

SPEAK's Campaign Strategy

We are focussing on Tony Blair, asking him to **end government support and promotion of the arms trade**. Blair has personally taken an active role in promoting arms exports.

By Feb 2004, we aim to have:

- ▶ Collected 20,000 signatures on our petition to Blair.
- ▶ Lobbied 100 MPs!
- ▶ Mobilised 600 people to come to DESO for the Day of Action (Feb 2004).
- ▶ Inundated Blair with thousands of Pray & Posts and letters.
- ▶ Raised awareness about the role of ECGD and DESO.

We need your help and prayers to hit these ambitious targets!!!

(See Volumize, p.10-11 for more)

What are we asking Blair for?

*A full and open assessment of the UK government policy of subsidising military exports.

*An extension of the list of countries to which the ECGD cover for military exports is banned, notably to more than just the Highly Indebted Poor Countries. Other countries with development concerns and countries engaged in conflict should also be banned from getting ECGD cover.

*A reduction, and eventually an end, of government support of the arms trade through DESO.

*The Defence Diversification Agency in the MoD should be given adequate resources to transfer military skills and technology to the civil sector, rather than the converse, as has often been the case so far.

SPEAK's *Counting the Cost* campaign looks at the spiritual, social, economic and development costs of our government's support and promotion of the arms trade. It is a multi-dimensional campaign and incorporates theology, spirituality, philosophy, discipleship, lifestyle and education as well as socio-economics. (See SPEAK's campaign handbook for more on the dimensions or goals)

"The Government are concerned by the denial of human rights wherever this occurs, and has consistently made our views clear to the Iraqi government on this subject. We have also made clear to the Iraqi government our condemnation of the use of chemical weapons. We will continue to do so. At the same time, we should not lose sight of the importance of developing political and economic relations with Iraq, and the provision of export credit is a major contribution to this."

By autumn 1989, trading relations between Iraq and the UK had deteriorated, mainly because Iraq was behind by an estimated £80 million in its payments. For this reason a lower level of credit - £250 million - was agreed for 1990. This loan was again backed by the ECGD. Despite the low interest rates, Iraq was still failing to meet the repayments. *The Observer* (03.06.90) claimed that the ECGD had been called upon to cover the Midland Bank's losses on earlier loans, and that it had paid out a substantial amount, although the ECGD refused to tell the paper this figure.

On 6th August 1990, four days after Saddam's forces had invaded another neighbouring state, Kuwait, the United Nations Security Council declared an arms embargo against Iraq as part of a series of sanctions that were imposed due to the invasion. Although loopholes in the law, and lack of information, meant that British companies may have unwittingly, or not so unwittingly, continued to supply equipment and component parts to Iraq that had dual use for civilian or military application - arms trade campaigners welcomed this embargo, but many felt that it was too little, too late. The main motivations stated by the British and American governments for the latest war on Iraq reveal the hypocrisy, high risks and humanitarian and economic costs attached to arming such a dangerous dictator and irresponsibly loaning him public money, and then going to war to disarm him.

As a result of multiple loans throughout the 80s, Iraq now owes an estimated \$383 billion to various countries. £1 billion of this debt is owed to the ECGD - £623 million is capital and the remainder is arrears since 1991. This money financed Saddam's palaces, his wars and his machinery of repression, rather than benefiting the Iraqi people. A campaign called *Jubilee Iraq* has recently been launched to call for the cancellation of these debts. Currently the British government has said it is prepared to forgive some but not all of the £1 billion debt. The government hopes there will be an internationally agreed restructuring and that the payments will be rescheduled. A spokesman said: "It is taxpayers' money at the end of the day. It would not send a good signal just to write it off." However, the government was happy to risk taxpayers' money in the first place to protect the interests of companies, and to fund an oppressive dictator. It was also happy to spend taxpayers' money to overthrow Saddam Hussein. *Jubilee Iraq* asks what kind of a signal it sends to demand payment for any of Saddam's debts from his already impoverished people whom we claim to have liberated.

This case study shows both the financial risks and dubious morality that is inherent in the under-writing of loans and arms exports to military dictators. Although we have a new government now that cannot be blamed for the mistakes of previous governments, SPEAK calls on Tony Blair to:

- ▶ Make amends to the Iraqi people through cancelling Saddam's debts - which the ECGD should never have allowed him to incur - so they can be truly liberated from his tyranny.
- ▶ Make the following changes to ECGD policy to ensure such mistakes cannot happen again:
 - ▶ Abolish ECGD support for arms exports.
 - ▶ Ban all countries engaged in violent conflict and countries with bad human rights records from receiving export credit guarantees, particularly for arms exports, because of: a) the high risk that these credit loans will fuel conflict and aid repression, as in the case of Saddam Hussein; and b) the economic risk that they will not be repaid.
- ▶ Increase the charges the ECGD levies for its services to reflect their full costs, so taxpayers are not subsidising the interests of companies.

"Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever." Isaiah 32:16-17

Action points...

- ▶ Read and pray through the enclosed 'Pray & Post' card, and sign and post the card to Tony Blair.
- ▶ Write a more in depth letter to the Prime Minister outlining the above points.
- ▶ Lobby your MP to put pressure on Blair to ban countries with repressive regimes and those engaged in armed conflict from receiving ECGD cover, particularly for arms exports.
- ▶ Write to Gordon Brown asking for Iraq's debt to the UK to be forgiven, and asking the British government to promote multilateral cancellation of all Saddam's debts.

Sources and further reading...

- *For more on Counting the Cost, SPEAK's arms trade campaign, see www.speak.org.uk or contact the network support office for a free campaign handbook and other resources.
- *For a more in-depth analysis of the supply of British military equipment to Iraq, 1979-90, see www.caat.org.uk/information/publications/countries/iraq-1991-briefing.php
- *For a more in-depth explanation of subsidies and the ECGD, see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/programmes/armstrade/execsummary.htm
- *For more on Iraq's debts and the campaign to cancel them, see www.jubileeiraq.org