are affected, too.
- **Talk one on one** with these other people. So far, you're just checking to see if others agree with you, not deciding what you're going to do about it.

- **Some people will be more concerned than others.** Don't be discouraged. Keep talking—without pestering people—until you find even one person who shares your desire to do something.
- **If you find a small handful of co-workers** who share this problem, get them together, perhaps over a cup of coffee during your break. First share your fears about what could happen if your group did something. Then, talk about what will happen if you do nothing. This will usually help make up your mind to do something! Then start talking about steps you could take.
- **Figure out together** who in management is the decision-maker on the issue. Does this boss know about the problem? How could you approach the boss, collectively? What are the risks and advantages of different approaches?
- **Check your workplace map** from Lesson 3. Think about who's involved so far, and who else you'll need to involve in order to win. Are there key leaders you want to involve early on? Who in your group should approach them, and what approach might work best?
- **Use the information** in Lessons 4 and 5 to make a plan. Take small steps to build your trust as a group. This is the best way to overcome fear.



Download this at  
[labornotes.org/  
secrets](http://labornotes.org/secrets)



## EVERY BOSS HAS A WEAK SPOT



Coalition of Immokalee Workers

Think about where your employer is vulnerable.

Steel production in the late 1800s used to require one crucial step: a 20-minute process called the “blow” that removed impurities, strengthening the metal. It was not unheard of for union members to go to the supervisor at the start of the blow and demand that some important grievance be resolved.

According to old-timers, it was amazing what the company could accomplish in those 20 minutes. These workers had found their employer’s vulnerability—and they used it to make the workplace safer and more humane.

Think about where your employer is vulnerable. For some companies it might be their logo or their image, which they have spent millions of dollars cultivating. For others it might be a bottleneck in the production process, or a weakness in their just-in-time inventory system.



## **WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK**

At a Fortune 500 truck factory, supervisors were ruthless and degrading. Discipline was arbitrary and unjust. At the monthly union meeting one worker noted that they were all being “railroaded.”

A few weeks later, 2,000 plastic whistles shaped like locomotives arrived at the local. The instructions were simple: whenever you can see a supervisor on the shop floor, blow your whistle.

At first, whistles were going off all over. But by the morning break the plant floor was quiet. Not a single supervisor dared to show his face.

The next day in contract bargaining, the employer refused to bargain until the whistles were removed. The bargaining team noted the company’s statements on refusing to bargain, and asked for a break to go call the Labor Board.

Bargaining resumed immediately, with positive results.



## LUNCH TO RULE

On a military base, aircraft maintenance workers would happily interrupt their lunch in order to deal with urgent problems. But in return they had an understanding that, once the problem was solved, they would go back to their sandwiches even though the lunch period had ended.

The situation was mutually acceptable for several years—until a new supervisor came along. We all know how that is. Had to prove himself. Show who's boss. Etc.

**'Okay, we'll  
play by your  
rules.'**

Steve Eames, an international rep for the Boilermakers union, explained that the new supervisor insisted that workers take their lunch between 12:00 and 12:30, period.

"So the steward said, 'Okay, we'll play by the rules,'" Eames remembers. The maintenance workers had previously eaten at a lunch table in the work area. But now, when 12 o'clock came, they left and went to a fast-food restaurant on the base. For three or four days they all went as a group, leaving the shop unattended.

One day a plane came in during the half-hour lunch period. No one was there to help bring the plane in, or to check it out. The supervisor had to park the plane by himself.

istolethetv (CC BY 2.0) bit.ly/1VQNT3M



“The boss went and talked to the steward, and the steward said, ‘That’s our time, we’re at lunch,’” said Eames. “You got what you wanted.”

The workers went out for lunch for a couple more days, and then they ended what we might call “lunch to rule.” “They didn’t want to file a grievance,” says Eames, “because the company would have won on the basis of contract language.

“Without anything in writing, it went back to the way it had been before. It empowered the guys. It told the supervisor, we’ll be a little flexible if you’ll be flexible.”

Lunch to rule.



Read more like this in *Labor Notes* magazine.



## OVERTIME BAN



Jim West, jimwestphoto.com

At a machine tool shop in Vermont, the company put in a harsh new absentee policy. Workers responded with a nine-month refusal to work overtime.

For nine months,  
workers refused  
to work overtime.

Union officials and stewards did not organize the ban, which under many union contracts could be illegal. “There was always another level of union leadership that did not hold any official position,” says David Cohen, who was a representative for the United Electrical Workers at the time.

“Mostly, the unofficial leaders were the older workers—the mentors, if you will—who had the respect of the others. They did not hold formal



meetings. They just talked amongst themselves and to the elected leaders.

“They did the work the elected leaders could not do. In fact, the union officials sometimes worked overtime, to make it clear that the ban was not official policy. It really was a rank-and-file effort.

“During the overtime ban, the union committee spent months negotiating over the absentee program, making it as loose as possible. Then we got workers to file grievances over every point they received for being late or absent. The only rule was that workers had to go to the grievance meeting and argue their case at the first step. This made it clear to the company that the members were opposed to the program.

“At one point there were hundreds of grievances pending. The union committee was spending eight hours a day meeting with the company. This in itself represented a big loss in production.

“Eventually, without ever admitting that the absentee plan was a failure, the company stopped enforcing it and installed new time clocks that could give workers a reasonable grace period.”

The unofficial leaders were the older workers who had respect of the others.



## KEEP THE BOSS OFF BALANCE

Managers like routine. They like to know that what happened yesterday will happen today and that no one is thinking too hard about it. You can make them nervous simply by doing something different, even something normal that would be unthreatening to the non-managerial mind. When they have to keep guessing where the next shot is coming from, you have the upper hand.

### POWERFUL WAYS TO ACT

- **Disrupt the flow of work**, the chain of command, or the employer's control over workers. Disruption gets attention, and often gets results.
- **Alter and improve.** Some things we can change simply by doing them differently: slow down production, take a longer break, or change the way work is organized. Once something is changed, it's harder for the employer to change it back.
- **Take control.** When the boss gives an order, he sets a chain of events in motion. When we act collectively, we start a chain of events in a different direction.

Jim West, jimwestphoto.com



“The corporate culture is not a creative culture,” says Joe Fahey, a former Teamster leader, “and we need to look at that as an opportunity.

“I used to bargain with Smuckers,” Fahey recalls. “We decided to do things that would freak them out.

Factory life is very predictable. The workers decided to take their breaks at the railroad tracks, instead of at the same table and the same bench that they did every day. It was easy for the workers to do, but it was scary for management. They are more easily scared than we realize.”

In another Teamsters plant, newly elected leaders of the local were bargaining with management for the first time. None had been to college or had union experience, and they were intimidated.

**Management  
is more easily  
scared than we  
realize.**

“We wanted to set it up to make the company feel at least as uncomfortable at the first meeting as the workers feel,” Fahey said. “The first negotiations were in the local union hall, so we had an opportunity to set the stage. We arranged the chairs in a circle, with no table. We invited the management team in and pointed to the empty chairs and said, ‘Have a seat.’

“It worked. They were polite but looked really uncomfortable. Their eyes were rolling. They had no place to open their briefcases or their laptops. They were not sure what to do with their legs.

“Now that we had made them uncomfortable, we tried to put them at ease. We said, ‘We want you to get to know us a bit and we want to get to know you a bit. We all have different jobs. You probably know more about our jobs than we know about your jobs. So let’s go around the circle and introduce ourselves.’

“When it got to the plant manager, we asked him what he did and who his boss was. This company makes frozen snacks. He answered, ‘My job is to make sure the lines produce 132 snacks per minute.’ We asked him more questions and he went on and on, like he was enjoying the fact that someone was asking him a question.

“He eventually revealed some things that the human relations manager didn’t like, and the human relations manager rapped him on the head with his knuckles and said, ‘You shared too much! You shared too much!’”



## 15-MINUTE STRIKE

Pennsylvania social workers figured out how to catch management off guard. During negotiations with the state, spokesman Ray Martinez said, “we wanted an activity that would irritate the boss, educate the public, and at the same time get the members psyched up. We decided that we would all take our 15-minute breaks at the same time.”

The union used its phone trees to call members at home. “At the agreed date and time,” Martinez says, “all of our members would get up and walk out of the office. This meant that clients in the office, phone calls, and so on would be placed on hold. In other words, all activity ceased.

“This served a couple of purposes. First, management and clients would get a feel for what it would be like without our services if we were to go on strike. Secondly, we, the members, would be outside of the worksite having outdoor shop meetings and updating the workers on the latest on the negotiations.

“While this was going on, we had picket signs asking drivers to honk their horns to show us their support. The beauty of it all was that this was perfectly legal, so there was nothing management could do.”

At the end of the 15-minute break, everybody went back inside and went back to work.



## TURN UP THE HEAT

Don't bring out your big guns right away. Start with an easy-to-do activity that won't take a whole lot of commitment on the part of your co-workers. If enough people participate, you've built communication and solidarity. Maybe you've had some fun.

As your actions grow more intense, managers begin to understand you mean business.

Take the New Haven teachers' fight against mold, for example. They began by gathering signatures on a grievance and doing a health survey. This helped them verify how widely and deeply felt their issue was, and form a network of activists who would lead their co-workers through the campaign.

If you don't achieve your goal through your first step, you then try something that's a bit harder, that pushes the boss a bit more. If necessary, another step could be to threaten to bring in outside pressure or publicity. And so on.

Why escalate gradually?

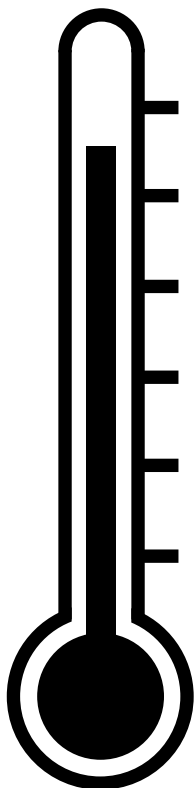
- **Take the high road.** By starting small, you show you are reasonable and credible. You *did* try asking politely.

- **It builds your group.** If you start off with low-intensity actions, members who have never said boo to the boss before will be more likely to participate. As your actions get more intense, make sure not to leave people behind.
- **Strength in numbers.** If you leap straight into high-intensity actions and only a few people participate, it's easy for your employer to single them out. With a few illegal disciplines, management can teach everyone the lesson that sticking your neck out means getting your head chopped off. If you start smaller and build, you can achieve greater participation.
- **Each action has a greater impact than the action before.** As your actions get more and more intense, managers begin to understand that you mean business. You also keep them guessing. When supervisors don't know what's going to happen next—that's when they make mistakes. And every time they make a mistake, the balance of power shifts in your direction.
- **Don't play your aces too soon.** If you do your worst first, there's nowhere for your campaign to go but down. It's more effective when managers can see there's a lot more to come—and there's still time to save themselves a headache by giving in.



## ACTION THERMOMETER

One way to visualize escalating tactics is to arrange them on a thermometer, with each action “hotter” than the last. Here are the steps the New Haven teachers took to solve the mold problem at their school, beginning from the bottom of the thermometer:



- Enjoyed their victory
- Walked out of a meeting en masse
- Spoke to the media
- Pulled a publicity stunt
- Called a meeting of supporters
- Used the result to formulate specific demands, with deadlines
- Filed an information request
- Reached out to parents
- Published a newsletter
- Formed a grievance committee
- Developed a communication network
- Conducted a health survey
- Gathered signatures on a grievance
- Defined their issue: air quality
- Met as a small group



In many cases a survey would be the lowest-intensity task, the one to start with. But in this case teachers were already fired up about the mold issue, and the initial group had no trouble getting them to sign a group grievance.

When the teachers walked out on the superintendent, it showed how far they had come. Their escalating campaign had built up their sense of the justice of their cause, and they were not afraid.



Download this at  
[labornotes.org/  
secrets](http://labornotes.org/secrets)

### **CHECKLIST: CHOOSE TACTICS THAT FIT**

- Does the action relate to your issue?
- Will it increase the pressure on the decision-maker?
- Is it simple?
- Is it visible?
- Is it timed for effect?
- Is it new and different—or tried and true?
- Are enough people ready to do it?
- How will others react? Will it unify people?
- How will management react? Could it backfire?
- Does it violate the law or the contract? If so, are you prepared for the consequences?
- Will it be fun?



**EXERCISE:  
ARRANGE THESE TACTICS ON A  
THERMOMETER**

Here's an assortment of tactics that workers have used and loved. Pick an issue in your workplace and imagine you're planning an escalating campaign. Draw a thermometer, and write in the tactics you might use, beginning at the bottom with the mildest ones.

Which tactics are "hotter" might vary from one workplace to another, and some tactics will be unique to a particular workplace. Can you think of actions you might try that aren't on this list? Place these on your thermometer, too.

Bombard the boss  
with phone calls and  
emails

Wear T-shirts or  
hats with a slogan  
or cartoon on a  
particular day

Strike

Put up posters

Visit the boss in  
a small group

Wear  
buttons or  
stickers

File a group  
grievance with  
signatures

Hold an  
informational  
picket line

Distribute  
leaflets

Set up a  
Facebook  
page for your  
campaign

Work to rule

## Lesson 5: An Escalating Campaign

Write and sing a  
song about the  
boss

Rally in the parking  
lot and enter the  
building at the  
same time

Circulate a petition

Barrage management  
with tweets and  
Facebook comments

Do a survey

Do a skit or other  
creative action at a  
picket line, shareholders'  
meeting, or public place

Invite a giant  
inflatable rat to  
sit outside the  
workplace

Stop working  
overtime, all  
together

Call the boss out  
in front of other  
workers

Meet with outside  
supporters; get  
them to take  
action, too

Make up wallet  
cards that define  
workers' rights

Everyone gets  
"sick" on the  
same day

All take breaks at  
the same time

Visit the boss in a  
large group

Rally at company  
headquarters or  
another target

Spill the  
beans to the  
media





## MAKE SURE EVERY JOB GETS DONE



Chicago Teachers Union

Even a tactic that sounds simple, like getting everyone to wear stickers on the same day, takes planning and follow-through.

Your group will need to identify all the tasks required, assign them to specific people, with deadlines, and follow up to make sure people do them. An easy way to think about it is, “*Who* will do *what* by *when*?”

To keep anything from falling through the cracks, make a chart like this one for every tactic that’s part of your campaign. Write down *all* the steps needed for this tactic, and assign one or more people to each task.

**TACTIC: STICKER DAY**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Who?</b>	<b>By When?</b>
Talk with co-workers about having a sticker day. Decide if we have enough buy-in to proceed.	All committee members	October 16
Come up with a catchy slogan.	Britney and Ben	October 20
Design the sticker.	Ben	October 22
Raise the money to buy the stickers.	Al, Calvin, Maria, Tonya	October 22
Print up the stickers at a union copy shop.	Freddie	October 23
Make a plan for handing out the stickers. Who will cover which areas?	Britney, Tonya, Maria, Millie	October 23
Inform people of their right to wear stickers, and prep them on how management might react.	All committee members	October 24
Hand out the stickers.	All committee members	October 25
Wear the stickers.	Everyone	October 25
Meet afterwards to debrief how it went.	All committee members	October 25

Adapted from United Steelworkers