

Our two biggest undertakings over the past year have been the asbestos campaign and the recent delegation to South Africa. The delegation will be reported on separately, so I will only mention it here where it overlaps with other parts of our work. It was a major operation in terms both of human and financial resources, and will have a correspondingly large and productive impact on our future work.

Campaigns

The campaign for justice for the former asbestos workers of Cape plc and for their devastated communities also absorbed a lot of time and effort, with very positive results. In April we had Sibongile Mlombo and Linah Mhlongo in Scotland for a few days, along with Laura Fisher from the ACTSA London office. They were in Britain to run the London marathon in aid of the asbestos court case, and came to Scotland principally to meet Scottish trade unionists at the STUC congress in Edinburgh. They also met Clydeside Action on Asbestos, and Frank Maguire from Thompsons Solicitors who has much experience of asbestos compensation cases in Scotland.

In June Shadrack Molokoane and Audrey van Schalkwyk, asbestos community activists in Northern Province and Northern Cape respectively, came to Britain for the House of Lords hearing, and came to Scotland for a short visit along with Chris Matlhako, the Press Secretary to the Premier of Northern Cape, and Aditi Sharma, ACTSA's Head of Campaigns. They had very useful meetings with Clydeside Action on Asbestos, Clydebank Asbestos Group, the STUC and some voluntary organisation folk gathered by the World Development Movement, as well as meeting ACTSA activists at a social evening.

The very striking photographic exhibition on the asbestos campaign was displayed throughout the STUC Congress and again at Glasgow Mayday, large quantities of information material were distributed by hand and by post, and articles appeared in various publications. The historic victory in the House of Lords (where it was decided that compensation claims should be heard in England rather than South Africa) was a major step forward but by no means the end of the campaign, which continues to press Cape for a just settlement. A two day visit to some of the asbestos-affected communities was one of the important highlights of the ACTSA delegation, and should strengthen the campaign against Cape plc both here and there.

We played a smaller role in some other national campaigns e.g. we distributed some of ACTSA's leaflets about UNITA's diamond exports, which was part of a larger and ultimately successful campaign to persuade the diamond industry to ban the handling of diamonds from rebel movements in Angola and Sierra Leone. The South African Government hosted the corresponding international meetings about complementary government action.

We have begun to distribute the leaflets on the new campaign on pricing policy for AIDS medicines, e.g. at the Glasgow World AIDS Day event last Friday, and I have no doubt we will be doing more in the coming year.

Debt has continued to be a campaigning focus, both through Jubilee 2000 and through promoting the appeal to the World Bank by the European Network for Information and Action on Southern Africa for the cancellation of Mozambique's debt to the Bank following the disastrous floods there. Jubilee 2000 has certainly achieved a great deal in a short time, even though it will still be far short of its target when it officially winds up at the end of this month. The campaign will continue in another form.

Solidarity

Solidarity activity has been less high profile this year, but we have still worked away at several projects.

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On the Phelophepa Health Train we have continued to look for donations, and promoted the CCETSA raffle. We have now raised rather more than £3000 directly, the bulk of that from a generous grant from the Tibden Trust but including also many smaller donations, and we also know of donations going directly to CCETSA for the train in response to our promotional work. Unfortunately the train management decided to stop taking student placements from abroad, which left a fair number of disappointed students who had been recruited here.

The Book Appeal has continued from our new base at the Mitchell Library, and we now have a large quantity of books waiting to be sorted and packed. We are grateful again to the Scottish Co-op for help with transporting books. Part of the delegation met with the Libraries Department in Eastern Cape, and we will need to look at how we arrange things in the light of that discussion.

Glasgow Caledonian University's links with South Africa have continued to grow, supported for the first time by earmarked University funding. Discussions around the ceremony at the South African High Commission to confer an honorary doctorate on President Thabo Mbeki, and the meetings held by the delegation in South Africa, will both help to strengthen these links. Two short placements in Scotland of Further Education managers from South Africa, the beginning of a long-term programme, will undoubtedly widen and deepen the educational connections between the two countries.

It would be fair to say that other connections, with Eastern Cape in particular, have been more fitful than we would have liked, but the trade union connections especially have been reinforced by the delegation, and we have reason to hope that progress can be made in the coming year with education and local authority links.

Our matchmaking role was useful in a different context, when we were able to help bring together the Balmore Trust's unique collection of John Muafangejo prints (framed for the Sechaba Festival in 1990) and Friends of Namibia Scotland's wish to mark the 10th anniversary of Namibia's independence with some sort of exhibition. The resulting display in the Chessel Gallery in Edinburgh was breathtaking, and very successful. We have also played a small part in the proposed linking of Black Umfolosi from Zimbabwe with the Kayec training project in Namibia.

Information

We have continued our usual pattern of stalls at conferences and events, where we have been able to make some useful contacts as well as distributing information. We have kept up our contacts with the churches through the Scottish Churches Group on Southern Africa. The ACTSA Scotland website is, of course, also a major information tool, and has been followed 18 months later by the national ACTSA site. As with previous paper publications the content does not write itself, and we have not yet made the fullest use of the site's potential despite meetings and good intentions, and the expert help we have on the technical side. We do get quite a number of requests for information both through the website and by letter.

With almost enough Committee members now having retired from work to justify forming a retired members branch, and with new contacts and initiatives arising out of the delegation, there should be scope for expanding several areas of work in the coming year. As I have said before, there is no shortage either of need or of opportunity for the kinds of work that ACTSA is good at.

John C. Nelson