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Strategies for Organising Polish Workers: The Case of UK Unions

Ian Fitzgerald

Presentation at the
ESRC Cross Border Trade Union Collaboration and Polish
Migrant Workers in Britain

practitioner dissemination event 7th October 2008

Strategies for Organising Polish Workers: The Case of UK Unions

Introduction

- Unions active from early stages (fire-fighting?);
- TUC important in seeking to support engagement (3 regional projects);
- Resources and men/women involved locally;
- Three main ways of involvement.

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‘Employer’ strategies:

- Negotiated entry by northern bus companies (T&G);
- Bfawu agency agreement + webpage now provides vital information in range of languages;
- Other cases?;
- **Challenges:** 1) short-term relationships
2) organised workplaces?

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Learning strategies:

- Through learning centres (communicating with friends; booking tickets home);
- Through Esol taught in many differing locations and Ways;
- Through innovation GMB & fishing;
- **Challenges:** 1) Will we continue to support these approaches if Esol & learning funding goes?
2) organised workplaces?

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Community strategies:

- Through locations & events;
- Through traditional Polish networks – ZPWB and church;
- Through the ‘media’ – Polish newspapers, radio and the internet;
- **Challenges:** 1) How sustainable are approaches?
2) competitive unions?
3) Listening unions?

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Conclusion:

- Migrant organising takes time – past we have been piecemeal;
- Trust is vital;
- Learning union – culturally aware able to change;
- A real opportunity > real progress > much to be pleased with