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Review of Progress, 2009

Last year, I stated in my review that, *“Our coalition continues to be one of the country’s leading regional campaign groupings”*. It still continues to be, judging by a letter I have just received from the campaigns head of one of our major aid agencies: alongside the printed statement, *“2009 was a mixed year for campaigning”*, he had written in the words by hand, *“but MPH-NE was phenomenal, as ever!”*

One of the most ‘phenomenal’ of our contributions were the categorical expressions of support for the stance which PANiC Stations developed (with our support) on new coal-fired power stations, from Professor Sir John Lawton FRS, Chair of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (*“you have my absolute support”*), the two previous Commission chairs (each a Professor, a Sir and an FRS!), other leading national figures, and all three North East MEPs. This stance has since become the norm in the Stop Climate Coalition. In this and other ways, we helped knock npower’s plans for Blyth on the head and PANiC Stations is now working with residents of the village of Cambois to get Northumberland County Council to develop a regeneration plan for the area, which will both benefit the community and prevent any return to ‘dirty coal’ there in the future.

Another notable contribution was our early, wholehearted commitment to *The Wave*, SCC’s national mobilisation on 5th December. Some may think our headline-catching, *“Coaches from every city, town and village in the North East!”*, was pretty silly, but the campaigns head of a national NGO (a different one!) wrote to say, *“Everyone’s talking about your coaches!”*. This helped to galvanise people throughout the country to mobilise support. [In the event, our support for this event, which attracted a record-breaking 50,000 people, was only ‘fair to middling’, with that by the churches particularly disappointing. I had set my sights on 500 from the NE, but we only got half that number. I still don’t understand why and find ‘the usual excuses’ unconvincing.]

We cannot pretend this has been anything but a bad year for those for whom we try to speak, despite real advances on several fronts (e.g., HIV/AIDS and Fairtrade). The financial crisis has pushed 100 million people back into absolute poverty and, worst of all, world leaders substituted petty squabbling for the determined and responsible actions required to guide the world away from climate catastrophe. Nevertheless, as the DATA Report states, *“The UK remains the clear leader”* in action on both climate change and global poverty. *And we never said it would be easy!*

David Golding, 1st February 2010

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TRADE

As the ONE Campaign's DATA Report 2009 states, "The G8 committed to 'make trade work for Africa', but have done almost nothing to facilitate greater trade between the continent and the rest of the world. Most African countries have not been able to reap the benefits of globalisation. Despite a substantial increase in exports in recent years, Africa's share of global trade is 3.5% in 2008, the lowest share of any region in the world. Even a small increase in this share of trade could translate into a substantial amount of income for Africa. In 2007, 1% of global trade was worth \$119 billion – more than three times what sub-Saharan Africa received in development assistance in 2007.

"Making trade work for Africa requires a combination of enhanced access to developed country markets, 'aid for trade' to help countries produce and deliver goods, a reduction in agricultural subsidies in rich countries that create an unfair advantage for their goods, and flexibility that enables governments to develop and implement trade policies that enhance poverty alleviation strategies. The magnitude of G8 agriculture subsidies and the failure of the Doha trade negotiations continue to make a mockery of the G8's promise to make trade work for Africa. As the world works to rebalance and rebuild the global financial system, conditions must be set that ensure that the nearly 1 billion people living in Africa are not excluded from the new global economy."

DEBT

DATA states that, "The G8 is delivering on debt cancellation, but potentially brewing a new debt crisis. Despite the many significant benefits [of debt relief], the lack of sufficient development assistance is pushing countries towards additional borrowing... thus creating the potential for another debt crisis in the near future.... This should be prevented by increasing the amount of assistance given in grants rather than loans... and establishing a fair and transparent process for [dealing with unpayable and illegitimate debt]."

A further three countries completed the HIPC debt relief process in 2009 – Burundi, Central African Republic and Haiti. The latter has been high on our list for 13 years and there is no way it would have got this far without the efforts of campaigners. However, the \$1.2 billion write-off still leaves it with about \$900 million (\$0.9 billion).

The scale of new lending is of concern to everybody. The debts of 28 poor countries are now at least twice the level considered sustainable even by the IMF and, since its catastrophic earthquake, Haiti's debt has been increased by \$100 million in the form of a *loan* by the IMF!

Jubilee Debt Campaign has succeeded in getting a bill introduced into Parliament to curb Vulture Funds – companies which use the courts to siphon off money provided by debt relief – and this will receive its second reading on 26th February. Together with Christian Aid, Oxfam and others, it has led the chorus of outrage at the failure to grant full debt relief to Haiti. It also took a leading role in establishing the Put People First grouping and in popularising the concept of 'climate debt' – the debt owed by rich countries to the poor for the damage caused by our environmental policies. [Such a pity then, that JDC's gifted, energetic and frugal secretariat has had to shed two of its five staff! Unhappily, it is not the only such group to be accorded such low priority.]

AID

DATA reports that "by the end of 2008, the G7 have delivered one third of the increases promised by 2010 [at Gleneagles]: only \$7 billion of the \$21.5 billion promised. By 2009, it estimates that they will have delivered half... By 2010, they need to deliver the other half.

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As a group, the G7 have performed poorly, but the blame for this lies with a minority of the G7. Some countries are meeting their ODA commitments, others are progressing valiantly, and others are performing especially poorly. France's delivery is disappointing, and Italy's performance is an utter failure."

Britain's commitments put "the UK on target to be the first G8 country to meet the UN goal of spending 0.7% of national income on aid by 2013."

HIV/AIDS

In December 2008, about 4 million people in low or medium income countries were receiving ARV drugs to control AIDS – that's ten times as many as in 2003, but still only 42% of the number in need of treatment. Treatment to prevent transmission of the virus during birth and breast feeding has risen from 10% to 45% during this time. [Over 400,000 children p.a. are still being infected in this way.] The rate of new infections have fallen by 30% since 1996.

Encouraging news is that a 'Patent Pool' is now to be set up as a result of pressure from the Stop Aids Campaign. We will now be in a position to 'encourage' drug companies to put their patents into the pool and will receive royalties in return. Hopefully, this will lead to second generation drugs being made available in poor countries at affordable prices – they are desperately needed!

FAIRTRADE

According to the review of 2008 published by the Fairtrade Foundation in March 2009, the UK is still very much 'Number 1' in the world for Fairtrade! Sales of FT products amounted to £700 million during the year, up by 43%; 70% of British households buy at least one FT product (2007, 40%) and 70% recognise the Fairtrade mark. 1,514 new products came onto the market during the year. Among the most notable successes was the increase in sales of FT cotton garments by Tesco – up from half a million to 5 million during the year; and the increase by 150% in the sales of tea.

During 2009, Starbucks became the world's largest seller of Fairtrade coffee; Cadbury's Dairy Milk went FT – a move which will triple FT sales from Ghana – and FT KitKats are on the way! [And the biggest coup of all? North Tyneside gained Fairtrade Borough status! ☺]

CLIMATE CHANGE

'The Elders' – a group of eminent global leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela and chaired by Desmond Tutu – wrote to 192 world leaders in November, stating that "Strong leadership has never been more needed". The leaders were urged to attend the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen in person and to "reach a deal that is fair, ambitious and effective". This differed little from our call for a 'FAB Deal' – **f**air, **a**mbitious and **b**inding.

In the event, the conference proceedings were a shambles and the outcome a disgrace. As Jeremy Hobbs, Executive Director of Oxfam International said, "This 'agreement' [the Copenhagen Accord] barely papers over the huge differences between countries which have plagued these talks for two years. The deal is a triumph of spin over substance. It recognizes the need to keep warming below 2 degrees but does not commit to do so. It kicks back the big decisions on emissions cuts and fudges the issue of climate cash. Millions of people around the world do not want to see their hopes for a fair, binding and ambitious deal die in Copenhagen. Leaders need to get back round the table in early 2010 and take the hard decisions they copped out of in Copenhagen."

***"We know what needs to be done. We cannot wait until it is too late.
We cannot wait until what we value most is lost."***
(St James's Palace Nobel Laureate Symposium)