

Des Loughney, Secretary, Edinburgh Trade Union Council.

BHOPAL DISASTER - 31ST ANNIVERSARY - 3rd December 2015

I am here as a representative of Edinburgh Trade Union Council and the UNITE Edinburgh Not For Profit trade union branch. We think it is important to mark the 31st anniversary of the disaster.

A year ago I was a member of the Scottish Trade Union delegation which visited Bhopal to participate in the events marking the 30th Anniversary of the Bhopal Disaster. Our experience of the visit made it clear that we were not just marking a disaster in the past but a continuing disaster.

The victims of the disaster are all those alive today who were poisoned by the gas emission; who developed cancers from the carcinogenic gases; who suffered genetic damage which has passed onto succeeding generations. The victims include people who have been exposed to contaminated ground water. The site has never been cleared up. That many victims have never received the support and access to health services that they require. There is not an NHS in India.

Trade Union and human solidarity require us to support the victims in any way we can, including financially.

We have to campaign to bring Dow to justice so that they are made to accept full legal responsibility for their health and safety systems blunders and carelessness. Dow must be made to pay proper compensation to the victims including the resources needed to meet their health needs. It must clean up the site and the local ground water system. Whatever role Dow has in the Indian economy as a powerful transnational it should be let off the hook.

Since the return from Bhopal a year ago I have endeavored to develop solidarity between the Scottish and British trade union movement and the Bhopal campaign groups.

With the support of my UNITE trade union branch - The Edinburgh Not For Profit branch - a solidarity motion was submitted which eventually was endorsed by our National Industrial Sector Committee. It was then forwarded to our General Executive Committee which oversees the whole of our trade union with its 1.5 million members. After a good debate the motion was endorsed and our International Committee, a sub-committee of the General Executive, was asked to make Bhopal solidarity an active part of its work programme.

UNITE has a sister trade union in the United States which is called the United Steel Workers (USW) It organises Dow workers in the USA. The motion adopted agreed that UNITE, working with the USW would seek a meeting with President Obama to discuss bringing Dow to justice. Our

representatives would be our General Secretary and the President of the USW. We have ensured that Bhopal solidarity, meaning how we put pressure on Dow, has been discussed at joint meetings between UNITE and the USW.

Our Scottish delegation ensured that solidarity motions were submitted for debate at the Scottish Trade Unions Annual Congress at Ayr in April this year. The motions were composited and the composite was adopted unanimously.

One of the aims agreed was the organisation of a Scottish solidarity conference. This task remains to be done. I hope that the conference will take place in 2016 and will represent a significant step forward in Scottish Bhopal solidarity.

Des Loughney