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David W. Golding CBE PhD DSc HonDCL

Review of Progress, 2008

One thing we have to say about 2008: this was a year which 'made history'! Unhappily, it did so most notably in the collapse of a financial bubble generated by a combination of recklessness, greed and corruption on a scale which almost beggars belief. The banks have been behaving much as they did in the 1970s and 80s, when corrupt lending to corrupt recipients in developing countries left the world's poor to carry the burden for decades to come.

Our coalition continues to be one of the country's leading regional campaign groupings and 2008 was a very special – and very stressful - year for us! Our campaigning has been focussed, persistent and varied, and even (unusually) had international repercussions.

- During the early months, we concentrated on campaigning hard and often for an effective climate change bill and most NE MPs were lobbied in person and/or by mail.
- May saw the 10th anniversary of Jubilee's mould-breaking gathering at the G8 in Birmingham and we sent a very good contingent to the 'Journey to Justice' event. We also made a contribution of national significance, securing support for the Fast Day we called for 16th May from a long list of international, national and regional leaders.
- In the autumn, we mobilised widespread support throughout the region for the UN/GCAP's World Poverty Day, 17th October. Furthermore, we called for a target to be set for participation by 1% of the world's population which inspired campaigners across the country and beyond, and was even trumpeted by the Director of the United Nations Millennium Campaign, Salil Shetty. In fact, nearly 117 million took part - the best part of two percent!
- In December, we acted as co-sponsor for the major climate conference, 'Spirituality for Survival', in Durham and, on the same day, supported the Newcastle Fairtrade Market.

As every section of the following 'Review of the Year' reveals, 2009 calls for our continued commitment. Matters of immense importance are at issue, such as the framing of the successor of the Kyoto Protocol in Copenhagen in December. "There are times in the history of humanity when fateful decisions are made and the failure of our generation on climate change mitigation would lead to consequences that would haunt humanity until the end of time" (Professor Ross Garnault, the Australian government's economics advisor on climate change). On the other hand, we, living now, have the unique opportunity to bring about a change which will bring unparalleled benefits to countless generations to come. Each of us can and should play 'our little part' in this great endeavour!

But be sure of one thing – we in MPH-NE will not forget our responsibilities to the billions of people suffering *right now* from the scourge of what Bono calls, 'stupid poverty'. We ask for your continued support – those people *deserve* your continued support.

Dr David W. Golding CBE

CLIMATE CHANGE

Remember this, in March 2008?

Climate Change Bill

- A Final Submission to North East MPs -

Question:

What is absolutely, desperately needed within government?

Answer: *“What is absolutely, desperately needed within government are people of integrity who will state what the science advice is, under whatever political pressure or circumstances.”*

(Professor Sir David King, until recently the Government’s Chief Scientific Advisor)

In brief, Make Poverty History NE asks our MPs to be such people. As such, we ask you to sign EDM 736, relating to the Climate Change Bill (and/or encourage other MPs to do so). In addition, please write to the government and press ministers to:

- Set a target for emissions reduction of at least 80% by 2050 (as the science dictates);
- Include the UK’s contribution to international aviation and shipping within the target;
- Have annual milestones for progress, to encourage the government to ‘get on with it’.

Well, we got all three of our asks in the Climate Change Bill, plus an independent expert committee to assess and report on progress! We know that the opinions of large numbers of backbench MPs had a lot to do with the outcome. Never before have campaigners had such cause for celebration!

Unhappily, after the celebration comes the cold shower of the reality of political timid short-termism, in this case with the decision to expand Heathrow Airport:

“In the end, Britain’s courageous, world-leading and scientifically rational response to climate change lived and died within the space of a few weeks... At its very first test, [the government] sided with the old, carbon-addicted economy... the most unsophisticated of responses to the extraordinary challenge that has been set for the next four decades” (The Guardian, 16th January).

This judgement is just as far as the Government is concerned, but Britain’s ‘courageous, rational response’ lives on in the hearts and minds of campaigners and, as a former Labour Party leader once put it, *“we will fight, fight and fight again”* to reverse this decision and any other such folly which follows it. **And here’s why:**

- According to Professor Sir John Houghton, one of the UK’s leading climate scientists, *“Recent best estimates give a mean sea level rise of up to one metre by 2100, with up to two metres not being ruled out”*.
- Is it any wonder that Veena Khaleque, Director of Practical Action in Bangladesh, expresses herself with such anguish: *“I find it almost impossible to imagine how the poor of Bangladesh will cope”*. Perhaps someone can tell her how they will cope – scores of millions of them!

The targets set for emissions reduction by the Climate Change Committee are enormously challenging – every sector of our economy and society will need to make major adjustments if they are to be met. And as Lord Robert May put it, speaking as President of the Royal Society, ***“The longer we prevaricate, the more difficult the task becomes”***.

TRADE JUSTICE

The talks at the WTO (World Trade Organisation) collapsed on 29th July, but the Trade Justice Movement believes that 'no deal was better than a bad deal'. The failure rested with the fact that the USA and EU have consistently put their own needs above those of developing countries, particularly in relation to agriculture. Developing countries are to be congratulated for defending the rights of their small scale and subsistence farmers.

The Doha round, begun in 2001, was billed as a development round. It was meant to make world markets fairer for poor countries and address the iniquities of previous trade rounds. Yet, if the deal had been signed this week, it would have made life more difficult for small scale and subsistence farmers in developing countries.

Meanwhile, Europe is pressing forward with new trade deals that will ruin Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific trade - and millions of people's lives. The EU's EPAs (Economic Partnership Agreements) will expose home-grown businesses and investment to unfair competition from Europeans - and could damage their jobs, livelihoods and the environment.

The first EPA was signed between the EU and 13 Caribbean countries on 15th October 2008, but the disarray surrounding the signing shows the extent of their unpopularity in the region and the pressure that the EU had to resort to in order to secure agreement. The signing was postponed several times after parliamentarians, leading academics and civil society organisations across the Caribbean voiced their concerns over the effects the deals would have on development.

Of the 13 countries that finally signed the deal, several made it clear that they did so to prevent damaging tariffs which the EU was threatening to inflict on crucial exports such as bananas. Haiti did not sign at all and The Bahamas reportedly signed only part of the deal. The EU refused Guyana's request to sign a goods-only deal and tightened the screws by gearing up to impose taxes that could devastate their sugar industry. But Guyana held fast and did not sign yesterday, but is likely to sign later this month.

The EU's tactics – led by former Commissioner Mandelson - have severely damaged relationships with the Caribbean and have sent shockwaves through African and Pacific countries that are still negotiating. Pacific Trade Ministers meeting this week (20-21 October) to discuss current negotiations for the region's own EPA with the EU, have formally told the Europeans they do not want the Caribbean EPA to set a precedent.

The EU member states and the new trade Commissioner designate have a vital role to play in restoring trust, reining in their negotiators and fundamentally re-casting their approach to these deals. It now appears that Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) could play a significant role in stopping these unfair trade deals being forced through – **it is still not too late to stop Europe's unfair trade deals!** Go to:

http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/get_involved/campaign/stop_epas/

[Based on briefings from Traidcraft and the Trade Justice Movement]

Drop the Debt

"Let me commend and applaud the tremendous work you are doing. Our country is an example of how international debt cancellation advocacy, such as yours, can truly move mountains" (President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, Africa's first woman president, in a message to message to JDC in May).

2008 was a year to review what Jubilee Debt Campaign has achieved already – and how much remains to be done. A decade after 70,000 people formed a human chain in Birmingham to demand that the G8 drop the debt, around \$90 billion of debt has been cancelled across 25 countries under international debt relief schemes. But that is only about one fifth of the debt cancellation that is needed. At least a further \$400 billion of debt needs to be cancelled across at least 100 poor countries simply for their governments to be able to meet their people's basic needs for food, water, education and healthcare.

In April and May this year JDC held a Drop the Debt Fast, to highlight the plight of 36 poor countries still in need of debt cancellation. Those taking part in the fast were encouraged to sign their name on a paper chain link, and the links were assembled into giant chains at our Journey to Justice event in Birmingham on 18 May. Nearly 11,000 signatures were collected, which were presented to the British and Japanese governments. MPH-NE made a unique contribution of national significance, securing support for the Fast Day we called for 16th May from an amazing list of leaders which included two national presidents. The *Pick up the Pace* campaign throughout 2008 called on the UK government to cancel more debts itself and to use its influence to ensure that more debts are cancelled internationally.

What has been achieved this year? *First* the global debt movement grew and consolidated its strength, finding expression in a major gathering of international debt campaigners in Ecuador in September. *Second*, after years of campaigning, Liberia was finally admitted to the HIPC process in March, receiving billions of dollars of interim relief of in the process. *Third*, in May the government agreed to change the criteria for giving relief for the UK's share of debts owed to the World Bank, benefiting five additional countries. Fourth, in November, Togo was admitted to the HIPC process and received interim relief. Finally, an event of huge potential significance: the Government of Ecuador published the report on first ever official audit of debts by a developing country, undertaken to assess their legitimacy. As a result of the findings, in December, President Correa refused to pay some debts which had clearly arisen from irresponsible lending.

The financial crisis has opened up discussions about the problems with the global financial system, including reckless lending and unsustainable debt levels. Jubilee Debt Campaign has put together resources to help people make the links with the developing world debt crisis, as well as bringing organisations together to respond to the crisis and its political fall-out. We held an activist forum in Debt Week to look at the connections between economic justice issues and the various current crises (finance, climate, and food) and will be helping to organise events around the UK-hosted G20 summit in April.

[Statement largely based on work by Sarah Williams, Senior Campaigns Officer at Jubilee Debt Campaign.]

MORE AND BETTER AID

Official figures published in April 2008 by the OECD show that aid from all OECD countries rose 2.4% in 2007. Overall aid to sub-Saharan Africa increased by 10%. Whereas the G7 (G8 minus Russia) reduced aid by 1% in 2007, excluding debt relief, non-G8 countries increased aid worldwide by 10.4% with several countries showing sharp increases – eg, Spain by 48%, Australia by 15.6% and Norway by 12.4%, excluding debt relief.

Oliver Buston, the spokesperson for DATA, said: “These aid figures are hugely disappointing. The world is dangerously off track in reaching the Millennium Development Goals and the richest countries are currently not playing their part. This should be treated as an emergency. If smaller economies like Spain and Australia can increase aid sharply, why can't the world's economic heavyweights? It is particularly disappointing to see Japan, this year's G8 hosts, slipping off the scale.”

Furthermore, donor countries are dragging their feet on 'better aid' – improving the quality of aid. Frankly, much aid is rubbish, being given with the interests of the donors in mind, rather than the welfare of the poor. [Britain's record is good in this respect.]

Among the G7 countries, the small overall decline in aid masks very mixed national performances. Britain has a clear three year budget commitment which will see aid levels rise in line with promises to increase aid to 0.7% of GNI by 2013. France's president, President Sarkozy, has reneged on his country's previous commitment to reach 0.7% of GNI by 2012, instead aiming for the more modest EU target of 2015. Germany's aid to sub-Saharan Africa increased by 12% in 2007, a year when Chancellor Merkel showed real commitment to fighting poverty. However, it is still a long way from the EU target of 0.51% by 2010. Japan's aid fell 24% and is at its lowest level since 1964. US aid increases have been slower than expected, but it is likely to meet its pledge to double assistance to Africa by 2010.

DATA's European Director Oliver Buston said:

“We are more than half way between the historic MDG summit in 2000 and the target date of 2015 agreed by world leaders to halve extreme poverty, but collectively we are way off track - in part because key G8 countries are not keeping their promises to help fund proven effective efforts.

Almost five thousand children die every day from severe diarrhea caused by dirty water. More than thirty million children in Africa don't go to school. These are not problems that will solve themselves but they are problems that can be solved.”

Well designed aid works: in Tanzania, debt cancellation and aid allowed the government to drop school fees, enabling 2 million more children to enrol; in parts of Kenya, deaths from malaria have dropped by 40 per cent through simple bednet distribution programmes; across sub-Saharan Africa, millions of people now have access to life-saving AIDS drugs.

[This report based on statement from DATA.]

FAIRTRADE

According to the Fairtrade Foundation, during the year 2007, the latest year for which national figures are available:

£500 million was spent on FT goods in 2007, 72% up on previous year;

More than 1,800 new products were licensed as FT;

1 in 4 bananas sold in UK are now FT;

6,000 farmers in Belize are benefiting from Tate & Lyell's switch to fair-trade;

For the first time, more FT coffee was sold by cafes and restaurants than by shops;

The Fairtrade Mark is now recognised by 70% of the British population.

And cotton products rose from £6.6 million to £52 million!

With reference to 2008, Traidcraft states that:

The economic downturn is affecting every part of the world, and as consumers buy fewer products so producers find their incomes directly reduced as the orders being placed by fair trade organisations in the developed world grow smaller. Unlike the UK, where most of us spend less than 15% of our incomes on essentials like food, many developing world producers have to spend 60 or 70% of their money on basic nutrition – so any fall in income is a serious challenge.

Like so many businesses we find the current conditions very challenging. Although market research shows that people are very committed to continuing to buy fair trade products, we are inevitably affected by people pulling back on their general levels of expenditure. We are doing all we can to protect our fair trade producers. **We are very pleased that so far this year we have been able to increase the overall volume of our fair trade purchases, protecting the livelihoods of our suppliers. Our practice of making advance payments when we place orders is also increasingly vital in the credit crunch (and is sometimes not part of the package offered by commercial competitors).**

The economic downturn is affecting all of us, and impacts on people around the world. Now is the time when we need to work together to protect the weakest and most vulnerable. We are grateful for your support in enabling us to continue going the extra mile for all those who can benefit from fairer trade.