

NATIONAL COALITION OF ANTI-DEPORTATION CAMPAIGNS

ANNUAL REPORT 1999/2000



Columbus Anyanwu

Since the last AGM on Saturday 5th June 1999, we in the National Coalition have upheld our mission to bring families together and fight with them the threat of deportation. For the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC), those threatened with deportation are not merely species of human beings made to be powerless,

hoarded and betrayed by successive governments and relentlessly harassed by a hostile mass media. They are a fellowship characterised by truly warm solidarity.

It is bad news that the main provisions of the Immigration & Asylum Act came into force on 1st April 2000. Are we are not left free to imagine that for its dehumanising provisions the document made effective on Fool's Day could be christened as an April Fool's Act. In our latest newsletter we set out the main provisions and implications of the Act and refer to it as the Immigration and Apartheid Act - for its true intention. NCADC - as allies to those directly affected by it - through the exercise of empathy and proactive action in 1999 / 2000 has recorded a remarkable year. We should now consider the evidences.

Thirteen Victorious Campaigns

More than 40 lives have been transformed because thirteen successful campaigns have won since the last AGM. Among the fortunate campaigns were Abdul Kadir from Middlesbrough, Abdul Mahmoud from Bedford, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx Alfred Koineh from Oxford, Columbus Anyanwu and his family from Coventry, Aziz Hashim from Stockport, Isaac Macharia Muraya from London, Jane Nalugya from London, Lal Mohamed and his family from London, Victor Ovienrioba & Family, Luis Sanchez and his wife Claudia are back in London from their exile in Spain, Zuber & Khatija Latif from London



Abdul Kadir and supporters

and the Ozbay Family from London (who ran probably the most active, vibrant campaign seen in London for some years). We congratulate each and everyone.

We have two special cases of victory of sorts, namely the campaigns of John Quaquah and Shafiq-ur-Rehman. John Quaquah, a Ghanaian asylum seeker and detention protester



Alfred Koineh

was released from Campsfield Detention Centre to prepare his case against the Home Office. In August 1999, the High Court blocked the attempt of the Home Office to deport him before his case against them and Group 4 could be heard. This was a small victory for John Q, who fights on while still in the UK. The 29 year-old Oldham-based mullah, Shafiq-ur-Rehman, recorded a precedent setting victory before the Special Immigration Appeals Commission in September 1999. Initially a Home Office bid to appeal against his victory was rejected by the High Court, but following a U-turn, in April this year, the court heard the Home Office appeal based on the submission that the case affects national security. A decision is still awaited as we go to press.

Needless to add, the story of everyone threatened with deportation is precious to us and regular updates are published in our quarterly newsletters. Most stories are horrific and with twists and turns that would make the average person tearful, but officials seem to view them as made up in competition for compassion.

The campaigners stories attract harsh responses from invariably insensitive government officials who handle the facts inconclusively through questionable application of existing rules. If this were not the case, the victories recorded above would have been practically impossible. In our experience, legal representatives and campaigns are together effective watchdogs of the Home Office. This is why we salute the fighting spirit of all who meet

the Home Office in the public arena through campaigns and we would encourage them not to give up as victory is always a possibility.

From experience, we appreciate the fact that the details of individual campaigns may differ, but each person is greatly stressed, emotionally and financially, by the protracted, manipulative, adversarial, and sceptical style of the Home Office in handling each case.

Reaching more people

The attendance at our meetings has improved remarkably over the past year. The largest general meeting since the inception of NCADC was held in Birmingham, on Saturday 9th October 1999. At that meeting seven new campaigns were started and seventeen updates were given from established campaigns. The following general meeting, in Manchester on 26th February 2000, featured another first - the display of some wonderful colourful banners of historic campaigns of the North West. Those reminders of many past victories served to keep up the chins of those who are still fighting to stay, fighting to belong. Hopefully this will encourage campaigners to travel to listen to others with similar plights to theirs.

A Higher Profile

We have re-designed our letterheads and standard leaflets and changed the colour of our quarterly newsletter twice, in response



Isaac Macharia Salome Tyson

to views expressed by supporters and officers. We are going more places fast on account of multiple skills available in our rank and file - between two full-time and two part-time co-ordinators and twelve officers who serve on our management committee.

We matched the National Lottery Charities Board in its sporadic demands on us to account for our corporate existence by drawing on our resources in financial and legal skills. We had to do this twice, following the abrupt cessation of our lottery funding, to attend to questions raised by grant auditors and managers.

We developed our web site and noted that more than 700 visitors accessed it in May 2000. The web site is updated at least once per week; with topical issues we remain highly contemporary.

We proved that "the modem is mightier than the pen" when the number of e-mails sent to the Daily Mail newspaper in London, through an electronic campaign, forced that newspaper to back down from its habitual slant on asylum seekers. That electronic campaign was effectively won by networking with groups that shared our conviction. We received peer recognition from other campaigners when we received over 200 congratulatory e-mails about that campaign alone.

Our representative featured on BBC Newsnight and CNN International to comment on the issues regarding the treatment of asylum seekers. This was another first since our start in 1995.

Among the significant demonstrations and pickets that regis-



Ali, Eloise, Veli and Semih Ozbay

tered the presence of NCADC were: House of Commons: Evidence Gathering from asylum seekers before last reading of the Bill on December 4th 1999; for the closure of Oakington Detention Centre in Cambridge on March 11th 2000; at the Daily Mail London Office on 13th April 2000 protesting against abusive coverage of asylum seekers; at the 6th Anniversary Demonstration against the opening of Campsfield House Detention Centre in Oxford on November 27th 1999; at Harmondsworth Detention Centre, calling for its closure on 11th December 1999; Bayo Omoyiola's Campaign at Home Secretary Jack Straw's surgery in Blackburn on 15th January 2000; and of course at the Royal Courts of Justice in The Strand, London, in support of Shafiq-ur-Rehman, xxxxxx xxxxxxxx, and other cases due for judicial review.

Okolo Family Book Launch:

This took place in the Reception Room in Manchester's Town Hall on 8th July 1999. It was followed by a debate on the Asylum Act. The production of a book is indeed a mark of high profile to its absorption of our cause into respectable book culture for all time. We are proud to be associated with "A Fight to Belong" an account of a story that unfolded before our very eyes as Florence and her family successfully campaigned against their deportation order.

Networking with other Agencies

In collaboration with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) and Family Immigration Rights (FAIR - UK) we supported a short, sharp campaign to lobby the Home Office and the government to adopt a European Union directive on family re-union.

With the National Assembly Against Racism and others we collaborated in the Coalition for Asylum & Immigration Rights (CAIR), to oppose the infamous Immigration & Asylum Bill until it was passed into an Act. We continue to participate in CAIR meetings and activities.

We have supported the work of Black Women's Rape Action Project in its objective to have rape recognised as a form of persecution and therefore a basis for the granting of refugee status.

We are impressed by the commitment of Lisa Schuster, who



Huseyin and Hanim Ozbay

was on hunger strike for 7 days between 20th - 27th October, in solidarity with asylum seekers. Lisa's account is published in our newsletter 17.

We are at one with Christian Action for Justice in Immigration Law and share its commitment to work for improvement in legislation through campaigning at all levels. We feature articles by CAJIL in our newsletters.

We are pleased to support the newly formed Cambridge Refugee & Asylum Network (CRAN). Representatives from kindred groups that we had met on protests attended the maiden meeting, including Amnesty International, Cambridge Oakington Concern, Cambridge Against Refugee Detention, Justice and Peace, One World Week, Oxfam, People & Planet, Student Action on Refugees, and the United Nations Association.

Solidarity was forthcoming when, in our hour of need, many friends and supporters were happy to provide references for us to help us meet the legal requirements of the Department of Trade & Industry in order to register as a limited company. We are grateful for the support of Oxford Trades Union Council, the North of England Refugee Service, Christian Action for Justice in Immigration Law, Andrew George MP, Neil Gerrard MP, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, Barrow Cadbury Trust,



Abdul Mahmoud and his partner Russell

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Churches Commission for Racial Justice, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, Evan Harris MP, Lord Ashdown Charitable Settlement, Liverpool Unison, the Green Party and Jean Lambert MEP.

Our Funders & Keepers

We wish to return special thanks to all our funders for enabling us to fulfil our objectives. I must give special mention to a new funder, Comic Relief, whose timely grant has enabled us to purchase much needed computer software and begin plans for the design of a new NCADC poster. We are also grateful for the continued support of the Churches Commission for Racial Justice, the Barrow Cadbury Trust, The Lord Ashdown Charitable Settlement, The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the National Lottery Charities Board.

Staff & Management Committee

My thanks are also due to our four dedicated staff who carry out most of the day to day work of NCADC. We need to applaud them for surviving the insecurity that disruptions to our funding have caused. A less committed team could have given us grief through litigation of sorts. I thank also my colleagues on the management committee for their individual sacrifice in time and other



Outside Rochester prison 1997, in support of asylum seekers on hunger strike against terrible conditions. Three years later not a thing has changed for the better.

personal resources in their overview of NCADC in 1999/2000. As a group we have successfully presented a united front in defence of deportees and asylum seekers.

The Campaigns

The Campaigns are central to NCADC as they provide the focus and challenge to the resources - human and material - which could be annexed. My thanks therefore go to all individuals who have trusted us and one another with their life stories, some with great pains and often across language, cultural and other barriers. At many a meeting, we put up with groans, common in places of worship, as people unburden, but we also have hearty laughter and crackles at the news of victories after years of campaigning. Thanks to all who have received in humility the resources of NCADC. In time past groups like ours would meet secretly but our genuine concerns now leave us no alternative but to openly fight for our beliefs.

Sources of Hope:

Could we have lamented the existing immigration law more? We referred to it above as an April Fool's Act and the Immigration & Apartheid Act with provisions that dehumanise deportees and asylum seekers. It provides for segregation, isolation and apartheid. It is a tale of fuss (vouchers, detention centres, name calling by a biased media) and fury (heckling on the floor of the Commons, the deaths of Joy Gardner and Joseph Nnalue, and other overstayers who met their death here or elsewhere. Ms Ann Widdecombe MP, pied by asylum seeker supporters, hunger strikers in and outside detention centres, slashed wrists...) signifying one thing - heightened suffering for a human constituency: deportees and asylum seekers. These constituents include those who may have survived a baptism of fire from the places where they fled persecution and dare not return.



Claudia and Luis return from their exile in Spain

NCADC would like to see a government that gets immigration in perspective, among its myriad concerns, and shows more compassion and wisdom and is not so concerned with scape-goating the vulnerable, such as those present here today (and this includes me). Happily we are not alone because we act from the shared ground of our common humanity and know that there are other campaigners who are working while waiting for the day-break of that new future. An Anglican hymn: Nuc Dimitis - Now let thy servant depart in peace.... draws from a biblical poem of perceptive Simeon as he felt fulfilled at the birth of long awaited hope. The source of hope is, invariably, that unique perception that sustains the dark period of waiting and, in our case, fighting.

As a failed asylum seeker threatened with deportation myself, I can confirm that, five years ago, I was accepted into NCADC as a founder member without reference to power or status. I have found the experience of sharing immigration-related life stories has resulted in greater confidence and hope for my next steps, no



Zuber Latif and son Abdullah

matter how small. Admittedly, NCADC is not about running soup kitchens, or handing out money as some charitable bodies do. We are not set up for that, others may do that but my emphasis is that there is fellow feeling of high quality about us. We proceed to work on campaign strategies to obtain practical solutions, always returning to meetings to collate results. This approach constrains me to submit that as practical folk we represent the U-turn to Lamentation.

We have referred you to the figures of those who were deported since New Labour came to power in May 1997. The quick index figures are 4 persons per hour in 1999 and 5 per hour since January 2000. Set against this downside, we stated earlier in this report that, through effective campaigns, many lives have been transformed by the sense of belonging here. I have also testified to the stimulating effect of rubbing shoulders with campaigners in this room and in other walks of life. These upturn events are the sources of transformation.

Set against the lamentation over the poor performance of New Labour (which will never admit it) to our particular cause, we have come across a veteran campaigner and poet of sorts in the person of Rev. Stanley Hope of Christian Action for Justice in Immigration Law (CAJIL). Himself a British citizen of ripe years, Rev. Hope refers to the immigration law as a monster which has been loose in Britain for three decades... since 1962. In the excerpt below, he catalogues the victims of this monster. He refers to the shame that is felt when our decent supporters say: "I am ashamed that my country is doing this to you." He refers to the necessity for forgiveness in a manner similar to the demands of the descendants of the holocaust and of the late Bernie Grant MP over a certain infamous trade. Be that as it may, Rev. Hope implies that the release of the so-called beast could only have arisen from the loss of our humanity. You will recall that, when apartheid made sense to a previous South African government, it



Souda Nkopi Lal Mohammed Brian and Taanisa

did not to the late Bishop, Trevor Huddleston, who supported the ANC until the collapse of apartheid. His unique sense must have sustained that fight. Is the unique sense required by New Labour present among us here as, Lisa Schuster, hunger striker in solidarity to asylum seekers, hinted? We are not here to take the Mickey out of New Labour because, after getting past this government's deplorable record of unfair detentions and deportation statistics, we are cheered by CAJIL's exponent's call for a new quality immigration policy for a new Britain.

Conclusion

I will close this report with the hopeful words from the man whose name and commitment are well aligned with ours in the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns:

Towards the New Britain, by Stanley Hope

For those unjustly removed or deported,
 For those detained without trial,
 For all separated families,
 For those denied visits to relatives in Britain,
 For our treatment of asylum seekers,
 For all those ignored, humiliated, degraded by the system;
 For the loss of our humanity,
 We express our shame and ask forgiveness.
 We commit ourselves to work for a fair and just immigration policy.



Bayo Omoyiola
 Bayo Omoyiola
 Chair NCADC 1999/2000