

Global Justice Now Annual General Meeting 2020

11am, 5 September 2020

Held on videoconference, hosted at 66 Offley Road London SW9 0LS

Present: Nicola Ansell (Chair), Andrew Taylor-Dawson (National Secretary), Adrian Lance (Treasurer), Asad Rehman (Council member)

Staff in attendance: Nick Dearden (director), James O’Nions (head of activism), Sandra Wild (head of fundraising), Steve Thomson (head of resources)

Members: 121 members had registered online for the meeting, with up to 63 present online at any one time. (Only members who had registered in advance were able to attend.)

Proxy votes: 86 members had registered proxy votes (67 from paper forms; 19 from the online form) in favour of the chair.

Apologies:

Chris Purnell had registered online, but had not received a confirmatory email so could not attend. Alison Skinner thought she had registered, but had not received a confirmatory email so could not attend.

INTRODUCTION

Nicola Ansell welcomed members to this year’s unusual AGM, delayed from June, which was being held online for the first time. She introduced herself, Andrew and Adrian as office-holding council members present, and the staff present who would either speak or answer questions: Nick, James, Sandra and Steve.

Nicola explained that as far as possible, the AGM would follow its normal format. People could ask questions through Zoom, either by typing into the “chat” function, or “raising a hand” to ask to speak.

Nicola explained the voting procedure:

1. We would be voting using the polling function built into Zoom for individual votes.
2. Anyone who had joined the meeting by phone would be asked to say what their vote is.
3. Anyone voting on behalf of a local group would need to type their group vote into the chat.
4. We will be taking several votes at once to cut down on the time it will take

[In these minutes, the votes are recorded against each agenda item, regardless of when the vote on that item was taken.]

1) DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Nick Dearden presented his report.

It's been an odd year to say the least, with significant political volatility in the UK and around the world. From Brexit to the hung parliament and political polarisation, we had real opportunities for radical new thinking. But there were also real threats with the election of leaders like Trump, Modi and Bolsonaro who could set out cause back.

Trade has been a huge issue. Our goal is to change the global trading system and constrain the power of corporations. The US-UK trade deal exposes the problems of this system and would, if passed, present real problems to our food system and public services. Our campaign against this has generated huge interest and helped build widespread opposition (farmers and even the Daily Mail!) to the deal. We've also worked to give parliament more power over trade deals. And we've worked to stop ISDS being included in new trade deals. We got huge publicity for our legal challenge to the government's secrecy over trade negotiations. Nick has also written a book which is being launched and rolled out.

The pharma campaign had a very positive year, with our recommendations (developed with our allies) being incorporated pretty much wholesale into Labour Party policy. But the pandemic has made the issues of pharmaceutical reform urgent and high profile. We've worked with allies to build a global movement and bring on board as many allies as possible. The Lib Dems and SNP have been very supportive but we've got allies right across the spectrum, including Lord Jim O'Neill, who recently spoke alongside Heidi on a platform. We work on an ongoing basis with People's Health Movement, and our work has been very helpful in pulling big NGOs into our space in demanding a people's vaccine.

We continue to challenge the poor and ideologically driven nature of some aid spending, most especially spending of the CDC group. We've achieved front page of the Times with one recent story. We're now working to oppose the DfID/FCO merger, but from a perspective of trying to reinvent (and rename) aid in a way which could mobilise a movement behind the need for global redistribution of wealth. We've also worked with other NGOs including JDC to call for an immediate and deep write down of debt during the pandemic. We're particularly focussing on the problem of private sector debt.

We would have been preparing for the climate summit in Glasgow by now, but the pandemic has decided caused COP to be postponed. Nonetheless, we've examine our unique role with regards to climate work and are preparing to focus on the role of trade rules in fuelling climate change, as well as working in a coalition to phase out all aid spending on fossil fuels. Next year, we will mobilise for a rescheduled COP.

Activism and movement building are at the heart of everything we do. The big change we're looking for must come from below. This work usually depends on us getting out into communities, which has been a challenge this year. Nonetheless, we very quickly swung into action with an impressive series of podcasts and webinars. We even converted our 50th anniversary event online, though in a vastly reduced form. The positive is it has allowed us to engage much more with speakers from the global south.

As always, most of our money comes from ordinary members. You keep us independent. However, we do receive funds from a number of trusts and supportive organisations and we're very grateful for these funds, without which a good deal of this work would not be possible.

QUESTIONS

Carolyn Pickering of Keep our NHS Public Nottinghamshire asked what progress there was with the **trade bill** coming to the House of Lords.

Nick hoped the Lords will pass our proposed amendments as before, when the bill was brought to the last parliament, but it will be difficult to pass the amendments in the Commons, despite support. We feel we've won the argument, but may not win the vote. But there will be more work to come even then, since some provisions can still be defeated outside parliament

Carolyn asked if people should write to MPs and Lords? **Nick** said written letters were always valuable, although we have done less directly with the House of Lords.

Catriona Lawrie thought we spent a lot on **fundraising** – of every £4 raised, only £3 gets to campaigns.

Nick said the figures did show that, but our fundraising costs included getting new activists online; the supporter magazine Ninety-Nine; supporter services; and getting new members. "Membership" is included in fundraising but it's bigger than just fundraising. We're spending enough to grow membership a little, but would need to spend more to grow significantly, and fundraising also includes expenditure to keep supporters and members on board. We could move more towards raising funds from trusts and foundations, but we are a **membership** organisation, and that's important to us.

Andrew Taylor-Dawson (on Council, but also a fundraiser) said our expenditure was not high in comparison with others, and much of the fundraising expenditure also drives campaigns (for example distributing action cards and promoting online activism.)

Sandra Wild (head of fundraising) added that her fundraising team's online work sits inside "fundraising" and not, for example, in an "Online activism team." Our work is very integrated across functions.

Julia Drown asked if we needed to work more in the political centre ground? She felt some of our materials were unnecessarily strident on anti-capitalism.

Nick said we are in effect a network of people wanting change, but how radical we need that change to be will differ from person to person. His job is to keep this coalition together and make sure everyone is broadly happy with the line we're taking. Of course, when dealing with these sorts of issues there is lots of debate and disagreement and members make really sure to tell us when they feel we get it wrong. Please continue to do so, as this helps us understand where the membership are. We will make mistakes from time to time. We want to be really clear that we're fiercely independent of political parties, but that doesn't mean we won't criticise one side more than the other as makes sense at a given time. For instance, in the current parliament one party has adopted most of our campaign demands, the other almost none, and so it doesn't make sense to be 'neutral'.

Anna Bluston said that we do need to look at structural issues with the systems we oppose, and link those to problems we see here and now in the real world

Carol Cooper asked if, for our work on a mining company using corporate courts in Armenia, we had been in contact with the Armenian community in this country – for example the Armenian Church in Kensington?

Nick agreed that was a good point. In the online chat **Jean Blaylock**, trade campaigner, stated that we had been in contact, and members of the Armenian Church had helped us with our protest outside the Armenian embassy.

Roger Miller asked if we could do more to get transnational corporations to pay more tax?

Nick agreed that we would love to do it, and support others who work on this, but lacked capacity to add more issues to our core work. But we should keep thinking about how to better integrate finance and tax into our work and this might be one for the strategy process next year.

2) MINUTES FROM 2019 AGM

The minutes of the 2019 AGM were **adopted** with no votes against.

There were no matters arising.

3) RESOLUTIONS

A) CO-OPTIONS

Ordinary Resolution

To ratify the decisions of Council to co-opt Hiba Ahmad, Anna Bluston, and Kennedy Walker to fill vacancies on Council, following the resignations of Josefine Brons, Jean Blaylock, and Martin Powell.

Nicola explained that during 2019 three Council members resigned. Josefine Brons, who has moved abroad for work; Jean Blaylock, who is now employed by Global Justice Now so ineligible for Council; and Martin Powell, for personal reasons. Council had agreed to co-opt Hiba Ahmad, an active member of the youth network, to replace Josefine Brons. Council had also invited Anna Bluston and Kennedy Walker, who were runners up in the 2018 elections to Council, to be co-opted to Council.

Council are actively seeking to co-opt further members to increase diversity and strengthen skills - under the rules there is space for Council to co-opt a further three members.

The co-options of Hiba Ahmad, Anna Bluston, and Kennedy Walker were **approved** with no votes against.

B) MEMBERSHIP RATES

Ordinary Resolution

To approve increases in membership rates:

Standard rate	£24pa to	£36pa
Unwaged	£12pa	unchanged
Youth	£12pa	unchanged
Overseas	£36pa to	£48pa

To apply:

- From the day after the 2020 AGM for all new members;
- From 1 July 2022 for existing members

Andrew Taylor-Dawson presented the motion to increase the membership rate on behalf of council. Subscription rates for membership have not changed since 2007, when the standard rate was increased from £16 to £24. (At that time it was noted that “rates have been £16 per year for at least 16 years” - implying that the previous change was made in 1991 or earlier.)

In real terms, allowing for inflation, the value of the basic annual subscription will still be much lower than when last increased. But we encourage people to become members to show their support for our campaigns and activities, not just for financial reasons – and that’s also why we are not proposing to increase the rates for unwaged supporters and supporters under 26 years old.

In practice, most members pay by regular monthly direct debit, which will entail an increase in the minimum rate from £2 to £3 per month, affecting perhaps 25% of members. (Over 70% of supporters already give £3 a month or more.)

For practical purposes, Council believes it is reasonable to give existing members up to two years to increase their regular giving (where necessary) to the new rates. We will contact all those members at least twice to ask them to increase their subscription.

The immediate financial impact of this will not be great, but it will improve our finances over time, and will make recruiting new members much more cost-effective.

Annette Brindle questioned why the increase in rates was not applying to all members at the same time? For a period of time there would be different rates for different members.

Julia Drown agreed that this seemed as if people in the same group would not be treated equally.

Andrew explained that this was a practical matter. For people who were already members, but paying at a lower rate, it would take some time for all of them to increase their subscriptions to the new rate, particularly those paying by direct debit and standing order, and we did not want to exclude them from membership.

The increases in membership rates were **approved** with no votes against, and six abstentions.

C) CHANGES TO THE RULES

Ordinary Resolution

To replace the existing Rules of Global Justice Now with the revised Rules attached.

Nicola explained that because the changes are quite complicated, **James O’Nions** (head of activism) who was on the staff/council group which drafted the rule changes, would explain the changes, and take questions of *clarification*. Then **Asad Rehman** will speak for the resolution on behalf of council, and then we invite people to ask questions and speak to the motion.

The full list of rule changes and the background to them had been included in the “Resolutions for the AGM Sept 2020.pdf” document on the website.

James introduced the proposed rule changes, and the rationale for them.

The changes will amend the Rules to remove the constitutional role of Area Representatives, and to change the method of election of members to Council. The proposed changes were discussed at the AGM in 2019, to give members the opportunity to comment on the principles before the formal proposals were brought to this AGM.

The role of Area Representatives has declined over time, and there are now many vacancies for representatives in the regions of the UK. One side-effect of this is that it is difficult to fill the three places on Council reserved for Area Representatives (there are only two at the moment.) Removing Area Representatives from Council is not intended to reduce the role of activists and local groups on Council – the proposed changes will still reserve three spaces for Council members nominated by groups, and recent experience suggests more than three are likely to be elected.

For this reason, and to seek to increase diversity on Council, we propose to change the rules for elections to Council so that:

- All places are directly elected by members and local groups (at present three Area Representatives are elected to Council by the Area Representatives themselves.) Every member and group can vote for up to twelve of the candidates of their choice.
- Elections will include quotas to ensure that Council includes at least:
 - 1 member under 28 years old
 - 2 BME (Black or Minority Ethnic) members
 - 3 members nominated by their local group
 - 6 women

These quotas are **not** mutually exclusive. For example, a BME woman under 28 years nominated by her local group who was elected would be considered to be part of each of those quotas.

We will **not** hold separate elections for each quota: members will vote for up to 12 candidates of all those standing; and candidates will be elected by ensuring the quotas are filled from those with the highest number of votes, and then remaining places from those with the highest number of votes.

If one or more of the quotas are not filled, then up to three places will be left vacant for Council to co-opt qualifying people (so that at least nine places will be elected at the AGM, regardless of the numbers of candidates for reserved places.) Council will then be required to prioritise any co-options to Council to fill the unfilled quota(s), in as short a time as practical

In practical terms, we think it is unlikely to make a huge change, perhaps with small differences at the margin, raising someone with fewer votes into council to ensure a quota is met.

Amendment to the motion

Sarah Hirom had proposed an amendment to proposal, to ensure that there should be some acknowledgement of need for regional diversity on Council, when there were no longer area reps.

Add new Rule 26.4: When making co-options in order to fulfil quotas or for any other reason, Council members should give due consideration to the need for regional representation on the Council as a whole.

Nicola stated that Council had agreed to the amendment, which now became a substantive part of the motion.

Nicola reminded the meeting that in addition to these main changes, Council have taken the opportunity to make a number of other minor changes to tidy up the rules. They include:

- Changing the reference to the “Charities Act 1993” to “Charities Acts” (so that we do not have to update the rules with every change – such as 1993, 2006, 2011 and 2016...)
- For clarity, making it explicit that a Council member must step down if they take up employment with the organisation. The current rules only state that staff cannot be *appointed* to Council.
- Giving affiliated organisations one vote, regardless of the size of the organisation. At present there is a complicated sliding scale; in practice it has not been used for many years.
- Reducing the period for proposing policy resolutions to the AGM from 50 days to 30 days before the AGM – to make it easier for members and groups to submit resolutions.
- On the Standards Committee, replacing the one person elected by the Area Representatives, to one Group Member elected by the AGM; and
- Clarifying that the term of office for the Standards Committee is the same period as for Council. This was not previously specified.

Asad Rehman formally proposed the motion on behalf of the Council. These changes were just one part of a stream of work to ensure equality and diversity, in how we work in activism, outreach, and in the office. This is just one bit of the big picture, and it’s just a start, recognising that the world is changing all the time.

Council wants to ensure that groups are always represented on Council; and to ensure we are committed to diversity and inclusion – with young people and with people of colour – so that those views can be represented in the room when we’re making decisions and looking forward at strategic and operational plans. In practice, we already meet all of the quotas for inclusion on Council, but this will embed that in our rules. The changes proposed are not meant to be exclusionary, and Council doesn’t believe that they are. We will also actively encourage representation from other groups in society, but it’s hard to embed all those diverse groups of people into the rules. And in future we will continue to look at other measures we can put into place to ensure Council fully represents society as a whole.

QUESTIONS:

Susan Francis asked about the gender balance inherent in the proposals; and questioned the absence of quota spaces for non-binary people.

James explained that Council has a majority of women now; these proposals ensured there would always be at least 50%, but it was unlikely it would ever be exactly 50/50 exactly. We had looked at having quotas for other groups of people, such as non-binary people and people with disabilities, but it was hard to include more quotas when there are only 12 places on council in total, and likely to be increasingly difficult to fill them all. This did not mean we didn’t think it was important to be as diverse as possible, and we would be taking up many of these issues of representation in other aspects of our work.

The changes to the rules were **approved**, with one vote against.

D) CHANGE TO THE ARTICLES

Special Resolution

To reduce the minimum number of council members from 10 to 9.

Nicola explained that we have two governance documents, the “Articles of Association” which are filed at Companies House, and the “Rules of Global Justice Now” which are an internal document about how we manage our affairs. Most of the changes needed to bring in this new way of electing council are changes to the Rules, but there is one small change needed to the Articles, to reduce the minimum number of members to Council from ten to nine. This has to be brought as a separate special resolution.

The change to the articles were **approved**, with two votes against.

4) POLICY MOTIONS

No policy motions had been proposed.

5) TREASURER’S REPORT

Adrian Lance (Treasurer) presented the treasurer’s report, which is attached to these minutes. He noted that these figures were still draft, and had not yet been audited, because the Covid-19 pandemic had disrupted first the preparation of the accounts, and then setting the timetable for audit work.

QUESTIONS

Susan Francis asked if we knew when the final figures would be ready?

Steve Thomson (head of resources) said he hoped the figures would be finalised by the end of the month, then audited.

[The accounts were formally signed off by Council on 20 November 2020.]

Sophie Franklin asked why we were holding such high reserves?

Steve explained that the reserves were high because of unexpectedly high levels of legacy income, which was hard to forecast. Our policy is to plan to reduce unrestricted reserves towards our target of about £350k over the next two to three years, by spending more than our income in each of those years.

6) ADOPTION OF ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

Nicola moved the adoption of the annual report and accounts based on the draft available. If the meeting voted against the adoption, the meeting would be adjourned until final audited accounts were available.

The annual report and accounts were **adopted**, with two votes against.

7) RE-APPOINTMENT OF THE AUDITORS

MHA MacIntyre Hudson were **reappointed** as auditors for the 2020 financial year, with two abstentions.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

Nicola thanked everyone for attending the meeting, the first to be held online.

She reminded members that at the next AGM in 2021 we would be electing a new Council. A number of existing Council members will be standing down after serving two full three-year terms, so she encouraged everyone who was interested to consider standing for election.

The meeting closed at 12.45pm.

-ends-