

Global Justice Cleveland Annual Report 2016

As many commentators have said, 2016 will be remembered for the surprise arrival of Brexit and Trump and the resulting rise in nationalism and intolerance. The changes we are likely to see during the next year or so will be damaging for the poorest and most vulnerable peoples, so our campaigning will be even more necessary in the future.

Our group has remained the same size with a dozen, fairly active members. We were heartened to learn via the groups survey that the typical group size is only 7 members, so we are better than average. Most groups apparently have a mailing list of 'less than a hundred people'; in our case this is a lot less so perhaps we should work harder on getting names onto a list so that if we arrange a public event we have a wider audience who we can call on.

We have continued to meet on an approximately 8 week basis and we have taken action on a number of campaigns. We have also had a summer walk with picnic and a Christmas meal, as well as a film night and supper.

Climate Change

In our view this remains the most important issue, because of the very immediate and small window in which effective action can be taken; it really is a case of 'now or never'. We were heartened after the Paris Climate Change talks at the end of 2015 at which all countries appeared to be in agreement. It has been disappointing during this year to see the subject slip down the agenda and to now alarmingly we have a US President who believes the matter to be a hoax.

A couple of our members went to Paris to protest at the time of the COP21. Following this visit we wrote a 1,500 word article about the trip. This was printed in full in the magazine which goes to 10,000 homes. The Editor seems willing to print what we send so this is a resource which we should bear in mind in future campaigns.

Some of us lobbied the North Yorkshire County Council on the subject of allowing fracking to take place locally in Ryedale and we were disappointed when the strong local protests were not listened to. This is much more than a matter of spoiling local countryside. If we are serious about reducing CO2 emissions then these 'hard to get' fossil fuels should remain in the ground.

We looked into showing the Naomi Klein film at a public screening but we were deterred by the complications and the cost of obtaining a licence. In the end we were able to buy a DVD of the film from America and we watched it ourselves in a private showing.

Trade Campaign

One of our members gave a talk about TTIP to a local Labour Party Branch and also to the Teesside Socialist Campaign. We had intended to work towards Redcar and Cleveland becoming a TTIP free zone but events have now overtaken us as it looks as though campaigning has been successful and that TTIP will not now be going ahead.

EU Referendum

During the referendum campaign we tried to raise global issues at a local level. As a result we were invited to attend the Question Time style debate organised by BBC Radio Tees in Darlington on 16 June. We are also got involved in arranging and attending a debate locally in Danby on 10 June. We distributed a leaflet produced by National at the debate.

New Alliance

We shared a stall at the Saltburn Farmer's Market with the Saltburn Allotment Association. The weather was poor so there were not so many people around as usual. We did an activity for children which involved making plant pots out of newspaper and planting saved seeds in them to take home. While we did this we were able to have some conversations with their parents about the negative effects of the New Alliance on peasant farmers in Africa and the way in which they are being forced into greater dependence on corporations. We got a few action cards signed and collected in but most people chose to take them home to read. We were also able to get a photograph and an article into the local Darlington & Stockton paper.

Migration Campaign

We have not done any work on this campaign directly but we supported an 'Out of Africa' music event organised by 4 People Not Profit in aid of Justice First. Several of us attended the event and gave out the GJN migration leaflets. Donations were made in aid of Justice First, an organisation that supports asylum seekers. Our links with this organisation are useful as they are able to attract some younger people.

Food Sovereignty

GJN nationally suggested a new campaign which sought to attack Monsanto by drawing attention to one of its successful products, Roundup. Despite having been in use for several decades it has recently been classified as 'probably causing cancer'. The anti Roundup campaign is being used as a way of exposing Monsanto and its push to gain corporate control of agriculture world wide.

While we understand and share the wish to criticise the actions and business practice of Monsanto in the global south it seems it might be better to do so directly rather than by advocating a ban of a widely used and extremely useful product. We have a farmer member who has used Glyphosate for the last forty years whose farming practice would be negatively impacted if the product was withdrawn from sale. Gardener members also use it. After discussion we decided not to take any action on this particular campaign.

It looks as though 2017 will be a year in which it will be even more important for activists to lobby and draw attention to injustice. We therefore look forward to another year of campaigning in 2017.