



Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) Annual Report January to December 2017

Fair Trade and Climate Justice

Our main campaigning theme for 2017 focused on Fair Trade and Climate Justice including the impact of climate change on small scale coffee producers; mitigation and adaptation programmes; and why the threats posed by climate change mean that Fair Trade and solidarity is even more crucial.

We carried this out in the following ways:

- Co-ordinating a speaker tour by Santiago Dolmus from our partner organisations CECOCAFEN during Fairtrade Fortnight
- Participating in the Climate Coalition (a coalition of over 100 national and local UK organisations working campaigning against climate change) to highlight Nicaragua as an example of an impoverished country with a high levels of vulnerability to climate change
- Published and distributed widely a briefing on Nicaragua, Fair Trade and climate justice, case studies of community energy projects, and other climate change related articles

Speaker tour by Santiago Dolmus, CECOCAFEN

A highlight of 2017 was the visit to the UK during Fairtrade Fortnight in March by Santiago Dolmus from CECOCAFEN, an umbrella co-operative with 2,100 farmer members organised into 11 community based co-operatives growing Fairtrade coffee and fruit and vegetables for local markets.

The key achievements of his visit were as follows:

- School visits in Lewisham and Portsmouth where Santiago did presentations and responded to many questions from 260 8-15 year olds
- Public meetings attended by over 100 people in Oxford, Lewisham and Portsmouth
- Meetings with the mayor, councillors and council officials in Matagalpa's twin town of Lewisham to consolidate the twinning link
- Visits to shops selling Fair trade products
- Promotion of CECOCAFEN coffee through meetings with CafeDirect

The success of the visit was due to Santiago's ability to engage people and explain very articulately the interconnectness of Fair Trade, co-operatives, small farmers, climate change, eco farming and how critical international solidarity is in supporting this model. He spoke to a very broad range of people including students, academics, Fairtrade promoters, councillors, NSC and twin town activists, allotment holders, and market sellers.

Campaigning against the NICA Act

Towards the end of 2017, NSC campaigned and lobbied against the introduction of the Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality Act, known as the NICA Act. This was unanimously approved by the US House of Representatives on 3 October and, if approved subsequently by the Senate and signed off by President Trump, would mean that the US would use its influence in international lending institutions to block all loans to Nicaragua from the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and other institutions. This would inevitably create economic instability and mean the reversal of the Nicaraguan government's highly successful poverty reduction programmes; as a consequence, the poorest and most vulnerable in society would suffer the most serious consequences. At the time of writing, the Act has been introduced into the Senate and remains on the US statute books.

Collaboration with and support for twin towns

Twinning activities with Nicaragua continued throughout the year in 12 towns and communities in the UK. The twinings take many forms – towns, universities, hospitals, trade unions, schools, community theatre groups and even toilets.

We collaborated with and supported Wales NSC, twin towns and local groups in Bradford, Bristol, Islington, Leeds, Leicester, Lewisham, Norwich, Oxford, Reading, Tavistock, Sheffield and Swindon, and the Nicaragua Education, Cultural and Arts Trust (NECAT).

NSC provided advice, support and co-ordination in the following ways:

- The organisation and follow up of an annual meeting of twin town representatives to exchange ideas and experiences, identify areas where co-ordination would be beneficial and celebrate the diversity of twinning links
- Co-ordination of information and acting as a contact point related to the Co-operative Bank closing or threatening to close the bank accounts of Wales NSC and five twin towns. This included feeding information into a research project commissioned by Amnesty International on Co-op Bank account closures which was used to lobby the Co-op Bank. There have been no further closures or threats of closures of bank accounts of Nicaragua related organisations.
- Briefing and co-ordination of twin town input into a research project on the history, scope and value of twinings being carried out by an academic at Manchester Metropolitan university.
- Liz Light, the NSC representative in Nicaragua, organised performances by an international circus troupe called by Performers with Borders (PWB) at schools supported by Islington – Managua Association and the Santa Rosa Fund.
- Promoted the work of twin towns through internal newsletters, our website and social media

‘I am blown away by the generosity of spirit and commitment that is evident in the work that you carry out, and the tangible, positive impacts on the communities involved, both in Nicaragua and in the UK.’ Ross Denny, UK Ambassador to Costa Rica and Nicaragua, February, 2017 in a message to twin towns.

Communications

- Publication of two issues of our magazine ‘Nicaragua Now’. We improved the quality of range of articles and encouraged greater involvement of Wales NSC and twin towns, promoted the print and electronic version of the magazine to ensure wider coverage in the UK and Nicaragua and aimed individual articles at specific audiences.
- Website and social media. We ensured regular updates of news from Nicaragua and UK-Nicaragua solidarity events and expanded our use of social media.
- We published a regular UK-Nicaragua solidarity news bulletin with news from Nicaragua, and UK – Nicaragua events. We used this bulletin to keep our members and supporters updated.
- We published the following briefings: Nicaragua, Fair Trade and climate Justice, an update on Nicaragua’s Inter-oceanic canal, the NICA Act, and Nicaragua’s municipal elections.
- The Guardian published two letters related to Nicaragua and the Paris Agreement and the inter-oceanic canal.
- Provided information and contacts for students and academics writing research papers on Nicaragua

NSC representative in Nicaragua

August saw the end of an era with the end of the contract of our representative Liz Light. The decision was taken by NSC’s Board of Trustees with much regret but out of necessity to ensure the future financial viability of NSC. We would like to place on record our thanks to Liz for her enormous contribution to UK-Nicaragua solidarity during her 11 years of service with NSC.

Events

In July, we organised a joint event with Friends of Ecuador looking at the experience of two left governments – Nicaragua and Ecuador – which have successfully implemented poverty reduction programmes that have benefitted the many rather than the few. Speakers included HE Carlos Abad Ortiz, Ecuadorean Ambassador to the UK, HE Guisell Morales, Nicaraguan Ambassador to the UK, Adrian Weir, UNITE assistant chief of staff and Nick Hoskyns, a member of NSC’s Board who has been working in Nicaragua for the past 30 years with small scale farming co-operatives and fair trade.

We again attended the El Sueno Existe Festival in mid Wales, where Helen Yuill spoke at a workshop on ‘common sense socialism’ with Chris Williamson MP. Helen also took part in a two day European Solidarity Encuentro in Paris in October with other Nicaragua solidarity groups from across Europe.

We have continued to co-operate closely with the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign and in October took part in a public meeting organised by VSC on resisting Trump and building links and solidarity between Europe and Latin America.

At the end of the year, we took part in the annual Latin America Conference, coordinated by the Venezuela and Cuba Solidarity Campaigns. The Conference focussed on the Trump presidency and the worrying escalation in the number and intensity of US interventions in Latin America. We spoke two seminars: one on education in Nicaragua, and the other on US destabilisation across the region. We introduced the film 'American Sandinista' which tells the story of US mechanical engineer and clown Ben Linder who, along with two Nicaraguan co-workers, was killed in northern Nicaragua thirty years ago by US-backed contra forces.

Fundraising and Sales

* 2017 turned out so much better than it started, ie. a rather miserable financial situation. Members donated extremely generously to our appeals for core funds, our NICA ACT work and for relief following Tropical Storm Nate. Additionally we received a wonderful donation of almost £12,000 to help ensure a longer-term future. The total raised through fundraising and sales was £53,923 compared to 2016's £30,519. A further £12,491 was made through claiming Gift Aid.

* Unusually, an NSC member ran up 877 stairs at the Broadgate Tower to raise funds for us and we had 5 runners both in the London marathon and in two half-marathons. We provided bar staff for festivals in Ireland as well as England for the first time (through the Workers Beer Company) and raised in excess of £9,300 over the season, the highest amount since 1993. 70 volunteer servers were involved, amazing. The number of students in our Spanish classes waxed and waned and we welcomed a new teacher whilst keeping very much in touch with Claudio Chipana who taught our classes for many years. Thank you Claudio!

* Sales made £4,461 which was a disappointment after last year's £6,488, the highest for many years. We usually hope to make £5000-plus from this activity. The Jeremy Corbyn mugs and fridge magnets, as well as Ken Loach DVDs, were again very popular but the timings of the inserts into magazines were not favourable for Christmas sales and we had fewer orders. The *Gift for Nicaragua* on the catalogue raised money for an eco-tourism project whereby small farmers and host families will receive training and hopefully will be able to live more sustainably.

Membership

All members received regular mailings including the magazine *Nicaragua Now*. We also email our Solidarity News to all members who have given us their email address.

- Income from affiliations and related donations was £23,149 as against £28,555 in 2016. Much depends on whether there are any large general donations during the year. We are continuing efforts to ensure greater income stability through standing orders and at the end of 2017 80% of individual members were paying their membership fees in this way which is excellent.
- From 2014 to 2016 the number of individual members remained almost the same but in 2017 there was a drop to 2013 levels. There were 9 new members compared with 7 last year and 25 in 2010. Two of these were from individuals who visited Nicaragua on the Small Group Holiday organised by Steve Lewis and Kath Owston.

Membership	Dec 12	Dec 13	Dec 14	Dec 15	Dec 16	Dec 17
Individuals	465	451	450	449	440	404
Wales NSC, twin towns and other groups	16	15	14	14	14	14
Trade Unions: national, branches and regions, trades councils	82	79	123	131	128	128
Overseas subscriptions (libraries)	4	4	1	1	1	1
All groups	102	98	138	146	143	143
TOTAL	567	549	588	595	583	547

NB. All trade union work is carried out through the separately constituted Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group (NSCAG). Further details on trade union affiliations are provided in the NSCAG annual report.

Staffing and Governance

NSC Staff: *London Office:* Stella Embliss, Helen Yuill and Susie Steven. *Representative in Nicaragua:* Liz Light (until August 2017)

NSCAG staff: Louise Richards.

Note that all staff are employed on a part-time basis.

Board of Trustees: NSC is governed by a Board of Directors/Trustees which develops NSC's overall strategy and monitors activities and outcomes. 2017 Board members: Dave Cosgrave, John Drewery, Rita Drobner, Gill Holmes, Bob Hardie, Nick Hoskyns (from July 2017), James Poke and Andy Waterworth

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