

# NICARAGUA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN ACTION GROUP (NSCAG)

## Annual Report January to December 2008

In 2008 NSCAG focused on solidarity links between Nicaraguan and UK trade unions, with a continued emphasis on young trade unionists. This included the completion in Nicaragua of the UNISON IDF-funded programme, implemented by the FNT (National Workers' Front) and NSCAG, aimed at strengthening young member structures and developing youth organising and training at national and regional levels within the FNT and member federations; the first multi union delegation of young trade unionists from the UK to Nicaragua and a seminar which provided training and information for young UK trade unionists to motivate them to get involved in international solidarity with young workers in Nicaragua and elsewhere. The activities have complemented one another. We would like to thank all those who contributed to this work, whether a trade union individual, branch, region or national office.

### **Linking Young Trade Unionists Project**

The UNISON IDF funded programme of education and training for young trade unionists in Nicaragua, which began in 2007, was completed in 2008. The FNT trained 240 young people through workshops and have set up the FNT Youth Council to coordinate national activities to support young members and encourage them to become more active. Youth structures have also been set up within most of the FNT's member federations. In August 2008 the FNT Youth Council organised a second smaller Youth Assembly, in which they carried out an evaluation of the project and discussed ideas for the future, with support from Julian Guevara, NSCAG worker in Managua. Overall, the project was viewed as successful and the FNT is keen to build on this success.

The UK side of the Linking Young Trade Unionists Project was also completed in 2008.

In February 2008, five young UK trade unionists - from UNISON, CWU, Amicus (UNITE) and TGWU (UNITE) - visited Nicaragua and met with young activists, FNT leaders, FSLN deputies in the National Assembly and representatives from civil society and women's rights organisations. Delegates were able to learn about the political, economic and social situation, share experiences of young member workplace issues and organisation and develop ideas for creating and maintaining long term solidarity links. Highlights included:

- Speaking at the 2008 FNT Congress
- Participating in the FNT coordinated Youth Solidarity Seminar with over 30 young members from FNT affiliated unions
- Meeting young workers including in the *maquilas*, free trade zones, judicial workers, informal sector workers, public sector workers (local government and health and education) and others
- Working with the FNT Youth Committee to develop a strategic plan for solidarity

A follow up meeting was held to develop an action plan to ensure that the links were maintained and developed. The delegates have subsequently been active in promoting international young member issues within their own unions, working to build direct links with Nicaraguan young members and supporting the co-ordination of the NSCAG International Youth Solidarity Seminar. Two of the delegates also joined the NSCAG Executive Committee.

**The International Youth Solidarity Seminar** provided information and training, to enable young UK members to get involved in international solidarity. Participants took part in skills based workshops on fundraising, campaigning, media and raising awareness and building practical links with workers in other countries, as well as working together to share ideas on actions and activities they could follow up as a group and within their own union to build solidarity with young Nicaraguan workers, with input from the young members that participated in the February delegation.

As a result of these discussions, a document, 'Ideas and Actions to Promote International Young Member Solidarity,' was produced to encourage individual and joint action and guide the next stages of NSCAG's solidarity work. One outcome was the launch of NSCAG's 'Youth Action Network' to share ideas and experiences on young member solidarity and receive NSCAG news. Over thirty young members joined the Network and sixty have joined the related Facebook site. The Youth Action Network and Urgent Action Network will continue to be promoted by NSCAG in our future work.

*"Through this experience our young trade unionists have made agreements and forged links with young trade unionists from the UK, allowing them to share experiences. It was very positive since we*

were able to construct a common agenda, agreeing on solidarity action we can take and how to increase trade union membership among young people. It is really important to continue this exchange." Maritza Espinales, FNT

"It was really inspiring to see the excellent work Nicaraguan trade unions are carrying out in extremely difficult circumstances and with very limited resources. We met activists from a wide range of backgrounds and I'm looking forward to sharing these experiences with British trade unionists and to maintaining solidarity links of mutual cooperation with our Nicaraguan brothers and sisters." Heenal Rajani, UNISON

### **Continuation of the project**

Following the success of this project it was decided to seek funding for a further youth focused project, once reporting and consultation was concluded and project proposals developed. The FNT is keen to continue young member capacity building by incorporating youth activities into a programme which would also include dissemination of training and national youth assemblies. Through the September 2008 strategy day and FNT evaluation it was proposed that online networks and film making equipment be used to enhance communication between young union activists in the UK and Nicaragua. Further delegations, speaker tours and events are planned to continue raising awareness, maintaining solidarity links, sharing experiences and developing new ideas. A small amount of funding remains from trade union appeals, with which to carry out some of these activities.

### **Other trade union work**

- A new trade union leaflet was produced and disseminated at various events and sent to General Secretaries of national unions with a sample letter to send to branches, asking them to affiliate. The affiliation drive began towards the end of the year and therefore its success has yet to be evaluated.
- NSCAG participated in UNISON, CWU, PCS and BECTU conferences, the World Day for Decent Work and the Latin America Conference. At these events we ran stalls to distribute information, to maintain key trade union links and to raise funds through the sale of NSC and NSCAG items.
- NSCAG also maintained regular contact with our key trade union affiliates at a member, branch, regional and national level through briefings, mail outs and appeals.

### **Affiliations**

10 national unions were affiliated at the end of 2008: BECTU, BFAWU, CWU, FBU, NUT, PCS, UNISON, UNITE (AMICUS and T & G) & USDAW. The total number of branches and regions affiliated at the year end (2008) was 82. Others, not affiliated, were asked to donate to particular appeals.

	<b>Dec 2005</b>	<b>Dec 2006</b>	<b>Dec 2007</b>	<b>Dec 2008</b>
AMICUS / MSF	24	22	now in UNITE	n/a
CWU	12	9	8	9
FBU	1	1	1	1
GMB	0	0	2	1
NUT	8	5	5	8
PCS	2	1	0	0
T & G	13	13	now in UNITE	n/a
UNITE	n/a	n/a	31	32
UNISON	29	28	24	30
USDAW	1	1	1	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>82</b>

In 2008 a new trade union affiliation leaflet was produced. 8 new branches had joined by the end of the year. A major aim for 2009 is to have the leaflet distributed through other unions to branches and regions. Another aim is to secure a new affiliation from at least one other national union.

**Staff:** Anna Cooper and Natasha Eve

### **NSCAG Executive members:**

**January– July 2008 (until NSCAG AGM):** Ruby Cox, John Drewery, Jane Freeland, Dave Godson, Bob Hardie, Gay Lee, Michael Macneil, Christine Oddy, Martin Roger, Bernard Roome, Jessie Russell  
**August- December 2008:** Altaf Arif, Ruby Cox, John Drewery, Jennifer Forbes, Jane Freeland, Dave Godson, Bob Hardie, Gay Lee, Michael Macneil, Christine Oddy, Martin Roger, Bernard Roome, Jessie Russell