

# CLR-GB

## Newsletter 1/2015

The **CLR-GB** Office is a platform linking CLR activities at EU and GB levels as well as trade union and academic work in GB in the field of Construction Labour Research. It will support related initiatives specific to GB.

### Introductory Note:

After a hiatus in publication, we return with this latest CLR-GB newsletter. The recent General Election saw the comeback of a Conservative majority government, with economic austerity set to continue over the next parliamentary period. On the face of it, the electorate voted for a continuation of the (rhetorical) promises of economic growth. Yet, despite the decline in unemployment levels, there is still the problem of under-employment in the economy. The strong employment figures mask the realities of part-time, self-employment and zero-hours contracts, which continue to prevail.

In this issue, we shed light on this in our report of a research seminar on 'Migrant Workers, Labour Market and Political Regulations in Austere Times'. We also summarise some of the key points raised in the CLR-GB AGM in February, which highlighted the continuing saga of the blacklisting of workers. Finally, we call for your participation in the forthcoming CLR AGM and symposium on 'Women in Construction'.

*Paul W Chan/CLR-GB May 2015*

### Migrant Workers, Labour Market and Political Regulations in Times of Austerity

*The Mechanics' Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester, 12 March 2015*

This seminar was organised by Stefania Marino from the European Work and Employment Research Centre, under the auspices of the ESRC Future Leaders Programme. Stefania opened the seminar by tracing recent moral panics associated with immigration and migrant workers. She observed that this fear often stems from the belief that migrant workers displace local workers, are the cause for increasing unemployment levels and reduction of welfare resources. She argued that these apparent 'reasons' mask the realities of worsening working conditions and scarcity of resources. The starting point of this seminar lay in the assumption that these problems are connected with wider questions of social justice and cohesion. The seminar was intended to draw on policies and experiences from across various countries in Europe, including the UK, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. Topics discussed included tripartite negotiations, collective bargaining, partnership frameworks, information and services, and organising through the trade unions. The seminar also extended the call to debate on neoliberal economic policies, specifically on the impacts of austerity measures and further deregulation on the state of the economy, labour market development and regulation, and the work of the trade unions.

The presentations cover an eclectic range of topics. For instance, Ruth Barnett, Project Officer at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, talked about 'The Invisible Workforce' in the cleaning sector, highlighting how this sector is characterised by precarious employment implicating a large proportion

of women, migrant workers and older workers in the workforce. She also noted how much of the work is contracted out, and that workers often lack awareness of basic employment rights. Don Flynn argued that the political debate on migrant workers is extremely dangerous. He suggested that the negativity towards migrant workers is avoidable, but noted a lack of political will to challenge popular prejudice through the parliamentary process. He cited how the political elites seem only to fuel such negativity by continually establishing statutory acts that increase and intensify the surveillance of migrants in the UK.

The pervasiveness of the neoliberal agenda is also one politicians appear reluctant to challenge or to blame for economic failings. Lee Jasper from the Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts (BARAC) argued that the rise in racism and xenophobia is a result of scapegoating for societal lack and decline (e.g. lack of social housing, lack of employment opportunities, decline in the white European population etc.). These negative sentiments, he maintained, detract attention away from the real societal issues, and reflect what he called the fragility of post-colonial confidence. He also challenged the trade unions for not paying sufficient attention to challenging anti-immigrant sentiments with real economic evidence of the impacts of immigration. He indicated that the trade union movement appears to be more successful at dealing with gender sexism than it is dealing with race equality.

There were two presentations at this seminar that were particularly relevant to the construction industry. In Charles Woolfson's (Linköping University) discussion of 'Austerity, Trade Unions and the End of Social Europe', he presented the Baltic States as the worst case scenario for neoliberal economics and austerity. He noted how the neoliberal camp often highlights Baltic States like Latvia as a success story in terms of implementing austerity measures with vigour without leading to mass social unrest. Yet, he argued, the austerity in the Baltic States was a direct consequence of the meteoric, unsustainable growth of the property bubble during the fat years of the early 2000s. He outlined how the Baltic States dealt with the sharp economic decline through internal devaluation and increases in regressive taxation that disproportionately affected the poor. He noted how trade union density in the Baltic States is amongst the lowest across Europe, and how this has meant that there is a remarkable absence of dissenting voices against the austerity measures. This has significant implications for the demographics of the Baltic States, as he projected a demographic decline of around 30-40% in the next fifty years. He dubbed the Baltic States as 'geo-demographic wastelands'.

The afternoon session comprised a series of presentations from trade union practitioners, including Rosa Crawford (TUC), Susan Cueva (UNISON), Steve Craig (UCATT) and Sheila Coleman (UNITE). The presentations were intended to showcase trade union activities aimed at fostering social cohesion and to better represent migrant workers, as well as to discuss some of the challenges faced. Steve Craig from UCATT provided a construction sector perspective of migrant representation. He challenged Lee Jasper's analysis by arguing that trade unions are trying their best to represent migrant workers, albeit with limited resources. He stressed that migrant worker representation was of concern to a union like UCATT, as he noted how the construction sector has historically been the 'natural' home for migrant workers globally. He stressed that migrants tend to be producing products that they are unlikely to afford financially. There is also a contradiction in terms of the technological advancements in the sector versus the exploitation of biblical trades. He argued for more work to be done to challenge public procurement to improve working conditions for all. However, this can be challenging given how employment and employment status changes in both concept and practice over time.

## **CLR-GB AGM**

*University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road,  
London NW1 5LS, 13 February 2015*

The CLR-GB AGM brought together researchers to exchange ideas and ongoing work relating to construction labour. Linda Clarke reported on a site visit to Newcastle, and observed how building information modelling (BIM) appeared to be disconnected from the everyday practices of building workers on site. She noted how workers often had to use their skill to improvise plans and models to make construction work in practice. Ian Fitzgerald from Northumbria updated the group with his work on the blacklisting of workers. He reported on the difficulties of calculating how much workers lost in wages, in part due to a historical lack of record keeping and auditing.

Other initiatives include:

- Climate change and changing working practices in construction: this is a Canadian initiative involving the University of Westminster as the European partner to assess how climate change responses are affecting working practices in construction. The project will also examine how the performance gap between design intent and practised realities can be bridged through training. Contact Linda Clarke for more information.

- Women in construction: a report is being written for Thames Tideway on the employment of women in construction. This will culminate in a conference scheduled on 18 June 2015.
- Lucy Parker has successfully been awarded an Arts Council project to produce a film about the experiences of the blacklisting of workers. Contact Lucy on [lucy.c.parker@gmail.com](mailto:lucy.c.parker@gmail.com) for more information.
- Fred Sherratt from Anglia Ruskin University reported on her ongoing work examining critical discourses of corporate social responsibility and occupational health to evaluate whether current provisions are adequately and appropriately considered. Contact Fred on [fred.sherratt@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:fred.sherratt@anglia.ac.uk) for more information.
- Ian Fitzgerald from Northumbria University is investigating legal perspectives of whistleblowing. Contact Ian on [ian.fitzgerald@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:ian.fitzgerald@northumbria.ac.uk) for more information.

## Call for Participation: CLR AGM and Seminar

*University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS, Wednesday Room M324*

17 June 2015 Indicative programme and agenda (12pm to 3pm):

Lunch (12.00-12.30 pm)

1. Introduction of the participants.
2. Annual report 2014-5
  - CLR-News
  - CLR-Studies
  - Workshops, seminars, research
  - Financial report.
3. Ongoing research and projects
  - brief presentation by the participants -
4. New projects for discussion
  - to be presented in advance on paper -
5. Activities in 2014-5
  - CLR-News
  - CLR-Studies
  - Workshops, seminars, research.
6. Any other business.

Members of the network who want to present a project for discussion (point 4) should mail us a brief outline on paper so that we can distribute it. If you are looking for cooperation with other CLR-participants or have anything else to announce or communicate please let us know.

*Jan Cremers, CLR coordinator (email [chr@mjcpro.nl](mailto:chr@mjcpro.nl))*

## Seminar: Changing Employment Conditions, 3.30pm-5.30pm

The AGM will be followed by a seminar on changing global employment conditions in construction, to include the following speakers:

- Phil Toner (University of Sidney) on *Financialisation and labour in the Australian construction industry*
- Susan Moir (Labor Resource Centre, Boston) on *Changes in construction employment in the US*
- John Calvert (University of Vancouver) on *Construction labour issues in Canada*

If you would like to join the AGM and/or seminar and/or be part of the CLR network, contact: Linda Clarke at the University of Westminster.

Email [linda.clarke@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:linda.clarke@westminster.ac.uk)

☎: +44 (0)203 50 66528; or

Email [clr@mjcpro.nl](mailto:clr@mjcpro.nl)

## Call for Participation in Symposium on Women in Construction: No more Softly, Softly; It's Time for Real Change

*University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London W1B 2HW, **Board Room** (Oxford Circus underground, north Regent Street exit, west side), Thursday 18 June 2015*

This symposium, organised in association with the European Institute for Construction Labour Research (CLR), will identify - with the help of researchers, academics, employers, trade unions, and those from women's organisations, local authorities etc. from Britain, mainland Europe, US, Canada and Australia – what can be done to increase the participation of women in the construction industry. We have seen a lot of tinkering and tailoring over the past decades in an attempt to improve the situation, but there has been little change, whether in engineering or in the operative workforce. The symposium will provide an opportunity to present projects across the world which have shown some success, examine the reasons for this and discuss what is needed to shift an exclusive male-dominated industry with its entrenched white- and blue-collar structures to become inclusive, diverse and composed of a range of green-collar professionals, 'manual' and 'non-manual'.

The day is organised around three main problems::

- *Strong measures and international perspectives*
- *Increasing participation*
- *What can be done in the workplace*

The symposium offers the opportunity for an informed, critical, open and international discussion with a range of professionals, employers, employees, trade unionists, academics, researchers and all those interested to participate. It is an old subject, but one which does not go away and is becoming ever more urgent, and we hope that the outcomes of our

discussions can inform policy and challenge the current unsatisfactory system. The symposium will conclude with a platform discussion with invited panellists, intended to bring the different themes together and to discuss how best to 'raise the bar' on women's participation in construction.

10.00-10.30	REGISTRATION AND COFFEE	
10.30-10.40	Welcome: Symposium theme and housekeeping	David Dornie/Shona Bettany Linda Clarke/Christine Wall
SESSION 1: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE CHAIR BY		
10.40-11.00	Strong and consistent measures needed	Sylvia Snijders/ Linda Clarke
11.00-11.20	The example of the Vancouver Highway	John Calvert, Simon Fraser Univ., Vancouver
11.20-11.40	Women and their career advancement in the Australian construction industry	Valerie Francis, University of Melbourne
11.40-12.15	What has been done in the US	Susan Moir, Labor Resource Centre, Boston
12.15-12.45	Discussion	
12.45-13.45	LUNCH	
SESSION 2: INCREASING PARTICIPATION: PROCUREMENT, TARGETS, QUOTAS AND OTHER MEASURES CHAIR BY		
13.45-14.05	Advancing equality through procurement: evidence from the Women into Construction project	Tessa Wright, Queen Mary University
14.05-14.25	The examples of the Olympics, Crossrail and beyond	Kath Moore, Women into Construction
14.25-14.45	Network Rail's Women on Board initiative	Kevin Bowsher, Network Rail
14.45-15.15	Discussion	
15.15-15.30	TEA	
SESSION 3: 'RAISING THE BAR': WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE WORKPLACE? CHAIR BY		
15.30-15.50	Leicester City Council, Women in Construction	Barry Sullivan, Leicester City Council
15.50-16.10	The importance of employee and trade union involvement: trade union initiatives in Austria	Brigitte Schulz, Austrian Construction Trade Union
16.10-16.30	Discussion	
PLATFORM DISCUSSION ON WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW AND IN THE LOW CARBON FUTURE CHAIR BY		
16.30-17.30	Plenary session with invited panellists, including Andy Mitchell (CEO, Thames Tideway Tunnel), Siobhan Endean (Unite National Equalities Officer) and more	Introduced by Jean Lambert MEP tbc
17.30-18.30	Drinks and networking	Barbara Allan

## To Our Readers:

The CLR-GB Newsletter is the organ of exchange for CLR in Great Britain. This function depends on the co-operation of its readers. The editors ask everybody who is interested in construction labour to contribute with information and commentaries.

**In this particular case we most cordially invite you to contribute to the debate transforming employment relations and the financialisation of the construction industry.**

Please send your suggestions, articles, information, letters, etc. to

CLR-GB Office:  
Professor Dr Linda Clarke  
Westminster Business School  
University of Westminster

35 Marylebone Road  
London NW1 5LS  
☎: +44 (0)203 50 66528  
email: linda.clarke@westminster.ac.uk

Or to

Dr Paul W Chan  
School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil  
Engineering (MACE)  
The University of Manchester  
Pariser Building  
Manchester M13 9PL  
☎: +44 (0) 161 275 4319  
email: paul.chan@manchester.ac.uk