

It is only twenty five years since the coming of the World Wide Web. What a transformation this has made to the everyday life of millions of people. But the transformation of life for campaigners has been even more profound. When I became the Chair of AAM, in 1975, we had no email (circa 1993), no internet (circa late 1980's), no face book (first began 2001), no twitter (began 2006) no blog (circa 1990),. no "e petitions" (first possibly 2005) and no web pages (the oldest known web page believed to be 1991).

Setting up for AAM News was scissors and paste. Believe it or not there were no computers, they came much later.

Further-more, there was no satellite television, and obviously no mobile phones. I remember being in Zimbabwe for the Independence Celebrations in April 1980, the white Rhodesians terrified by the anti-black propaganda put out by the Smith Regime had made exit plans and there were no seats in planes out of the capital Harare for months ahead. The whites had booked everything up. The BBC TV crew covering the event were panicky about getting film of the event back to London to be developed so that material could be used on television. They paid an outrageous sum to get priority for first class seats. I too was panicky about getting back, I had a Three Line Whip in the House of Commons! I did not have the money the BBC people had. Luckily I did not need it (the BBC money was squandered), as departure time neared it became clear that there had been massive "hedge" booking and there were plenty of seats available

Nowadays with the, development of digital camera, and digital mobile phones with camera and video built in, events can be beamed across the world in seconds. It is difficult to imagine the stranglehold in news which the South African's (and other dictatorships) had.

So campaigners worked their socks off day and night, using the telephone, writing letters, using old fashioned manual typewriters, setting up networks of activists, organising local and national protests and public demonstrations, marches local and national) and also physically lobbying Members of Parliament, in their constituencies and at the House of Commons and in London.

We engaged with the political parties, we had most support in the Labour and Communist Parties, support from the Liberal Party, but the Conservative Party but very hostile, but even there we had a few adherents.

We received a great deal of support, morally and financially from the Trades Union Movement, from the Trades Union Congress, Individual Trade Unions and at Branch level.

Thanks to the good offices of Archbishop Trevor Huddleston we were able to reach out to all religions and have a multi-faith organisation.

Coupled with the extraordinary engagement of so many individuals, it can be said without doubt AAM was the most widespread and successful non-party political organisation of the 20th Century. A bold claim, but a justifiable one.

Bob Hughes,
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